The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

Water, water everywhere? Well, not quite. Improving access to clean drinking water, sanitation and hygienic facilities needs to be addressed for a large portion of our world. This goal not only focuses on human consumption of water, but the quality and sustainability of water resources worldwide. This goal addresses access to water, managing our impact on water sources, protecting our ecosystems and supporting our communities to improve sanitation management.

TARGETS

- Ensure that everyone has access to safe and affordable drinking water.
- Ensure that everyone has access to adequate sanitation (safe sewage disposal and good waste management), as well as public education on healthy hygiene habits.
- Monitor and reduce contamination of water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, and increase recycling and safe reuse of water.
- Improve water use, developing new systems and resources to reuse it and address water scarcity.
- Increase awareness among communities to involve them in water and sanitation management.
- Protect and restore water-related ecosystems including mountains, forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers and aquifers.

“Although we take it for granted, sanitation is a physical measure that has probably done more to increase human lifespan than any kind of drug or surgery.”

Deepak Chopra
Author and public Speaker
THE BIG QUESTIONS

1 Where did it begin?

- Over two-thirds of Earth’s surface is covered by water. However, as our population grows, we are putting increased pressure on our planet’s freshwater resources through our activities and consumption.

- One of the biggest problems is water pollution. Pollution happens when substances build up in our water to such an extent that they cause problems for animals, people and our ecosystems. Human activity causes waste, which can severely impact our water ecosystems. Sewage, fertilizers, wastewater, chemical waste, radioactive waste, oil and plastics can end up in our waterways if we don’t manage them properly.

- Insufficient water caused by pollution, conflict, distance to water sources, overuse of water and drought impacts our lives and the health of our planet. When there isn’t enough clean water to use, health, resistance to disease, hunger and hygiene are all affected and can hinder a person’s ability to escape the cycle of poverty.

- Warming temperatures, changes in precipitation, runoff and rising sea levels, erosion, drought and salinization are becoming large problems for our water resources because of climate change. For the sake of our society and our planet, we need to protect water sources.

2 Why does this issue matter?

- **Access to clean water is still an issue**
  Around 1.8 billion people are using a source of drinking water that has fecal contamination, and 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services such as toilets or latrines. **Water scarcity**, or the lack of sufficient available water resources to meet our needs, affects more than 40 per cent of the global population.¹

- **Our water is stressed**
  37 per cent of countries are experiencing high to extremely high levels of **water stress**, including Cyprus, Jamaica, Qatar, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. When water stress occurs, demand for water exceeds the available amount during a certain period. This can deteriorate the quantity and quality of freshwater resource through aquifer over-exploitation, pollution or the drying out of rivers.

- **We’re the problem and solution**
  Environmentally, more than 80 per cent of wastewater resulting from human activities is discharged into rivers or seas without any treatment, leading to various forms of pollution.² When we manage our water sustainably, we can improve our food and energy production, preserve our water ecosystems and their biodiversity and take action on climate change.
Who and what are affected?

- **Children**
  Diseases related to water and sanitation are among the major causes of death in children. More than 800 children die every day from diarrheal diseases linked to poor hygiene.\(^3\) In addition, children are often responsible for fetching water to use in their homes, often making day-long trips and sacrificing their education to support their families.

- **Women**
  In many countries, collecting water is women’s work. Much of their time is spent finding adequate water resources, which can take time away from paid work or education. At home, school, or work, lack of adequate sanitation can impact health, safety and dignity for many women. A lack of access to water and sanitation can make it hard for women within a cycle of poverty to escape as they may not be able to attend school or earn an income.\(^5\) This lack of access can heighten the *double burden* or *dual burden* effect that women in the Global South often face.

- **Indigenous Communities**
  Many Indigenous communities do not have access to clean water and sanitation. The Neskantaga First Nation in northern Ontario has had a boil-water advisory, meaning water must be sterilized before drinking, for more than 20 years. About 73 per cent of First Nations water systems are at high to medium risk of contamination, with more than 160 water advisories in nearly 120 First Nations communities in Canada.\(^6\) Investment in sanitation and water purification are a high priority to ensure the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples on and off of reserves.

- **Ecosystems**
  Water pollution is catastrophic for our water ecosystems. Close to 40 per cent of America’s rivers and 46 per cent of America’s lakes are too polluted for fishing, swimming or aquatic life.\(^7\) In Canada, nearly all 167 *sub-watersheds* are currently subject to some form of environmental pollution, some with multiple threats, and more than half of these sub-watersheds have experienced a significant loss of ecosystems.\(^8\) When we are careless with our disposal of waste, when we overconsume, when we introduce chemicals and waste into our water supply, when we disrupt a land’s natural environment, or there is an occurrence of invasive species, our environment pays the price. Organisms die, food chains are disrupted and ecosystems can be destroyed.
What needs to be done?

- Progress has been made to increase access to clean drinking water. In 2015, 6.6 billion people, or 91 per cent of the population, used an improved drinking water source, an improvement from 82 per cent in 2000. Adopting an integrated water resource management approach helps promote coordinated efforts to develop and manage water resources to maximize their social and economic benefits while ensuring the sustainability of our ecosystems.

- In 2015, an estimated 663 million people were using unimproved water sources or surface water, and in 2012, it was estimated that 1.8 billion people were exposed to drinking water sources contaminated with fecal matter. Investing in wastewater treatment can help improve ecosystem health and improve the quality of water we drink and use daily.

- Ongoing access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services are some of the most effective ways to prevent disease and improve human health.

- Integrating a gender-sensitive approach to water management can have a positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions to conserve water resources. Involving different genders in the design and implementation of interventions can lead to new solutions for water problems which can also improve gender equality, clean water access for all, the effectiveness of government interventions and also make projects more sustainable.

- Identifying water scarcity and water pollution through education and awareness can help fight ignorance or passive positions on the issue. If we don’t have enough clean water, we won’t survive. This is every global citizen’s issue. By challenging our community and leaders to remain accountable and active, we can address this issue by 2030.

“Anything else you’re interested in is not going to happen if you can’t breathe the air and drink the water. Don’t sit this one out. Do something.”

Carl Sagan
American astronomer and author
Access to sanitation facilities, closer proximity to clean water sources and improved resilience against droughts and floods impact all of us, but particularly impact women and girls. By finding solutions to water security and sustainability that are considerate of different gender experiences, we can improve our impact on the environment and empower our girls and women in the process.

Building sustainable cities, ending hunger, taking action against climate change and improving our health and well-being are all connected to accessing clean water. It is important to see how our actions and attitudes are interrelated with our environment and our water.

“The water is female; water is life and so we as women must stand with the water. We stand in prayer and in civil disobedience. We stand because we must protect our children and grandchildren.”

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard
Lakota historian, activist and founder of Standing Rock resistance camp
Consequences of inaction

- If we do not do anything about our world’s water qualities and quantities that are at risk, the costs will be huge for our society and our economy. Without proper sanitation infrastructure, worldwide, more than two million people will continue to die every year from diarrheal diseases. Poor hygiene and unsafe water are responsible for nearly 90 per cent of these deaths and mostly affect children.¹¹

- When we fail to invest in water and sanitation, we are losing out on 4.3 per cent of sub-Saharan African GDP. The World Bank estimates that 6.4 per cent of India’s GDP is lost due to adverse economic impacts and costs of inadequate sanitation.¹²

- Without better infrastructure and management for our water resources, millions of people will continue to die every year and there will be further losses in biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, undermining prosperity efforts towards a more sustainable future.

**REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?

“We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one.”

*Jacques Cousteau*
French explorer and conservationist