

KEY MESSAGES ON THE VALUE OF SDG 6 DATA

Data and information are crucial to the achievement of all eight SDG 6 targets.

Clear and compelling messages about the importance of SDG 6 monitoring and reporting will help generate support and investment in this critical area.

This document provides both general and indicator-specific key messages on the value of SDG 6 data, IMI-SDG6's activities and some country examples.

For more information, please refer to our [website](#) and the [SDG 6 Data Portal](#).

GENERAL

- We can only manage what we measure. Data quantity and quality is an issue across many SDG 6 indicators, holding back progress.
- Credible and timely water and sanitation data create social, economic, and environmental benefits in both public and private sectors, such as stronger accountability, political commitment and evidence-based decision-making.
- Data drives accountability, political commitment and evidence-based decision-making.
- By reporting on the SDG 6 global indicators, national governments can show their citizens that the country is progressing towards SDG 6 and national commitments on water and sanitation.
- By reporting on the SDG 6 global indicators, national governments can make a case to fill funding gaps in water and sanitation, both from national budgets and international donors.
- Effective monitoring of SDG 6 requires increased investment in national monitoring systems, including related capacity development to address critical data gaps.
- For every dollar invested in data and data systems, on average 32 dollars is returned in efficiency gains and cost savings, according to a recent international study. For example, during the record-breaking floods in Bangladesh in 2020, an

early warning weather system enabled a faster emergency response that cost half the amount of previous responses.¹

- Bringing together all stakeholders involved in water and sanitation monitoring and combining their datasets will lead to more efficient use of monitoring resources, more holistic policies and integrated resources management.
- Effective monitoring of SDG 6 requires increased investment in national monitoring systems, including developing and strengthening capacity to address critical data gaps.
- IMI-SDG6 supports countries to identify data gaps and share lessons on how to address them, including on good practices for intersectoral collaboration and consolidation of existing capacities and data across agencies.
- IMI-SDG6 collaborates with international organizations involved in strengthening national data systems for monitoring SDG 6. IMI-SDG6 calls on these organizations to support countries to report on SDG 6 in the 2023 Data Drive.
- IMI-SDG6 is working together with regional organizations to harmonize focal points, methodologies and data requests, and to jointly provide capacity development support. IMI-SDG6 calls on these organizations to support countries to report on SDG 6 in the 2023 Data Drive.
- ‘Improved data and information’ is one of the five accelerators in the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. High-quality information on all SDG 6 indicators must be freely accessible to any decision maker.

6.1 DRINKING WATER

- Access to safe drinking water is a human right. Collecting information on the accessibility, availability and quality of drinking water enables governments to identify risks to public health and to address inequalities in service levels between different population groups.
- While most countries already monitor whether drinking water is accessible on premises and available when needed, many countries still lack data on whether supplies are free from faecal and chemical contamination.
- Since 2015, more than 50 countries have integrated water quality testing into national household surveys enabling them to generate representative data for all

¹ [Investment Case: Multiplying Progress Through Data Ecosystem](#). Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, 2022.

population groups, including those living in rural areas and those who are not connected to piped networks.

6.2 SANITATION AND HYGIENE

- Access to safe sanitation is a human right. Collecting information on access to sanitation facilities and safe treatment and disposal of human waste enables governments to identify risks to public health and to address inequalities in service levels between different population groups.
- While many countries have information on treatment of wastewater from households with sewer connections, very few have data on treatment of waste from on-site sanitation systems such as septic tanks and pit latrines, which are used by more than half the world's population.
- Handwashing with soap and water is one the most cost-effective ways to prevent disease outbreaks and to improve public health. Collecting information on the availability of handwashing facilities with soap and water at home enables governments to identify populations at risk and to better target communications and behaviour change campaigns.

6.3 WATER QUALITY AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT

- By collecting data on wastewater generation and treatment from utilities and industries, it is possible for local and national governments to enforce compliance with environmental laws.
- Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency has recently started collecting and reporting quantitative data on wastewater treatment. This experience could help other countries in similar situations.²
- By regularly monitoring and assessing the water quality in rivers, lakes and groundwater, public authorities can get an early warning of polluting activities in the area and learn if the waters and its fish are safe for human consumption.
- Analysing long-term water quality data can provide vital information on whether a water body is being impacted by climate change and if the services it provides, such as water for drinking or irrigation, will be sustained into the future.

² SDG 6 Acceleration snapshot: What monitoring progress looks like – Ghana – Wastewater treatment. UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, 2023.

- In Sierra Leone, the National Water Resources Management Agency is engaging with citizen scientists and local communities to complement their national water quality database and to protect and restore the country's freshwater bodies. This experience could help other countries in similar situations.³

6.4 WATER USE AND SCARCITY

- Information about water withdrawals by different economic sectors helps decision makers target interventions to achieve improvements in water-use efficiency across the economy. For example, if agriculture is the major water user, dedicated policy, financing and investments may be needed.
- As the water situation can vary significantly within a single country, water basin data on water availability and use can help mitigate water scarcity through informed decisions on land use, investments and economic activities, particularly in more water-stressed areas.

6.5 INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

- The reporting on integrated water resources management is a diagnostic tool, which helps identify gaps and challenges across different levels of government and sectors within a country. The reporting requires a multi-stakeholder dialogue, which can provide a platform for further coordination and collaboration.
- In Kenya, stakeholder consultations as part of the SDG 6.5.1 reporting led to a common understanding of the priorities for achieving more sustainable water management, and this was the basis for developing a National Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) Action Plan. This experience could help other countries in similar situations.⁴
- Assessing the current transboundary cooperation with neighbours on shared rivers, lakes and aquifers can help improve future cooperation.
- Coordinating the SDG 6.5.2 reporting on a transboundary basin with all neighbours sharing the basin can help improve cooperation.

³ Pilot project for citizen science-based water quality monitoring in Sierra Leone. GEMS/Water, 2023.

⁴ SDG 6 Acceleration snapshot: What progress looks like – Kenya – Integrated Water Resources Management. UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, 2023.

- Improving data availability and data-sharing on transboundary aquifers can help improve cooperation, for example by enabling the integration of shared aquifers into existing river basin arrangements. Experience gained from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on this could help other countries in similar situations.⁵

6.6 ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

- Environmental data help public authorities to manage and protect ecosystems more effectively, as it allows for target-setting, detailed planning and law enforcement.
- High-resolution data on changes in surface water identifies areas that are prone to floods and droughts. This information is useful for local and national governments to plan for climate adaption and disaster risk reduction.
- In Argentina, data on ecosystem extent are used to identify and prioritize ecosystems that require urgent interventions. This experience could help other countries in similar situations.⁶

6.a INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FINANCE

- Financial monitoring results in transparency and a better understanding of the financial flows in the sector, which in turn can increase efficiency and stimulate further internal and external funding.

6.b LOCAL PARTICIPATION

- Reporting on local participation helps stimulate actual local participation in water and sanitation decision-making, which is essential to ensure accountability and long-term sustainability of water and sanitation solutions.

⁵ SDG 6 Acceleration snapshot: What progress looks like – Botswana, Namibia and South Africa (Stampriet) – Transboundary Cooperation. UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, 2023.

⁶ SDG 6 Acceleration snapshot: What data use progress looks like – Argentina – Ecosystem protection and restoration. UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, 2023.