

Adapting monitoring and evaluation approaches to SDG #6

The SDGs embraced the important statement about the fundamental role of water in sustainable development. Consequently, the SDGs have a specific goal, number 6, dedicated to water and sanitation, which is to 'ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all'. National governments have been given the responsibility for transmitting monitoring data to UN agencies.

How will this affect the coordination and accuracy of water and sanitation access data? In terms of evaluation, the most frequently used methodology, of the OECD/DAC, dates back to 1991. Are the criteria still relevant to water and sanitation projects which aim at leaving no-one behind? Do the criteria cater for a mainstreamed Human Rights approach?

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“**A**t the beginning of the new millennium, the entire world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions agreed to set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to fight poverty in its many dimensions. Despite the achievements, such as increasing to 91% the global population using an improved drinking water source, MDGs have been considered as not sufficiently ambitious, lacking in vision of equitable development, too paternalistic and technocratic – being designed exclusively for developing countries – and not taking into account the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability.

The design of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) intended to amend the limitations of the MDGs. Indeed, the MDGs only took into consideration access to safe drinking water, a target of Goal #7 which came under the broad heading of ‘ensure environmental sustainability’. In the MDGs initial version, sanitation was omitted; with the target to improve access to basic sanitation only added two years later, under the same Goal #7.

The SDGs embraced the important statement about the fundamental role of water in sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda, made in the RIO+20 resolution: “water is at the core of sustainable development as it is closely linked to a number of key global challenges”. Consequently, the SDGs, with 17 global goals and 169 targets, have a

specific goal dedicated to water and sanitation, Goal #6 is to ‘ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all’ (figure 1).

SDG #6 is an expansion of the MDG #7.C, previously focused only on drinking water and sanitation and now covering the entire cycle of water, including water management, wastewater and ecosystems resources (UN-Water, 2016a). Importantly, the SDGs have embraced the principle of leaving no one behind, meaning that targets have to be reached universally, for all sub-groups within the population, regardless of their age, income, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. (WHO, 2016 d).

SDG #6 contains eight targets: six on outcomes in regard to water and sanitation and two on the means of implementing the outcome targets. Targets #6.1 and #6.2 are the direct continuation of target #7.C of the MDGs, with a higher ambition of achieving universal coverage on water, sanitation and hygiene. It is important to note that access to water in the SDGs includes, for the first time, aspects as equity, affordability, availability and ensuring safe drinking water (figure 2, from WHO 2016 b). In other words, it includes the Human Rights dimensions in its description for the first time. This is an important difference in comparison with MDG #7.C, where *improved water* meant water from an improved source, without any consideration in terms of quality, availability or affordability. In the same way, access to sanitation has ►



Figure 1: Goal 6: Targets and Indicators

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all			
TARGETS		INDICATORS	
6.1	By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all	6.1.1	Proportion of population using safely managed drinking services
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	6.2.1	Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water
6.3	By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally	6.3.1	Proportion of wastewater safely treated
		6.3.2	Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality
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	6.4.1	Change in water-use efficiency over time
		6.4.2	Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources
6.5	By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate	6.5.1	Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (0–100)
		6.5.2	Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation
6.6	By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes	6.6.1	Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time
6.A	By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies	6.A.1	Amount of water – and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan
6.B	Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management	6.B.1	Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management

► been adopted through an integrated approach, considering the entire sanitation chain, from waste generation to final use and disposal, as stated in targets #6.2 and #6.3 (figure 1).

In light of the the ambitious new concepts of universal access, affordability, equity or ecosystems introduced by the SDGs for water and sanitation, a change in the current paradigm is needed.

Achieving SDG #6 involves a shift from a project-based approach to a service-based approach, where the water cycle is managed in a holistic way, to include issues such as the price of water, stakeholder participation and service management.

The monitoring of the eight targets for the SDG #6 is led by “custodian agencies” from

the United Nations, which are responsible for compiling and verifying country data and metadata (UN-Water, 2016b). Subsequently, data is sent to the United Nations Statistic Division for publishing in a UN database and used for thematic reporting (figure 3). ►

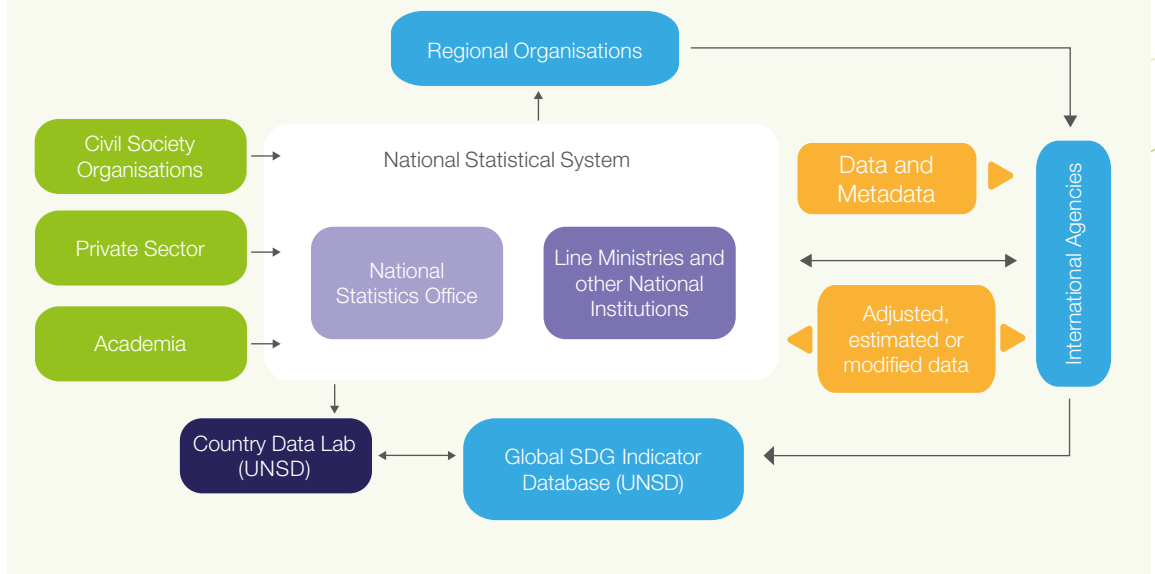
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Figure 2: Extended interpretation of target #6.1

#6.1 By 2030 achieve universal	Implies all exposure and settings including households, schools, health-care facilities and workplaces
and equitable	Implies progressive reduction and elimination of inequalities among population subgroups
access	Implies sufficient water to meet domestic needs is reliably available close to home
to safe	Free from pathogens and elevated levels of toxic chemicals at all times
and affordable	Payment for service is not a barrier to access to or prevent people from meeting basic human needs
drinking water	Water used for drinking, cooking, food preparation and personal hygiene
for all	Suitable for use by men, women, girls and boys of all ages including people with disabilities



Figure 3: Data flow in SDG reporting, highlighting the central role of the national statistical system



► UN agencies in charge of SDG #6 are divided as described in figure 4.

Unlike MDG monitoring, which was achieved from household surveys, SDG #6 monitoring relies on national authorities and their national statistical system (UN-Water, 2016b). It is left to each country to decide how much detail they want to share with the custodian agencies on each target. The minimum would be at least one aggregate per indicator and logically, the more detail they provide, the more credible and useful the data becomes. The decision on how much detail is to be given in monitoring data is aligned with the strategic priorities adopted by each of the countries, especially for targets such as #6.4, for which the milestone is to ‘substantially increase water-use efficiency’, without no clear reference to a quantitative milestone. In all logic, a country with severe water stress will put special emphasis on increasing water efficiency. Consequently, aggregates associated to monitoring will be larger and more detailed.

According to the classification made by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG – SDGs), targets concerning access to water and sanitation could be monitored by most of the countries through their existing national statistic data (UN-Water, 2017c). The Joint Monitoring Program recommends population-based sources of data, such as censuses and household surveys, over administrative records such as infrastructure coverage, if that information is also considered important. Additionally, the SDGs have established a *ladder of monitoring*, suggesting the possibility to continue monitoring *basic drinking water* for those countries where more accurate data is not available (Schmidt-Traub et al., 2015).

This concession in the monitoring system can have serious consequences in the underlying concept for the SDGs. In the water and sanitation sector specifically, the revolutionary progress for the SDGs face to the MDGs was to consider the issues mentioned above – affordability, equity, service, etc.–, instead of simply considering infrastructure coverage. ►

► If countries do not provide accurate data about pricing, water availability or water quality, it will not be possible to evaluate the achievement of SDGs in water and sanitation at national level. Evaluation, as for the MDGs, will be limited to measuring the access to infrastructures. Additionally, increasing the role of the national authorities in monitoring may jeopardize accuracy. Indeed, the monitoring systems require the coordination of authorities and actors at local and national level. In many countries across Africa, systems and human skills are outdated and weak, especially at local level, which may call into question the accuracy of data.

Exposing the flaws of current evaluation methodology

The most frequent principles used for Evaluating Development Assistance are the ones drawn up by the Development Assistant Committee (DAC) (OECD DAC, 1991): relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. These five principles, described in figure 5, were set in 1991 by aid agencies for the evaluation of aid-financed activities, addressed to ongoing and completed activities (OECD DAC, 1991).

A close analysis of target #6.1, using the definition described in figure 2; reveals that the innovative core concepts related to Human Rights included in the target are not necessarily taken into account within the five principles of the DAC Evaluation.

Taking for example a drinking water project, one important aspect of the SDGs and excluded from the evaluation principles is the affordability of the service. In target #6.1, affordability is understood in a way that the payment for service should not be a barrier to access to or prevent people from meeting water access. However, within the evaluation principles,

the price of the service should be considered under sustainability dimension, measuring the (financial, social, environmental) capacity of the service to continue after donor funding.

The disparity between sustainability concepts in the two approaches (SDGs and DAC Evaluation), leads to different conclusions about what is a successful project. In the case of a drinking water supply project in a low-income rural area with low demographic density, a successful project, from an SDG angle, would be one that guarantee water access to their dwellers at an affordable price, regardless of whether this is below the cost recovery price of the water system. This implies that additional financial resources should be made available, and therefore the right to water takes precedence over the financial sustainability of the system. From an evaluation standpoint, this project will be successful only if the drinking system is financially sustainable, which means that the water tariff could be higher than dwellers' payment capacity. Application of a higher water tariff to achieve sustainability will exclude the poorest dwellers from using the system.

Another paradox between the SDG and the DAC Evaluation approach occurs under the concept of equity. Take for example a sanitation project in an urban school with 1200 students, of which 12 have reduced mobility. From an SDG angle, the project would be considered successful if the sanitation service can be used by all. This implies that if the project infrastructure is not suitable for the 1% of disabled people, the project would be considered a failure, because it is contrary to the principle of equity. From an evaluation point of view, a project that covers 99% of total target expected would definitely not be considered a failure, because the effectiveness of the objective is close to 100%. ►►

Figure 4: Agencies leading SDG #6 monitoring

TARGET	CUSTODIAN AGENCY
6.1 and 6.2	<p>JMP: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation</p> <p>JMP was the leading agency for monitoring progress made in targets concerning water, sanitation and hygiene since 1990 (JMP, 2017).</p>
6.3 to 6.6	<p>GEMI: Integrated Monitoring of Water and Sanitation Related SDG</p> <p>Created in 2014, to integrate and expand existing monitoring efforts on wastewater treatment and water quality, water use and scarcity, integrated water resources management and water related ecosystems (SDG6, 2016a).</p>
6.a and 6.b	<p>GLAAS: UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-water</p> <p>GLAAS initiative provides information on investments and the enabling environment, with a specific focus on targets 6.a and 6.b. In addition to monitoring the SDG, The dialogue and information that emerges from GLAAS reports enhances the understanding of linkages between water, sanitation, and economic growth, and promotes a culture of mutual accountability, partnership and shared responsibility (WHO, 2017).</p>

Figure 5: DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance (Source: OECD)






 <p>Relevance</p>	<p>The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.</p>
 <p>Effectiveness</p>	<p>A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives.</p>
 <p>Efficiency</p>	<p>Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. It is an economic term which signifies that the aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results.</p>
 <p>Impact</p>	<p>The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental and other development indicators</p>
 <p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.</p>



Figure 6: Proposed evaluation criteria

PROPOSED CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Availability	The project output provided is ready to be bought, used or reached, and in sufficient quantity;
Accessibility	The quality or characteristic of the project output that makes it possible to approach, enter or be used by everyone. Includes physical and economical accessibility as well as information accessibility.
Acceptability	The project output is ethical and sensitive to cultural factors as well as age, gender, disabilities, ethnicity, etc.
Quality	The project outputs provided are satisfactory for all the groups according to their needs and international standards.
Inclusiveness	The project outputs include different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally, reducing and eliminating inequalities among population subgroups.
Affordability	The project outputs pricing is not a barrier to access to or prevent people from meeting basic human needs.

► The *efficiency* criteria also gives rise to discrepancies between the SDGs and DAC evaluations. Indeed, one of the dimensions of the DAC is *efficiency*, as defined in figure 5. SDGs analyze the financial resources mobilized for target #6, in indicator #6.A, but not how they have been used. Efficiency is a key dimension for Aid Agencies but has little relevance from the SDG, or Human Rights angle.

These three examples show that the evaluation framework, as it is now, is not aligned to the SDG approach. **While some aspects of the SDGs can be directly included in the five-dimension evaluation framework, such as universality – that can be included in the effectiveness assessment; equity or inclusiveness have to be addressed**

independently. Efficiency is arguably irrelevant to the SDG approach.

The solution proposed to this challenge would be to adapt the DAC evaluation approach. It means that the existing five dimensions could be kept, but other dimensions (see figure 6) have to be added in order to integrate the Human Rights Approach in the evaluation methodology. **Each Human Right has different dimensions associated to it, meaning that the evaluation methodology approach should incorporate all these different dimensions.** Then, each Development Agency, taking into account the project to evaluate and its own development mission, should do a selection of the criteria to to be assessed. ►

► Conclusion

A paradigm shift in evaluation is required, moving from the DAC approach to an evaluation approach that integrates Human Rights throughout the evaluation process, both for ongoing and completed projects. The paradigm shift has to be translated

to each aid agency's own methodology, and evaluation dimensions have to be rethought taking into consideration the different dimensions of each human right and the agency's own development mission.

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Author's profile

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