

Using SDG data to support science, technology and innovation: The SDG 6 on water and sanitation example

Event summary by Christopher DuMont

On 14 May 2019, UN-Water held an interactive demonstration of the nearly complete Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) Data Portal during the Fourth Multi-Stakeholder Forum of Science, Technology and Innovation (S.T.I.) at the U.N. Secretariat in New York. Over the course of three days, the S.T.I. Forum convened a multitude of stakeholders to share new science, technologies and innovative measures aimed at achieving SDG 6.

The SDG 6 Data Portal demonstration offered experts, stakeholders and interested participants the opportunity to learn about the upcoming SDG 6 Data Portal and to provide feedback prior to the Portal's launch in August 2019. Participants emphasized that accurate and accessible information empowers stakeholders to make more data-driven decisions and that data forges the path to explore new opportunities to address current and future challenges. It was noted that the lack of quality data posed a significant obstacle to making water management decisions.

The world is not on track to achieving SDG 6 – for example, water pollution continues to worsen and water governance structures remain fragmented. These are just a few of the challenges participants emphasized that a greater compilation of accurate data could help mitigate. Integrated water management practices are essential to address the economic, social and environment dimensions and would benefit significantly from a comprehensive, free and user-friendly platform that compiles relevant data. Guests shared that the proposed Data Portal offered the innovative and holistic approach needed for data sharing and that it should be extended to other sectors of international development.

UN-Water Secretary Madhushree Chatterjee of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs made opening remarks at the event, noting the global challenges in water and sanitation while discussing how standardized data can aid decision makers. Joost Kooijmans of Sanitation and Water for All was the event's moderator and seconded many of the challenges and opportunities in data collection for SDG 6. Maria Schade, a global monitoring specialist for UN-Water who played a crucial role in developing the SDG 6 Data Portal presented how the Data Portal information was compiled, how to navigate the Portal's functions effectively and also how it can provide an efficient and transparent tool to present critical information on SDG 6 and related matters. As participants asked questions and Maria demonstrated how to display the data, it became evident that gaps existed for certain indicators within countries and regions. Attendees hope these gaps will induce countries to enhance their data collection efforts.

Robert Bain of the United Nations Children's Fund presented interlinkages between SDG 6 and the SDGs on health, education and inequalities. Robert mentioned that as data becomes increasingly precise in part by refining household surveys and introducing administrative zones, decision makers can begin to target more vulnerable communities with assistance. More data will improve the process of finding interlinkages among various challenges and resolving them accordingly which will help the world achieve not only SDG 6 but also the other 16 SDGs. The

Data Portal offers visual graphics and interactive data mechanisms to display how water and sanitation can be linked to other SDGs in a bivariate or even multivariate way. This aspect of the Data Portal proved particularly interesting to attendees. Laura Paterson of the World Meteorological Organization expressed that this promising mechanism should serve as a model for other SDG data platforms to follow, and emphasized the links between water and climate data.

Attendees concluded the event by discussing steps that they themselves were taking to achieve the SDG 6 targets. Sibella Stern of the Australian Mission asserted the importance for both her country and the rest of the world to act in addressing water crises, but also agreed that this could only be achieved with the help of accurate and comprehensive data gathered through proper monitoring.

The discussions and feedback from the event will support the UN Water team's efforts in improving the Portal further.