

# **Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments**

## **Inputs for the thematic report on “The right to water and sanitation as a tool for peace, prevention and cooperation”**

### **78th session of UN General Assembly**

**The right to water and sanitation is vital for promoting peace, preventing conflicts, and fostering cooperation between nations and communities.**

Human action has thrown the global water cycle out of balance and every person, ecosystem and place is at risk until we restore this balance. This has repercussions everywhere. All persons, all economies and societies, all ecosystems and places, are already affected and will be more impacted in the coming decades. Vulnerable countries, groups and communities, women and girls suffer first and foremost.

Without concrete action, the crisis of global water will grow to endanger all the SDGs and imperil global food and health security, relief from poverty, and peace within and between nations.

The global water cycle must therefore be recognized as a **global common good** and tackling the water crisis a collective responsibility and endeavor, in the collective interests of all nations. If water is to be seen as a right and as a public good, it is essential to overcome its commodification, ensuring that it is available to all residents. To ensure that water remains a common good, it will be essential to address its provision, including the need to remunicipalise, deprivatise or enhance public management participatory governance and bring commoning practices to the forefront.

Hence, coordinated water governance and cross-border institutions are urgently needed, particularly in international river basins where over half of the global population lives. To ensure that no one is left behind, we must strengthen our commitment to water governance and promote multi-stakeholder collaboration to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.

Recommendations for action include:

- Recognizing access to water as a global common good, to be collectively tackled, through local to global actions, in the interest of all nations.
- Improving and strengthening governance, from local to global, to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to water.
- Addressing provision of water including remunicipalization to ensure water remains a public good
- Ensuring government support for universal water and sanitation access, focusing on marginalized populations, including women and girls in water management and decision-making.
- Addressing underground water pollution and promoting integrated approaches.
- Encouraging private sector engagement in innovation and investment.
- Coordinating groundwater management and fostering cooperation and cross-border governance between neighbouring states and regions.
- Increasing community awareness and involvement in water management.
- Emphasizing the connection between ocean and water governance.
- Supporting small island developing states (SIDS) in water and ocean challenges.
- Strengthening the science-policy interface and data systems through collaboration.
- Promoting a more inclusive and decentralized multilateral system involving local and regional governments.

- Establishing innovative financial mechanisms and strengthening local and regional finance for SDG targets.

### **Rethinking how we value access to water as a global common good, in the shared interest of all nations**

The Water Action Decade presents a crucial opportunity to restore the global water cycle and advance SDG implementation, climate action, and biodiversity conservation. Its success will bring tangible benefits to communities, environments, and nations worldwide, thereby rebuilding trust in the multilateral system.

To achieve a sustainable, just, and fair water future, we need to enhance our collective ambition. This entails reevaluating the value of water and systematically integrating it into decision-making processes, promoting efficient use across sectors, equitable distribution among populations, and sustainable practices at local and global levels. Our shared goal is to reclaim, protect, and uphold the rights associated with water, including the universal right to water for all.

Market fluctuations should not determine the availability of basic rights and dignity; instead, all communities must take responsibility for their preservation. Achieving this requires inclusive governance, where every individual collaborates and works together. By redefining water as a common resource—both practically and conceptually—and emphasizing its connection to co-creation, we can prioritize the needs of communities and rethink governance structures.

### **Renewed governance frameworks at global, regional and basin levels play a crucial role in cooperative water management**

In a world where many countries and communities are grappling with water scarcity and other water-related challenges, **sharing knowledge, technologies, and best practices can be critical for building more resilient and sustainable water systems. International cooperation can also help to address transboundary water issues and promote more effective management of shared water resources**, which are critical for promoting peace and preventing conflicts.

Achieving this target will require a coordinated effort between all spheres of governments, together with key stakeholders and communities. This effort will need to focus on addressing the root causes of water and sanitation inequality, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resources, and environmental factors. It will also require a commitment to promoting cross-border cooperation and collaboration at regional and local level to ensure equitable access to water resources.

Effective cooperation requires greater political will to promote sustainable and integrated water resources management and increased public awareness and involvement. **Cooperative decision-making should be inclusive, which requires local governments participation in conflict resolution and the engagement of stakeholders from all sectors and at all relevant levels.**

### **The right to water and sanitation is paramount to reach SDGs and promote peace and security.**

**Ensuring universal access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental requirement for upholding basic human rights such as the right to life, health, education, and food.** Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty, inequality, and conflicts.

As a result, it is imperative to continue striving towards ensuring that all individuals have access to water and sanitation without discrimination while ensuring that water resources are managed sustainably and equitably.

Providing access to water and sanitation not only fulfills the objective of supplying clean water and sanitation to all (Goal 6), but it also contributes significantly to achieving other Sustainable Development Goals. These goals include poverty reduction (Goal 1), food security (Goal 2), improved health and well-being (Goal 3), clean energy (Goal 7), climate change mitigation (Goal 13), protection of ecosystems (Goals 14 and 15), and the **promotion of peace and security (Goal 16)**.

Achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation is vital for promoting basic human rights, sustainable development, and reducing poverty, inequality, and conflicts. It is a critical objective that requires the collective efforts of governments, local and regional governments and communities to ensure that everyone has equal access to water and sanitation resources.

### **Access to water is essential for public health and regional stability**

**Access to water and sanitation is crucial for maintaining public health and promoting social stability.** Inadequate access to these resources increases the risk of waterborne illnesses such as cholera, dysentery, and typhoid fever, which can lead to high mortality rates, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children. Furthermore, **water scarcity can result in population displacement, social unrest, and instability**, particularly in regions with weak governance structures. In some instances, limited access to water resources has been identified as a key factor in conflicts between nations or communities.

### **Water cooperation as a tool for peace**

Water resources by nature transcend borders and sectors and are of fundamental importance to the health and well-being of ecosystems and thus to our life support systems. In many places, this requires cooperation between countries depending on the same river or aquifer. More than half the global population lives in one of the world's hundreds of international river basins, but most basins lack any form of cooperative management framework. There is a need for more coordinated water governance and cross-border governance institutions supporting local and regional governments and their networks, including on decentralized cooperation.

Ensuring access to clean water and adequate sanitation is crucial **for preventing conflicts and promoting peace. Access to these basic resources can reduce the risk of water-related disputes and promote equitable and sustainable use of water resources.**

To prevent conflict and sustain thriving economies over the long term, countries will need to work more closely together to maximize the benefits and reduce the risks of these shared systems, in a manner that is equitable and inclusive for all stakeholders.

### **Significant investments in infrastructures are needed to prevent conflicts**

Achieving universal access to water and sanitation remains a major challenge, particularly in low-income countries and marginalized communities where resources and infrastructure are often lacking. In many cases, marginalized communities, such as indigenous peoples and rural populations, are disproportionately affected by water scarcity and lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities. **Addressing these disparities will require significant investments in infrastructure, technologies, and capacity building, including in local finance, as well as policies and programs that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.**

Providing access to water and sanitation requires significant investments in infrastructure, education, and governance. Many governments and aid organizations are unable or unwilling to allocate sufficient resources to address this issue, **which can perpetuate inequalities and exacerbate conflicts over water resources.**

### Our recommendations

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**Efforts shared among local and regional governments and their networks and partners in maintaining local service provision and fostering cooperation on water through city and subnational diplomacy and regional basin management will be critical to reach these shared objectives.**

#### On human rights:

- Recognizing water as a global common good and ensuring that water remains a common good, including the need to remunicipalise, deprivatise or enhance public management participatory governance and bring commoning practices to the forefront.
- Strengthening the link between the Commons and Human Rights through the Right to Water: a new common sense around the Commons is needed that puts rights at the centre and protects those that protect and defend them. The Right to water framework allows us to understand the commons as collective rights, not individual ones.
- Encourage ongoing support from all tiers of government to ensure access to water and sanitation services for all, and sustainable water management and, particularly, for the most vulnerable segments of the population as a human right. Highlight the issue of access to services for marginalized populations (migrants, homeless, etc.), particularly, in countries that are otherwise advanced in terms of access to services or in countries most exposed to such flows.
- Foster **women and girls'** inclusion in water management, including in position of responsibility, and promote participatory, inclusive approaches that ensure all voices are accounted for and represented in decision-making.
- Build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments over the past years and recognize care as the dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions to protect the most vulnerable, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and those living in informality.
- As long as in cases of conflict water is being used as a weapon or as a target, international criminal law should be reinforced to punish war crimes or **crimes against humanity related to water resources.**

#### On sustainable management:

- Strengthen capacities of local and regional governments in building sustainable management models of our ecosystems and biodiversity to protect water as a public good, including the

collection of best practices on sustainable management of water ecosystems by local and regional governments.

- Develop and implement policies addressing underground water pollutions at a national, river basin and aquifer scale, and allocate means of action to local governments to enforce them.
- Develop an integrated and comprehensive approach at all levels of government including water and sanitation as the core components, alongside related topics, such as solid waste management, agriculture, and environmental health.
- Set up an enabling environment for local and regional governments to implement, run and regulate efficient, and user-centered essential services, such as safe water production and supply and sanitation.
- Considering its proximity to citizens, local and regional governments can join and facilitate the collaboration with communities and stakeholders in processes of co-creation to define common actions to protect coast and marine ecosystems, especially to preserve the rights of future generations for a healthy planet;

#### **On the governance of water:**

- Strengthen the role of regions, intermediary cities, small towns, and rural areas and territories in the achievement of the universal development agendas, softening the asymmetries in the distribution of water capacities and supporting the role of regional governments in bridging the urban-rural divide.
- Highlight the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration in the managing water ecosystems and the inclusion of cities, regions and territories in water related policy making.
- Renew the collaboration with the private sector in the achievement of SDG6 in particular through innovation, new financing mechanisms and private sector investment in water and sanitation.
- Deploy groundwater management and monitoring solutions, including the use of nature-based solutions, and reinforce coordination, harmonization, data-sharing and scientific cooperation between neighbouring states and regions, either for surface water or groundwater.
- Raise awareness with communities on water management and include them in the decision making.
- Ensure a clear connection between the governance of the world's oceans and the governance of water and stress the presence of 'urban-ocean linkages' calling upon the engagement of local and regional governments in global efforts and decisions to protect the ocean and maritime resources.
- Strengthen the capacity of SIDS and their cities to respond to global challenges in light of the aggregated risks faced due to ocean and sea degradation and their relationship with the overall governance of water.

- Ahead of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021 - 2030, highlight the intrinsic link between the governance of our oceans and the governance of water and sanitation, the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the science-policy interface, as well as to improve data systems and seek innovative solutions at all levels.
- Foster a renewed, more inclusive, multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation and peace, including the added value of decentralized cooperation on water and sanitation and engaging local and regional governments and their representative associations in all stages of decision-making processes.
- Develop innovative financial solidarity mechanisms at local and regional level, and rethink fiscal architecture, strengthen local and regional finance to provide sufficient financial capacity to reach the SDG targets. Establish instruments - at the national and multilateral levels - to finance water savings at national, regional and local levels, with priority given to areas under great quantitative pressure.

The right to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right that is essential for the enjoyment of a wide range of other rights, as well as for promoting peace, preventing conflicts, and fostering cooperation between nations and communities. Achieving universal access to clean water and adequate sanitation will require significant investments and a human rights-based approach that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in order to sustain peace and prevent conflict. Renewed inclusive governance model can create a more equitable, sustainable, and peaceful world where all people have access to the basic resources, they need to live healthy and dignified lives for a peaceful world that promotes cooperation and prevents conflicts and war.