



FACT SHEET

Access, efficiency and transformation as a progressive and pragmatic approach to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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A. The need for clarity on links and trade-offs

The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies advocates that achievement of the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on water and sanitation hinges on three issues. First, it is imperative to determine the interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs among the many targets within SDG 6 as well as within the other 17 SDGs. The interlinkages then need to be compared with the institutional and budgetary structures within a national government to devise reforms that will strengthen the efficiency of the institutional architecture of all 17 SDGs.

Second, it is better to break down the absolute targets into gradual goal posts so that countries can more easily check their progress over time. Because national targets and SDG road maps must gather resources in line with national circumstances, there should be immediate, medium-term and long-term priorities for the progressive achievement of the goals.

Third, access, efficiency and knowledge transformation should be prioritized to guide policy decisions.

B. The way to transformation

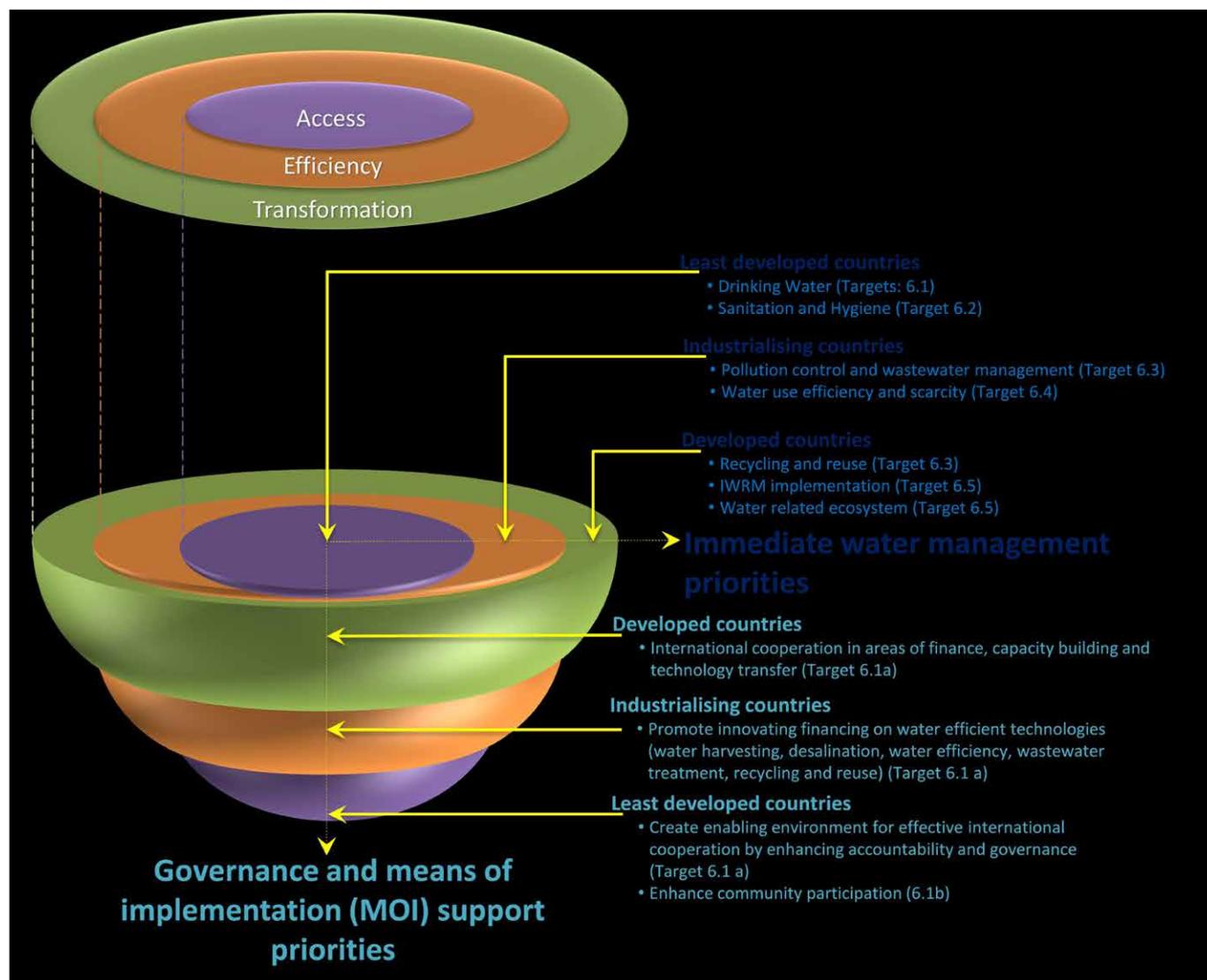
There are two dimensions to SDG 6 that should be prioritized for immediate water management: (i) For least developed countries, it is prudent to channel resources towards overcoming the challenges of access to clean water and services for sanitation and hygiene (targets 6.1 and 6.2), which closely relate to efficiency improvements and wastewater management to reduce water scarcity and pollution (targets 6.3 and 6.4).

Delivering safe water and sanitation carries the potential risk to local water resources such as groundwater, which in many countries is the only source of water supply. While industrialized countries, such as China, India and Viet Nam face water and sanitation challenges, it is important for them to concentrate on efficiency improvements and wastewater management to address water scarcity and pollution (targets 6.3 and 6.4).



Early achievement of both water access and efficiency are stepping stones to system transformation. For industrialized countries, where access and efficiency may already have been addressed, achieving SDG 6 should concentrate on systemic transformation to reduce per capita water use and increase the proportion of environmental flows (target 6.6). Using the benefit of relatively advanced governance, developed countries can set an example of integrated water resources management or transboundary water management, such as the Basic Law on the Water Cycle in Japan or the European Union's Water Framework Directive.

The three priorities behind achieving SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation)



Source: Authors' modification, based on Shivakoti and others: Placing Water at the Core of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Why an Integrated Perspective is Needed? IGES Policy Brief No. 31 (Hayama, Japan, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, 2015).

The second dimension relates to governance and means of implementation. Industrialized countries should provide increased international support on finance, capacity building and technology transfer to developing countries and countries with special needs (target 6.a). Industrialized and developing countries need to create an enabling environment through good governance, institutional reform, transparency of financial flows and community participation to ensure that results align with the needs of the general population (target 6.b). Support must address the water management challenges by promoting innovative approaches, such as water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling, reuse and exchange programmes for sharing experiences of local invention. Sharing these experiences as well as allowing space for local innovation will be important, in addition to the financial support for the least developing countries.



C. Recommendations

The proposed differentiation between countries is a simplified concept for integration. Integration requires a system thinking approach that is reflected in governance structures as well as recognizing the political economy dimension that can hinder success. Most likely, all three priorities—access, efficiency and transformation—are relevant for any country at any stage. Efficiency improvements should be thought of concurrently with access issues. The transfer of the right technology could allow for early leap-frogging towards the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Regional partners, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, can help governments plot their national development plans which may comprise SDG road maps and accelerate transformative changes while achieving short-term priorities.

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