



RESEARCH  
PROGRAM ON  
Water, Land and  
Ecosystems

**EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, 20 OCTOBER AT 00.01 Sri Lanka Time**

**For more information, please contact:**

James Clarke at +94 (0) 77 3369533 or [j.clarke@cgiar.org](mailto:j.clarke@cgiar.org)

Neil Palmer at +94 (0) 77 7443836 or [n.palmer@cgiar.org](mailto:n.palmer@cgiar.org)

**Editor's Note:** To attend the Water for Food Global Conference (19-22 October) in Seattle, please RSVP to Molly Nance at [mnance@nebraska.edu](mailto:mnance@nebraska.edu) or +1 402-472-5512.

## **Sustainable Development Goals Offer Unique Opportunity to Transform Management of Critical Water Resources**

*Targets that promote efficient, nationally and locally appropriate water use will be key to achieving the SDGs*

SEATTLE, Washington (20 October 2014)— The proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a set of goals drafted by 70 nations and presently being discussed in the UN General Assembly to end poverty and hunger and sustain the environment—will guide social policy and investments for decades to come. Their approach to water management will be key to success, according to a new report issued today. The report from scientists at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) cautions against an overly rigid approach to implementing SDGs, which could limit development options for poor countries, particularly in how they are able to manage critical water resources.

According to the United Nations, water use has been growing at more than twice the rate of population in the last century, and an increasing number of regions are chronically short of water. At the same time, water is a crucial resource for meeting the development aspirations of poor countries, especially in Asia and Africa.

“Of all our natural resources, water underpins sustainable development perhaps more than any other,” said IWMI Director-General Jeremy Bird. “To deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have to be smart and inclusive. Water cuts across many of the goals—from poverty, to health, energy and the environment—so we must reflect on the interactions and identify locally appropriate solutions to managing water.”

According to a new publication by IWMI, key challenges include setting realistic targets, carefully considering the local context to address the needs of the poor, and promoting sustainable water resources development in a way that values healthy ecosystems. The scientific research organization launched the report, *On Target for People and Planet: Setting and Achieving Water-Related Sustainable Development Goals* in conjunction with the [Water for Food Global Conference](#) in Seattle.

Water concerns permeate the SDGs. Goal 6 calls for ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Proposed SDGs on food and

energy security also include targets on increasing water efficiency. But the three sectors can't be viewed in isolation, IWMI researchers said – rather they are interconnected and must be managed in an integrated way, often across borders.

Providing everyone with access to water – whether male, female, wealthy or poor – also is vital to achieving the SDGs on health, livelihood improvement and economic growth, IWMI researchers said. “This is especially important in rural and urban fringe areas,” said Julie van der Bliek, the publication’s lead editor. “People need access to water for domestic use and to generate income from growing crops.”

"To guide meaningful action, SDG targets will need to support the aspirations of poor nations for development," said Bird. "This means encouragement to use natural resources in smart, efficient and productive ways, while protecting ecosystems. Efficient use of water is at the heart of this balancing act."

The SDGs follow the U.N.-led Millennium Development Goals, which focused on reducing extreme poverty. The SDGs focus on sustainable development, taking into account such factors as water scarcity, food insecurity, ecosystem loss, and climate change. At stake is a healthy planet and people.

The 56-page IWMI book, illustrated with case studies and examples, provides critical analyses of how national SDG targets can be defined and met through the most current evidence-based water policies. IWMI, which recently adopted a new strategy to deliver a “water-secure world,” plans to produce a series of annual reports that synthesize thinking on major water issues.

IWMI scientists have developed cutting-edge tools to help policy makers, investors and water professionals assess and monitor ecosystem health and investment options – analytical tools that fit in with the theme of this year’s Water for Food Global Conference – “Big Data.”

For example, one tool uses near real-time satellite data to identify agricultural areas prone to waterlogging, and to map the progression and severity of floods. In Sudan’s Gash Basin, IWMI is testing a flood forecasting tool—the first of its kind in the region—that delivers flood information directly to farmers via cell phone text messaging.

The book offers other examples of IWMI’s work in tackling complex issues:

- IWMI conducted pilot tests in Uzbekistan’s Ferghana Valley to “bank” winter water flows released for hydropower into underground aquifers and later extract the stored water for dry-season irrigation. Such strategies may prove to be a pragmatic way to reverse damage caused by groundwater overpumping, and to deal with competing demands for water, energy and food.
- Despite today’s focus on participatory water-use management, IWMI’s research shows that women, minorities and the poor often are left out of local decision-making. In such situations, women revert to “stealing” the water they need for domestic use and crops.
- Humans generate millions of tons of solid and liquid waste every day. IWMI and its partners are testing innovative, low-cost human waste-to-fertilizer models in 10 cities across the globe. Implementing such solutions is a key to achieving SDG health and environment goals in low-income countries.

*On Target for People and Planet: Setting and Achieving Water-Related Sustainable Development Goals* is published today. You can download a copy here: [www.iwmi.org/sdg-book](http://www.iwmi.org/sdg-book)

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The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** is a non-profit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries. It is one of 16 such CGIAR centers across the globe, and is headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with regional offices across Asia and Africa. IWMI works in partnership with governments, civil society and the private sector to develop scalable agricultural water management solutions that have a tangible impact on poverty reduction, food security and ecosystem health. [www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)

IWMI leads the [CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems \(WLE\)](#), which combines the resources of 11 CGIAR centers, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and numerous national, regional and international partners to provide an integrated approach to natural resource management research. WLE promotes a new approach to sustainable intensification in which a healthy functioning ecosystem is seen as a prerequisite to agricultural development, resilience of food systems and human well-being.