

## Linking IWRM and WASH: a position paper

### About Watershed

Watershed empowering citizens programme is a strategic partnership between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo. Watershed aims at delivering improvements in the governance and management of water, sanitation and hygiene services as well as of the water resources on which they draw.

Watershed is implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Mali, Ghana, Bangladesh and India.

The long-term objective of Watershed is improved governance for WASH and IWRM so that all citizens, including the most marginalised, can benefit from sustainable services.

The immediate goal is to enhance citizens' ability to obtain information so that civil society organisations (CSOs) can advocate for change based on reliable, accurate data.

### CONTACT

**Maria Stolk** - [maria.stolk@wetlands.org](mailto:maria.stolk@wetlands.org)

There are clear linkages between integrated water resources management (IWRM) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) that need to be highlighted. Yet, encouraging linkages does not mean that CSOs implementing WASH services need to be fully capacitated in IWRM. Experts implementing WASH services are not responsible for IWRM in the region.

Wetlands International has been studying the priority actions for stronger alignment of Dutch-funded water management and WASH activities abroad<sup>1</sup>. This position paper presents the key findings and recommended priority actions, based on the work in partner countries, workshops and discussions<sup>2</sup>.

The challenge for governments and civil society organisations is to deliver water security in an increasingly insecure world. This is not an easy task, but we do believe it is possible if we work together and if we stand on each other's shoulders.

1 WASH/IWRM alignment in Dutch foreign policies and practices, main findings from interviews and literature review. Joyce Kortlandt, Wetlands International. 15 February 2017

2 [https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/wetlands\\_2017\\_wash\\_and\\_water\\_security\\_web.pdf](https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/wetlands_2017_wash_and_water_security_web.pdf)

## Key findings

1. Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water, Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) experts work in silos and barely meet each other, both at policy level and implementation level. Sector specialisation is often needed, but in absence of effective coordination it can result in inefficiencies.
2. Effective IWRM – WASH linkages require adequate institutional capacity and political prioritisation. According to practitioners and policy evaluations, this remains a challenge. While IWRM has found its way into plans and policies in partner countries, operationalisation is often not part of the political priorities.
3. IWRM often remains abstract and at high level (basin, national or trans-boundary) whereas drinking water and sanitation are concrete, and achievements can be measured relatively easily (e.g. number of people with access to safe drinking water). This leads to WASH practitioners having difficulty to grasp IWRM.
4. Although, SDG 6 clearly includes both WASH (6.1 and 6.2), and broader water management and governance (6.5), discussions in the Dutch Water Sector and in partner countries about SDG 6, often focus on WASH only.

## Two takeaways

In order to identify linkages between IWRM and WASH in a certain intervention, we recommend that two aspects are taken into account:

**1** Where and how is WASH (particularly drinking water) under threat due to problematic<sup>3</sup> water resources management?

**Or put differently:**

- Where is the water for a WASH scheme coming from, and is it threatened?
- Where is SDG 6.1 under threat from problematic 6.4 and 6.5?<sup>4</sup>

**2** Where and how is problematic WASH (sanitation and wastewater) a threat to other water resources and ecosystems,

**Or put differently:**

- Where does the disposal of faecal sludge / wastewater effluent take place and how does it affect ecosystems/aquifers/water bodies?
- Where is SDG 6.2 a threat to SDG 6.3 and 6.5?

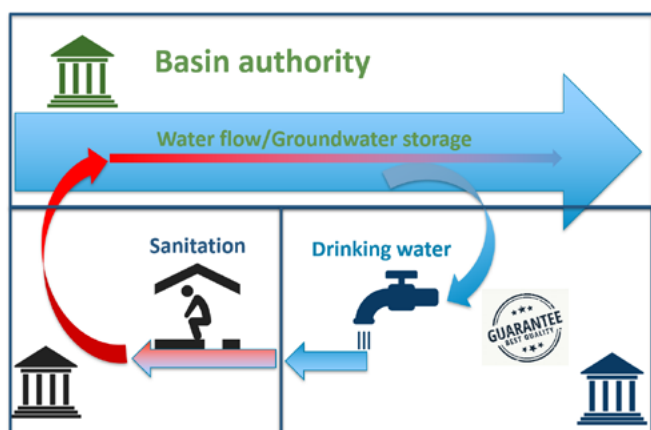
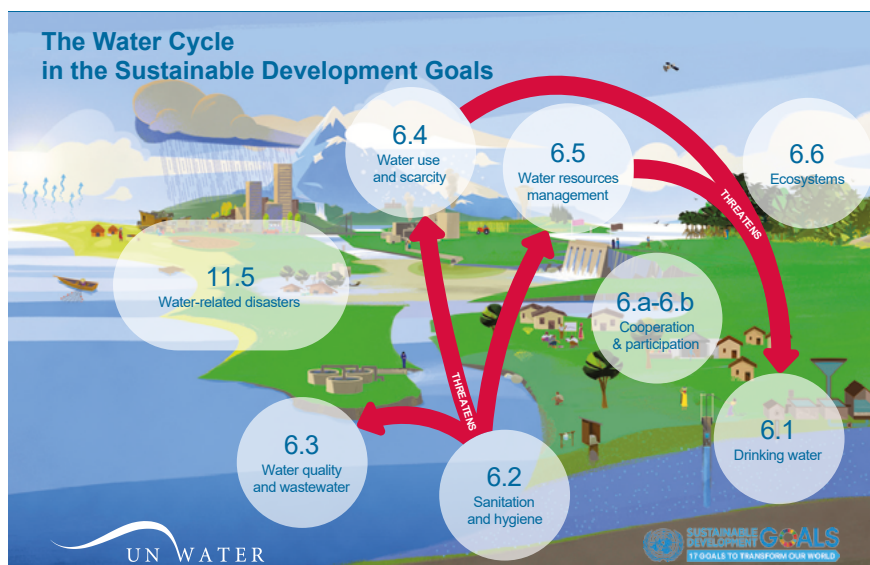


Figure 1 - schematic linkages - note the following -

- Typically, different institutions are involved, for example: a) Ministry of Public Works for drinking water b) Ministry of Environment for sanitation c) Ministry of Agriculture for water management. In addition, there is the role of communities as users of the water.
- For drinking water, the highest quality water should be made available.
- Dirty sanitation and wastewater often pollute existing water bodies, sometimes even drinking water further downstream/drawing from the same aquifer.
- At each governmental level, different institutions are involved. For example, at national level, it could be a ministry of public works and housing responsible for drinking water and ministry of health responsible for sanitation. At decentralised level, this could be the utility as service provider for water and municipality responsible for sanitation.

<sup>3</sup> Problematic in this context refers to inadequate water supplies or water quality.

<sup>4</sup> For a visualisation of these linkages please see Figure 1.



Adapted from UN Water (2017).

**Figure 2** The linkages between IWRM and WASH within the SDG targets. Problematic sanitation and hygiene practices threaten water resources management, water use and scarcity, as well as water quality and wastewater. In other words, inadequate disposal of wastewater/faecal sludge threatens efficient water resources management (6.5) as it worsens the water quality (6.3) downstream, thus, also impacting efficient water use and likely, water scarcity levels (6.4). Untreated wastewater also has a negative impact on surrounding ecosystems (6.6). The inefficient use of water and water scarcity also impact drinking water supply projects, as the water sources may be under threat. Similarly, inadequate water resources management may threaten the quality of the water source needed for drinking water (Source: UN Water).

## Schematic linkages WASH in management

Despite good intentions regarding coordinated efforts to align water management and WASH projects, too little alignment takes place in practice. Water management projects, such as irrigation and drainage projects, tend to focus on their key stakeholders, such as farmers and other entrepreneurs. WASH projects tend to focus on their key stakeholders, such as users of drinking water.

However, water management and WASH are intertwined. For example, faecal sludge from latrines may pollute water sources for other users and groundwater extraction for irrigation may impact drinking water availability. In many parts of the world, climate change-induced changes in rainfall and evaporation patterns increase the stress on water resources even further. This makes an even stronger case for linking approaches to get long-term, resilient water services under SDG 6.

## “We see alignment of IWRM and WASH in policies and implementation growing”

### Position

Based on our studies, experience within the Watershed programme, dialogues with international partners as well as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we find that alignment of IWRM and WASH in policies and

implementation is growing. For example, the current development of new water programmes in Mali, by the Netherlands Government, takes a broader regional perspective into consideration, while keeping tabs on the linkages between IWRM and WASH.

Another example is the Blue Deal<sup>5</sup>, in which IWRM and WASH/urban water supply are considered in synergy in some cases, and in which much more potential exists to propagate this.

## Conclusions

The objective of the Watershed Programme is “improved WASH governance” and by taking the two takeaways into consideration will inform actors at implementation level of the linkages between IWRM and WASH. These takeaways can also guide policy makers to take these linkages into account.

It is recommended that future capacity building and training activities related to IWRM and WASH within Watershed are based on these two takeaways. This will be applied in both the final stages of the programme and initiatives beyond Watershed.

<sup>5</sup> <https://dutchwaterauthorities.com/blue-deal/>