



## 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



# CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION: WHY IT MATTERS

### What's the goal here?

To ensure access to safe water sources and sanitation for all.

### Why?

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a human right.

The demand for water has outpaced population growth, and half the world's population is already experiencing

severe water scarcity at least one month a year.

Water is essential not only to health, but also to poverty reduction, food security, peace and human rights, ecosystems and education. Nevertheless, countries face growing challenges linked to water scarcity, water pollution, degraded water-related ecosystems and cooperation over trans-boundary water basins.

**2.2 billion**  
people around  
the world still  
lack safely  
managed  
drinking  
water,  
including  
**785 million**  
without basic  
drinking  
water.

## What are the challenges to lack of access to safe water and sanitation?

In 2017, an estimated 3 billion people worldwide lacked the ability to safely wash their hands at home – one of the cheapest, easiest and most effective ways to prevent the spread of diseases like the coronavirus.

Water, sanitation and hygiene services are also not always available at medical care facilities: in 2016, one in four facilities around the world lacked basic water supplies, one in five had no sanitation services, and two in five had no soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub, at points of care.

And today, 4.2 billion people are still faced with daily challenges accessing even the most basic of services. Of these, 673 million people practised open defecation.

By managing our water sustainably, we are also able to better manage our production of food and energy and contribute to decent work and economic growth. Moreover, we can preserve our

water ecosystems, their biodiversity, and take action on climate change.

## Are water and climate changed linked?

Water availability is becoming less predictable in many places. In some regions, droughts are exacerbating water scarcity and thereby negatively impacting people's health and productivity and threatening sustainable development and biodiversity worldwide.

Ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable water and sanitation services is a critical climate change mitigation strategy for the years ahead.

Without better infrastructure and management, millions of people will continue to die every year from water-related diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea, and there will be further losses in biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, undermining prosperity and efforts towards a more sustainable future.

## What can we do?

Civil society organizations should work to keep governments accountable, invest in water research and development, and promote the inclusion of women, youth and indigenous communities in water resources governance.

Generating awareness of these roles and turning them into action will lead to win-win results and increased sustainability and integrity for both human and ecological systems.

You can also get involved in the World Water Day and World Toilet Day campaigns that aim to provide information and inspiration to take action on hygiene issues.

To find out more about Goal #6 and the other Sustainable Development Goals, visit:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>

[wateractiondecade.org](http://wateractiondecade.org)



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**