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# Thematic Working Aid

## Leave no one behind in practice

# Water, Sanitation & Hygiene


By RésEau, coordinated by Nadia Benani, SDC Global Programme Water

Whoever you are, wherever you are, water is your right  
(World Water Day campaign 2019)

Switzerland has been involved since 2006 in the process of recognising the human right to water and sanitation through its numerous advocacy actions in strategic global forums and through alliances. It paved the way for the adoption of resolutions on the human right to water and sanitation in 2010 by the UN General Assembly and in 2014 by the Human Rights Council.

This present working aid is intended to help applying the [SDC Guidance Leave No One Behind](#) to water, sanitation and hygiene-related interventions in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, it contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 6 "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all". The working aid is the result of a consultative process within the SDC water network [ResEau](#).





## What do we know about marginalised people in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector?

Water plays a crucial role in human life. It is a source of enormous social and political power since its deprivation exposes people to inequality, vulnerability<sup>1</sup> and to severe threat to health. This fact is mirrored in the five aspects of human capabilities covered by the framework of multidimensional poverty:

- **Human** (e.g. water and sanitation for health, safe conditions during education, water for nutrition).
- **Economic** (e.g. water to generate income, to produce assets).
- **Political** (e.g. fulfilment of human rights to water and sanitation, participation in decision-making around water, secure peaceful relations between states sharing transboundary waters).
- **Socio-cultural** (e.g. spiritual value of water).
- **Protective** (e.g. continuous access to water and sanitation services during emergencies including armed conflicts).

Access to water and sanitation can **enable the realisation of other human rights** such as the right to life, human dignity, food, health, self-determination, housing, an adequate standard of living, participation in cultural life, suitable working conditions, education<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, access to clean water and sanitation contributes to achieving all the SDGs.

In the water sector, **achieving the targets set for SDG 6 Clean Water & Sanitation** will be difficult. Even if significant progress has been made, one person in four worldwide still lacks access to **safe** water and around half of the global population have no access to safely managed sanitation. Thus, it is more than a handful of individuals who suffer from exclusion. In rural areas of Niger, for example, only 1.1% of the population has access to an improved water supply service and 18% to a basic water supply service<sup>3</sup>. In emergencies, the provision of WASH services is also a growing challenge. From 2005 to 2017, the number of crises that demanded a response from international partners doubled from 16 to 30<sup>4</sup>. On average, children under five years are more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease related to unsafe WASH than from violence in conflict<sup>5</sup>.

More information and data can be found in the [2019 United Nations World Water Development Report on LNOB](#).

## How to diagnose people left behind in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector?

“The contours of failure of access to clean water and dignified sanitation match the contours of discrimination faced by marginal communities,” (Kate Gilmore, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights).

This paragraph raises awareness of who is and who could be left behind in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector. **Who is excluded? From what? Why? By whom? These are the four basic questions to be answered.** A set of questions relating to the water sector are provided below. These can help to identify people who need more attention: those discriminated, the poorest of the poor, those who are living in extremely difficult conditions and who are especially vulnerable to shocks and stress.

The questions are structured along the different targets set in the SDG 6.



## LNOB and access to drinking water

### SDG 6.1

*“By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all”*

The SDC relies on the criteria set out in [Human Rights to Water and Sanitation](#) (HRWS) for achieving the goals on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. The criteria follow five dimensions<sup>6</sup> (availability, quality, acceptability, accessibility, affordability) and the principles of non-discrimination and equality.

Who does not have access to drinking water services? Is it because of a lack of quantity, quality or affordability? Is the quality of the water acceptable for the targeted populations? Is there a gap in service provision and could new entrepreneurs, water committees contribute to the service provision? Do the same water quality standards apply to all users, independent whether they are connected to a public network or rely on alternative water supplies (water kiosks, water trucks, wells, etc.)? Is there a monitoring system for water quality in place covering all populations? Is access to the water resources safe and secured for all? Who sets the water price? Is there a tariffication principle? Does the national constitution recognise the human right to water? Are the needs of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) included in national WASH-related strategies? Is there a national institution in charge of drawing up the national water law?



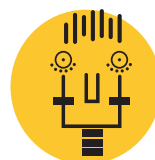
## LNOB and access to sanitation & hygiene

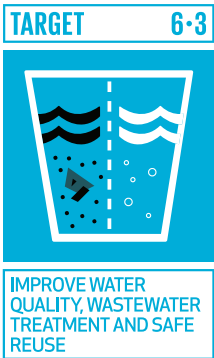
### SDG 6.2

*“By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations”*

The SDC relies on the criteria set out in [Human Rights to Water and Sanitation](#) (HRWS) for achieving the goals on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. The criteria follow five dimensions<sup>7</sup> (availability, quality, acceptability, accessibility, affordability) and the principles of non-discrimination and equality.

Do people with special needs have access to sanitation facilities? Can girls and women manage their menstrual hygiene safely, including at school and at work? Do the sanitation facilities accommodate for the common hygiene practices (i.e. anal and genital cleansing)? Are certain minority groups excluded from using shared facilities? Does the location of the sanitation infrastructure offer the adequate privacy and security, adapted to the local culture? Is open defecation still practiced? If yes, what are the causes for it? Are sanitation services affordable? How is the availability of sanitation services in public places? In humanitarian aid interventions targeting refugees and IDPs living in informal settlements in urban and peri-urban areas, is the aim at improving access to water and sanitation services for the broader populations in vulnerable situations, including both displaced persons and urban poor?





## LNOB and improved water quality, wastewater treatment and safe reuse

### SDG 6.3

*“By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and increasing recycling and safe reuse globally”*

Exposure to environmental risk factors is unequally distributed, often related to income, social status, employment and education, gender, age or ethnicity<sup>8</sup>. Non-treated industrial effluents can be hazardous for people living near industrial zones. Water pollution disproportionately kills the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. In 2015, an estimated 1.3 million deaths worldwide were attributed to unsafe water sources, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia being hit the hardest.

Who are the persons/group of persons the most affected? What is the impact of polluted water on the vulnerable population? Do they have access to this information? Is there a mechanism accessible to all citizens where they can easily report cases of suspected polluted water? Is there a mechanism in place to hold accountable public, semi public and private actors for the inadequate management and provision of water? Do the authorities provide alternative solutions to guarantee the provision of safe drinking water to the ones most in need?



## LNOB and water efficiency, sustainable withdrawals and reduction in people suffering from water scarcity

### SDG 6.4

*“By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity”*

Securing environmental water requirements is essential to maintaining ecosystem health and resilience.

Increasing water-use efficiency over time means decoupling a country’s economic growth from its water use, for example by reducing water losses in municipal distribution networks and water use in production processes. In this regard, some sectors such as agriculture, industry, energy and municipal water supply are particularly relevant due to their high water use.

How and to what extent does water scarcity influence the incomes of vulnerable groups? Which coping mechanisms can be supported? Are certain groups of people excluded from decision-making processes to ensure sustainable freshwater withdrawals and by whom? Is there data available showing the negative effects on economic development, increasing competition and potential conflict among users? Are there mechanisms to measure the allocation of water and to ensure the provision of water for human basic needs? When adopting austerity measures, is there adequate protection of human basic needs of water, with particular focus on disadvantaged individuals or groups? Do strategies and plans against water scarcity address spatial inequalities, such as those experienced by communities in rural areas and informal settlements or slums? In areas hosting refugees or IDPs, are perceived or actual depletion/degradation of resources properly monitored and adequately communicated in a conflict-sensitive manner?





## LNOB and integrated water resources management including trans-boundary cooperation

### SDG 6.5

*“By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate”*

In the competition for access to and use of water, it is necessary to ensure that those with the least leverage in society – many of whom are already without an adequate or reliable water supply or means of waste disposal – do not suffer further disadvantage in the implementation of water-related policies. Experience shows that in any competition over access to resources, whether these be natural resources or man-made services and livelihood opportunities, those living in poverty do less well than others, unless they, or agents acting on their behalf, manage to safeguard their interests vis-à-vis those with more economic, social and political power<sup>9</sup>. You can find more information in the [IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework Assessment Guide](#).

Are human basic needs prioritised, including the need for adequate water and personal and domestic use (HRWS)? What are the roles of individuals, communities, authorities in water resources management? Are they limited due to stereotypes (ex. certain marginalised groups not consulted because perceived as not being able to understand the issue)? Are vulnerable groups and their interests considered alongside other interest groups (influential corporates, national interests, etc.)? Are the decisions respected, and their implementation monitored and evaluated? Could water management decisions that may lead to economic gains at national level (e.g. building of a large dam) in the formal economy result in a loss of livelihood for minorities without acceptable compensation?



## LNOB and water-related ecosystems

### SDG 6.6

*“By 2030, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”*

Natural resources are often one of the only assets the poorest have at their disposal, and income from natural resources can act as a stepping stone towards economic empowerment. Often, indigenous people and other groups have traditional economies based on subsistence. Therefore, secured rights to land, territories and natural resources is essential for their well-being. Managing natural systems sustainably is essential to supporting those most at risk of being left behind<sup>10</sup>.

Are there inclusive and safe spaces (open committees, consultation mechanisms, etc.) for dialogue among individuals relying on economies dependent on natural resources? Are minority groups’ traditional knowledge and requests taken into account in an equitable manner in decisions on the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems (e.g. specific traditional, ancestral knowledge on plants and their uses)? Do vulnerable groups have a fair share in the economic benefits of restoring water-related ecosystems?



# Entry point for LNOB in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene-related projects throughout the project cycle management (PCM)?



## Taking action

Unless exclusion and inequality are explicitly and responsively addressed in both policy and practice, water interventions will fail to reach those most in need and who are likely to benefit the most.

- **Explore!** Find out who is being left behind, and how this may have happened.
- **Expose!** Expose and discuss the challenges faced by those left behind.
- **Commit!** Commit to taking action for people left behind and focusing on addressing their needs.
- **Think!** Bring about transformation by balancing powers, interests and participation in decision-making and outlining the expected results for the targeted individuals and groups left behind.
- **Engage!** Engage in policy dialogue, advocate for access to water and sanitation, and introduce LNOB in negotiations with partner organisations.
- **Integrate!** Ensure integration within programmes and/or develop specific programmes for the left-behind groups.
- **Enhance!** Enhance information systems and the production of disaggregated data that reveals the challenges involved.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> UNDP (2006) Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis. Human Development Report 2006. New York: UNDP. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/267/hdr06-complete.pdf> (accessed 22 March 2018)
- <sup>2</sup> SDC 2008 A Human Rights-Based Approach to Water and Sanitation. [https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/themen/staats-wirtschaftsreformen/170500-human-rights-approach-water-sanitation\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/themen/staats-wirtschaftsreformen/170500-human-rights-approach-water-sanitation_EN.pdf) (accessed 15 June 2018)
- <sup>3</sup> Revue nationale volontaire du Niger, ODD 2018
- <sup>4</sup> UNOCHA, world Humanitarian Data and Trends, OCHA, 2018, p33.
- <sup>5</sup> UNICEF, Water under fire, 2019.
- <sup>6</sup> Set out in General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2002a), the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, and the resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council (OHCHR, n.d.)
- <sup>7</sup> Set out in General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2002a), the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, and the resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council (OHCHR, n.d.)
- <sup>8</sup> WHO, 10 facts on preventing disease through healthy environments (2016)
- <sup>9</sup> Global Water Partnership, TEC background papers no. 8, Poverty Reduction and IWRM (2003)
- <sup>10</sup> WWF, Brief, Leave no one behind, Talking points (2016). [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10774WWF%20brief\\_Environmental%20dimensions%20of%20LNOB.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10774WWF%20brief_Environmental%20dimensions%20of%20LNOB.pdf)



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