



General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 July 2016

Original: English

Seventy-first session

Item 19 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Sustainable development: implementation of Agenda 21, the
Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21
and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable
Development and the United Nations Conference on
Sustainable Development**

International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015, and further efforts to achieve the sustainable development of water resources

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 58/217 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly decided that, in order to meet the commitments on water-related goals and targets, as formulated and agreed in international forums, as well as under the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation), and raise the profile of water for both Member States and stakeholders, it was necessary to declare an International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015. The Decade commenced on 22 March 2005 in conjunction with World Water Day, its aim being to promote a larger focus on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programmes and projects, while striving to ensure the participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts, and the furtherance of cooperation at all levels. In the same resolution, the Assembly called upon the United Nations system and its partners to coordinate activities and actions to achieve the Decade’s goals.

* A/71/150.



Pursuant to a series of activities and achievements noteworthy for their richness and diversity and with the Decade drawing to a close, the General Assembly, in its resolution 69/215 of 19 December 2014, requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its seventy-first session on the evaluation of the Decade, highlighting its successes, lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

The present report outlines the activities that have been carried out through the Decade, the elements and organizations that were key to its success and the key findings, to be taken into consideration within the context of future United Nations-related activities directed towards the promotion and implementation of internationally agreed goals and targets associated with water.

I. Introduction

1. The phrase “Water is life” is commonly used in speeches on water. It is the foundation of the response to the question why water is important to humans and the society and the environment in which they reside. Focus on water as a political issue can be traced back to the Mar de la Plata Action Plan, adopted in 1977,¹ followed by the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, covering the period from 1981 to 1990. In 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, world leaders dedicated an entire chapter to water in Agenda 21,² the main outcome document of the Conference, including identification of freshwater resources as an essential component of the Earth’s hydrosphere and as an indispensable part of all terrestrial ecosystems. Increasingly, the role of water including its cross-cutting nature garnered support in both the advocacy and policymaking spheres, while important decisions in follow-up to chapter 18 of Agenda 21 were also made within the context of the Commission on Sustainable Development

2. With the growth of populations, the increasing movement of people to cities, the taking hold of climate change and the occurrence of land-use changes due to changes in economic development, the need to sustainably manage water resources became critical. Public and political awareness of the importance of water for so many of life’s needs (related, e.g., to food, energy, health, habitat, transportation, ecosystems and recreation) gained traction and generated a sense of urgency which led to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and new commitments associated with the adoption of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation)³ in 2002. In 2003, taking the impetus gained from the successful International Year of Freshwater, Member States agreed to launch an entire decade dedicated to raising the awareness of water and improved implementation of water projects and programmes. Efforts were to be made to focus attention on water and to fill gaps so that the subject of water would be addressed in ways that supported sustainable development. Hence the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015, was born, recognizing that water not only is life, but is also required for support of the many pillars that uphold life.

3. At the end of 2015, the “Water for Life” Decade came to a close after its active promotion by a broad range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and organizations, including the United Nations system, through which the place of water in the political agenda was successfully raised. What follows is a review of the initiatives that contributed to the efforts responsible for the success of the Decade.

¹ *Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12 and corrigendum), chap. I. Available at http://www.internationalwaterlaw.org/bibliography/UN/Mar_del_Plata_Report.pdf.

² *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution I, annex II, chap. 18.

³ *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

II. Background

4. While water has always been a crucial resource, its importance for society and the planet has been undervalued. Acknowledgement of this fact can be traced back to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. As noted, an entire chapter of actions was dedicated to water in Agenda 21, which launched water on its long path towards gaining the attention of decision makers worldwide.

5. In 2000, furthering decisions related to freshwater which were taken during the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (see [E/1998/29](#)) and eight years after the holding of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the United Nations Millennium Declaration⁴ set out the development agenda for the United Nations system, in which a target was formulated among the Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing by half the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015. Two years later, in 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the target to reduce by half the number of people without sustainable access to sanitation was added to the Goals in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (para. 8). At the same time, it was also agreed — although this goal did not become part of the Millennium Development Goals — that countries should develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005. Generally speaking, these were the most well-established internationally agreed goals specific to water at that time.

6. It was clear that the turn of the millennium was a turning point for water. Within the context of the increased attention centred on water, as garnered through the adoption of those instruments, and the awareness of the work needed to make their goals a reality, the General Assembly, in its resolution 55/196 of 20 December 2000, proclaimed 2003 the International Year of Freshwater, with the aim of increasing awareness of the importance of freshwater and promoting action at the local, national, regional and international levels.

7. As the International Year of Freshwater ended, the General Assembly, in resolution 58/217 of 23 December 2003, decided that in order to build on the momentum created during the Year, a Decade would be initiated whose goal would be to achieve a greater focus on the implementation of water-related programmes and projects, while striving to ensure the participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts, and the furtherance of cooperation at all levels, in order to help to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals. The International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015, commenced on World Water Day, 22 March 2005, and was coordinated by UN-Water.

8. After 10 full years of activities and actions promoting water, the Decade (as already indicated) came to a close at the end of 2015. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67 of 25 July 1980, and pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 69/215, the Secretary-General was requested to report to the Assembly at its seventy-first session, in 2016, on the evaluation of the Decade. The evaluation that follows, which was conducted based on reporting arrangements designed especially for application to the subject of the Decade, aims at

⁴ General Assembly resolution 55/2.

informing and facilitating the follow-up process to the Decade and providing guidance with respect to consideration of the proclamation of a possible future decade.

III. Brief overview of the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015

9. In its resolution 64/198 of 21 December 2009 on a midterm comprehensive review of the Decade, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its sixty-fifth session on the implementation of that resolution. In the same resolution, the Assembly invited the President of the General Assembly to host a high-level interactive dialogue of the sixty-fourth session of the Assembly, on 22 March 2010, on the implementation of the Decade and welcomed the offer of the Government of Tajikistan to host a high-level international conference, in June 2010, with both events focusing on the implementation of the Decade.

10. The present report mirrors in many ways the structure of the report on the midterm review,⁵ which outlined activities and actions carried out by the United Nations system, including those at the regional level within its economic and social commissions. A short section focused on United Nations assistance to country programmes (sect. VI) and the communication strategies adopted to support awareness about the Decade (sect. VII). The report noted succinctly that the United Nations had worked closely with many partners during the first five years of the Decade.

11. The main takeaways and recommendations derived from the midterm review guided the work of the Decade for the remaining five years, which has led to the present comprehensive review of the implementation over the period from 2005 to 2015. The outcomes of the midterm review encompassed three main issues:

(a) Resources mobilization: there was a need to mobilize more resources to carry out the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015. This was to be done with the active involvement of all stakeholders, including Governments, non-governmental organizations and private sources. The report suggested that interested stakeholder groups could support the Decade by providing voluntary contributions to UN-Water for the remaining five years;

(b) Stakeholder engagement: in the recommendations the need to increase engagement with all stakeholders in implementing the Decade was reiterated. This should include, but should not be limited to, supporting the development and implementation of national plans on sanitation and drinking water, as well as linking activities carried out by stakeholders in the course of the Decade;

(c) International-national linkages: while the Decade was well known in the international water community, such awareness had not extended as successfully to the national level; hence, more efforts needed to be focused on making this happen. As the findings of the midterm review suggested the need for greater commitment

⁵ See the report of the Secretary-General on the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015 (A/65/297).

and political push with regard to sanitation- and drinking water-related goals, the creation of national focal points and mechanisms designed to facilitate and achieve results related to the Decade was proposed.

IV. Intergovernmental processes evolving during the International Decade, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015

A. Friends of Water

12. The Friends of Water is a voluntary association of like-minded countries which came together as a platform in support of the implementation of the Decade’s midterm comprehensive review in 2010. Initiated by the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan to the United Nations, the Friends of Water, which currently comprises over 40 Member States whose common goal is to promote the United Nations water agenda, is coordinated by a Steering Committee, including Finland, Hungary, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Thailand. The group played a key role in facilitating the preparation of the High-level Interactive Dialogue of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly and the High-level International Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Decade. Both processes focused on taking stock of the first five years of the Decade.

B. High-level Interactive Dialogue

13. As was the case at the midpoint of the Decade, the President of the General Assembly, as invited by the Assembly in its resolution 69/215, convened, during its sixth-ninth session, on 30 March 2015, a High-level Interactive Dialogue of the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly on a Comprehensive Review of the Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015. The Interactive Dialogue highlighted best practices and lessons learned as a means of facilitating achievement of sustainable development. During the Dialogue, it was emphasized that major progress had been made during the second half of the Decade and that water is now recognized as not only one of the highest priorities for sustainable development, but also as an important contributor to achievement of the other Sustainable Development Goals (i.e., Goals besides Goal 6, which is to “(e)nsure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”). Enhanced cooperation, capacity-building and adequate technology were required. The cross-cutting nature of water in the context of sustainable development was stressed and, in this regard, the need for inclusion of more sophisticated, quantifiable and clearer indicators in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, more investment was needed as well as a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation requiring participatory governance, and the addressing of financing, pollution and improved monitoring and data.

C. High-level Conference

14. As already noted, in its resolution 69/215, the General Assembly welcomed the offer of the Government of Tajikistan to host a High-level International Conference on the Implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water

for Life”, 2005-2015, as it had at the midpoint of the Decade, as a contribution to a comprehensive review of the Decade. The International Conference was held from 9 to 11 June 2015 in Dushanbe and consisted of two high-level implementation panels and six high-level round tables, in addition to pre-conference and side events, which included a Women Water Forum. The Conference highlighted the importance of the Decade in promoting the efforts to achieve international water-related goals and called for improved coordination between stakeholders at all levels in achieving those goals in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁶ The main outcomes of the Conference encompassed the suggestion that the global community work towards a greener economy, resilience in the face of global changes, increased funding for water projects and programmes, improved water governance, strengthened cooperation, especially in a transboundary context, and the taking of steps to address emerging water problems.

V. Programmes and activities conducted by the United Nations system including through country programmes

A. UN-Water (coordinator)

15. UN-Water was the overall coordinator of activities related to the Decade over nearly the entirety of its 10-year duration, utilizing its programmes, projects, members and partners to implement the Decade. UN-Water is a coordinating mechanism for United Nations system bodies and external stakeholder partners. Created by the Secretary-General in 2003, UN-Water was originally composed of senior programme managers in United Nations organizations who then elected one of their peers to serve as Chair. With the General Assembly relying increasingly on UN-Water for coordination and technical advice centred around water issues, the role of UN-Water became increasingly relevant. In 2011, the position of Chair was elevated to that of chief executive of a United Nations entity, which in turn enabled improved support of Member States during the latter part of the Decade. UN-Water facilitated a series of activities and actions aimed at implementing the Decade which helped foster achievement of the goals of the Decade and further progress on achieving sustainable water management worldwide. A more in-depth perspective on these activities can be found in section VII below.

B. UN-Water Decade Programmes on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) and Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC)

16. Two UN-Water Decade Programmes were created shortly after the launch of the Decade in order to support the activities related to it. UNW-DPC was established to strengthen coherence and effectiveness of the capacity-building elements related to the Decade and support the members and partners of UN-Water in assisting national Governments in their efforts to achieve the internationally agreed goals and targets related to water. The role of UNW-DPAC was to maintain and even increase attention focused on the themes of water and sanitation at all levels, ranging from the local to the global, over the duration of the Decade. More

⁶ Resolution 70/1.

information on the UN-Water Decade Programmes and their activities on behalf of the Decade can be found in section VII.C below.

C. World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP)

17. The World Water Assessment Programme, which was created shortly before the start of the Decade, in 2003, and is hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is charged with monitoring the world's water resources. Bringing together members and partners of UN-Water as well as experts hailing from around the world, the Assessment Programme regularly contributes recommendations, develops case studies, enhances assessment capacity at the national level and informs the decision-making process. WWAP regularly disseminates a variety of publications. Each issue of the World Water Development Report, a UN-Water flagship publication which, since 2014, has been produced yearly, provides an in-depth examination of a specific water-related subject to help inform decision makers on key issues of sustainable water management.

D. World Health Organization (WHO)/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP)

18. Given the Decade's focus on helping to implement international water-related goals, the Joint Monitoring Programme has, over the course of the Decade, been the primary mechanism for monitoring the targets related to drinking water and sanitation under the Millennium Development Goals; and the Programme will continue to exercise the same function with respect to water and sanitation access, under Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.1 and 6.2.

E. Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

19. The Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation was created in 2004 by the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to provide advice on water- and sanitation-related issues, spur action both within and outside the water community and mobilize funds for water and sanitation. The Board was composed of eminent persons and experts representing national Governments, civil society and the private sector, who were engaged in dealing with water issues. The work of the Advisory Board on water and sanitation issues helped underpin the efforts made during the Decade to achieve agreed water-related targets. Most notably, the Advisory Board facilitated and supported the initiative "Sustainable sanitation: the five-year drive to 2015", presented in General Assembly resolution 65/153 of 20 December 2010 as a platform for action, which focused efforts to close the gap in order to meet the Millennium Development Goal target on sanitation. The Advisory Board terminated its activities with the handover of a final report⁷ to the Secretary-General during its final meeting on 20 November 2015.

⁷ Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/water/unsgab/finalreport>.

VI. Regional initiatives

A. Economic Commission for Africa

20. During the Decade, Africa made significant progress towards achieving the objectives that had been laid out for the period of 2005-2015. Water rose higher than it ever had in the political agenda of the continent, becoming a key issue even at the level of Heads of State. The African Ministers' Council on Water was founded in 2002, with the African Water Vision for 2025 (2000) as its foundation, to promote cooperation, security, social and economic development, and poverty eradication as well as help drive political will towards the meeting of the targets under the water-related Millennium Development Goals. In 2008, national Governments adopted the eThekweni Declaration, which focused on sanitation and hygiene. This was followed in the same year by the adoption of the Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration, an agreement of the Heads of State of Africa, in which they committed to the Millennium Development Goals and water security. Further action and implementation of Decade-related goals were galvanized by the African Ministers' Council through such initiatives as AfricaSan, Africa Water Week and the African Water Facility (in collaboration with the African Development Bank).

B. Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

21. The ECE region focuses on implementation of the Decade primarily through the lens of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which has been both an official mechanism through which policies are established at the regional level and an instrument critical to the implementation, of those policies on the ground by the parties to the Convention. Application of the Convention has been successful in promoting more than just transboundary river basin cooperation. It has been effective in furthering cooperation among countries through project implementation and exchange of knowledge and experiences. It has also fostered national-level policy development through national policy dialogues, which has improved water resources management in the region, and enabled the goals of the Decade to be met. By making climate change adaptation activities and work related to the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus a key focus, the Convention has promoted the goals and principles of the Decade.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

22. Since the inauguration of the Decade, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has made substantial progress towards the achievement of internationally agreed water- and sanitation-related goals and targets. While headway has been made more significantly with regard to drinking-water supplies compared with sanitation, ECLAC has directed efforts towards addressing the gaps, specifically within institutional frameworks, to ensure economic efficiency, social equality and environment sustainability, the pillars of sustainable development, as a basis for promoting water security, cooperation and integrated water resources management. Propelled by the World Water Forums held during the second half of the Decade, the

Water Forum of the Americas has set forth on a path towards bringing together diverse stakeholders and actors from the different subregions of the continent to work towards forging a common vision for sustainable water resources management.⁸

D. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

23. Asia is one of most diverse regions of the world, in terms of both demographics and geography. Today's most critical water-related challenges and opportunities are being faced on that continent. Some of the largest gains in terms of achieving the water-related Millennium Development Goals were made because of progress on the continent, with China and India making significant progress towards meeting the water and sanitation targets. While much work remains to be done, Asia has made substantial strides in improving water security, increasing the implementation of integrated water resources management and promoting cooperation at the national and regional levels through mechanisms such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Asia-Pacific Water Forum. The Decade has focused broadly on water-related disasters, as Asia experienced unprecedented levels of damage inflicted by such disasters during the span of the Decade. This has invigorated work in the region on implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters⁹ as well as the activities of the High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

24. Western Asia is the most water-stressed region on the planet, with 18 of its 22 countries below the "water poverty line" of 1,000 cubic metres/person/year. The region has been adversely affected, over the course of the Decade, by population growth, urbanization and climate change, as well as conflict, which has had a negative impact on water resources in many areas of the region. Only a small degree of progress has been made with regard to achieving the Millennium Development Goal targets of access to water and sanitation; and the region has remained under the global average since the commencement of the Decade. Effort has not been lacking, however, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) works hand in hand with the Arab Water Council to achieve the goals of the Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region to Meet the Challenges and Future Needs for Sustainable Development (2010-2030).

VII. Achieving the Decade's goals

A. Overall objective: achieving water-related goals

25. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/217, by which the Assembly launched the Decade, all of the primary objectives of the Decade were focused on

⁸ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1936, No. 33207.

⁹ [A/CONF.206/6](#) and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2.

facilitating the achievement of internationally agreed water-related goals that had been set out in Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and, as appropriate, those identified during the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

26. The most visible of these goals were the targets included in the Millennium Development Goals concerning drinking water and sanitation. Millennium Development Goal target 7.C was to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation”. For the target on drinking water, the effort was a success. The target was achieved five years ahead of schedule, in 2010, with 2.6 billion people having gained access since 1990 and 91 per cent of the world’s population currently using an improved drinking-water source.¹⁰ While this has been a significant achievement, 663 million people were still living without an improved drinking-water source by the end of the Millennium Development Goals period in 2015.¹¹

27. Efforts in the area of sanitation were not as successful, inasmuch as Member States were not able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the population without sustainable access to basic sanitation. While access was extended from 54 to 77 per cent between 1990 and 2015, with 2.1 billion gaining access, by the end of the Millennium Development Goals period in 2015, 2.4 billion people still lacked access to improved sanitation facilities and nearly 1 billion still practised open defecation.¹² A significant gap remains in terms of sustainable access to both safe drinking water and sanitation, which is why Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.1 and 6.2 focus on universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

28. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation committed to “develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005, with support to developing countries, through actions at all levels”. The goal of developing such plans within three years of the holding of the World Summit in Johannesburg had been overly ambitious; nonetheless, through concerted efforts, especially by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN-Water Global Water Partnership (GWP), substantial progress was made during the Decade towards achieving this target. According to the 2012 status report on the application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources, “80 per cent of countries have embarked on reforms to improve the enabling environment for water resources management based on the application of integrated approaches as stated in Agenda 21 and affirmed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation”.¹³

29. One of the other goals formulated at the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development was set forth in the call to “shift emphasis from a needs-based to a rights-based approach” when it comes to improving access to safe drinking water in urban and rural areas. While a framework has not been

¹⁰ WHO/UNICEF, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water: 2015 Update and MDG Assessment* (Geneva, 2015).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme, *Status Report on the Application of Integrated Approaches to Water Resources Management* (Nairobi, 2012).

established to monitor and evaluate progress on this movement towards a rights-based approach to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, significant progress was made when, in 2010, the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010, recognized the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation.

B. Greater focus on water-related issues

30. In the second half of the Decade, campaigns became one of the major success stories of UN-Water, having raised water awareness among members of the public — a public wider than any reached before by the United Nations system. These included (a) the Decade itself, (b) World Water Day,¹⁴ an event held yearly on 22 March which generates excitement within the water community and beyond through presentation of a specific water-related topic, (c) the “Drive to 2015: sanitation for all” campaign, which aimed at making sanitation a global development priority and (d) World Toilet Day,¹⁵ celebrated every 19 November since 2013, which is intended to raise awareness on sanitation issues worldwide.

31. The informational materials of UN-Water have been disseminated everywhere throughout the Decade, providing knowledge on a multitude of water-related subjects in support of the Decade. These materials range from the UN-Water Technical Advice on a Dedicated Water Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which proved critical in making the case for inclusion of a dedicated goal on water in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 6), to the annual World Water Development Report, which is aimed at providing decision makers with evidence-based information designed to assist in the implementation of the sustainable management of water resources across different thematic areas. These are backstopped by UN-Water analytical and policy briefs. With respect to drinking water and sanitation, both the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme annual progress reports and the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water provide the data and analysis needed to monitor the international targets associated with these areas.

C. Implementation of programmes/projects¹⁶

1. UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development

32. Hosted by the United Nations University in Bonn, the Programme on Capacity Development facilitated the capacity-building dimension of the Decade. Capitalizing on the efforts of over 30 UN-Water members and partners, the Programme carried out more than 100 capacity development activities dating back to 2007. In addition to undertaking capacity-building projects, UNW-DPC managed the UN-Water Activity Information System (UNW-AIS) as a platform for sharing information on water-related projects and learning activities among UN-Water members and partners.

¹⁴ See resolution 47/193 of 22 December 1992, entitled “Observance of World Day for Water”.

¹⁵ See resolution 67/291 of 14 July 2013, entitled “Sanitation for all”.

¹⁶ See the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 2005-2015, website for further information derived from the reports and documents of the Programmes (<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/>).

2. UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC)

33. Mandated to support the implementation of the Decade through advocacy and communications, the Programme on Advocacy and Communication, managed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and based in Zaragoza, Spain, carried out a series of activities focused on raising awareness on the Decade and water in general. The Programme achieved this through a variety of means, most notably through its annual International Zaragoza Conference, which helped UN-Water and its members and partners prepare for the World Water Day of the upcoming year. The Programme also coordinated the “Water for Life” UN-Water Best Practices Award process, directly linked to the Decade, through which best practices helping to fulfil international commitments made on water and water-related issues are highlighted. The Programme led two other important activities: management of the Decade website,¹⁷ through which progress on the Decade could be tracked, and management of the United Nations Documentation Centre on Water and Sanitation,¹⁸ which is the source of a compilation of materials related to water derived from the United Nations system.

3. Other UN-Water featured projects

34. Other UN-Water projects that supported the Decade included the (a) UN-Water Federated Water Monitoring System and Key Water Indicator Portal initiative, (b) the UN-Water country briefs project, (c) the Safe Use of Wastewater in Agriculture project and (d) the Capacity Development to Support National Drought Management Policies project.

D. Participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts

35. In its resolution 58/217, which set forth the specific goals of the Decade, the General Assembly clearly stated that those goals should be “a greater focus on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programmes and projects, while striving to ensure the participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts”. Historically, the inclusion of women in these types of actions within the water community has been a challenge, despite the benefits that accrue to society, livelihoods and water itself. One of the goals of the Decade was to bridge this gap by facilitating the inclusion of women in its activities.

36. The first half of the Decade witnessed an effort to include women in water-related development efforts through the creation by UN-Water of the Task Force on Water and Gender, which, until 2010, had promoted gender mainstreaming in the implementation of internationally agreed upon goals related to water and sanitation. The Task Force was highly active in terms of producing policy briefs and organizing workshops, side events, training sessions and panels on the subject. While the Task Force disbanded in 2010, many UN-Water members and partners continued the Task Force’s work by integrating that work in their own activities. For example, the World Bank Group, UNDP, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council,

¹⁷ See <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/>.

¹⁸ See http://www.zaragoza.es/ciudad/medioambiente/onu/en/ultimasPer_Onu.

UNICEF, the Gender and Water Alliance, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat and the Women for Water Partnership have all produced materials advocating for gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation activities.

E. Furthering water cooperation

37. In its resolution 65/154 of 20 December 2010, the General Assembly declared 2013 the International Year of Water Cooperation with a view to increasing and improving water cooperation globally in response to the growing pressure on water resources and on societies and nature. Given that one of the Decade's focus areas was furthering cooperation in the area of water resources, as called for in Assembly resolution 58/217, this particular international year generated a concentrated effort to increase water-related cooperation among Member States during the latter half of the Decade. As noted in the Secretary-General's report on the Year ([A/69/326](#)), it was effective in enhancing knowledge on water cooperation and reinforcing the idea that "political will, legal frameworks, accountability and institutional structures can provide a solid foundation for cooperation over water". The International Year of Water Cooperation was a success, inasmuch as it created an impetus for collaborations worldwide and the strong engagement of youth.

38. Examples of such cooperation ranged from the signing of the Treaty on Cooperation on the Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Dniester River Basin in 2012 by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the engagement of over 500,000 people in activities related to the International Year of Water Cooperation to the collaboration of the various members and partners of UN-Water on a post-2015 global goal for water, which provided the rationale for inclusion of a stand-alone water goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

39. In its resolution 58/217, the General Assembly called for the "furtherance of cooperation at all levels" with regard to the implementation of the Decade. On the other hand, the way in which UN-Water has itself promoted cooperation, both externally and internally, since its creation, has often been neglected. The lifespan of UN-Water up to now is almost as long as that of the Decade; and the progress it has made as a coordination mechanism for United Nations entities and external stakeholder partners during this time, in fostering cooperation among those entities, albeit not without difficulty, so as to raise the profile of water in the political agenda, must not be minimized.

VIII. Lessons learned and the way forward

40. The Decade is responsible for many accomplishments. No other 10-year period in the history of the United Nations has witnessed as many water-related activities and achievements.

41. The successes of the Decade can be attributed in great measure to its ability to have consistently reached milestones over the course of those 10 years, ranging

from the establishment of two time-bound UN-Water programmes in support of the Decade in 2007 and the International Year of Sanitation (2008) to the recognition of the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation by the General Assembly in 2010: these accomplishments required only half the Decade to materialize. The second half began with the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on “Sustainable sanitation: the five-year drive to 2015” in 2011, followed by the highlighting of water in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”,¹⁹ the International Year of Water Cooperation (2013) and the inclusion of a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal on water just before the close of the Decade.

42. And these are just highlights! Through sustained campaigns centred around World Water Day, World Toilet Day and the sanitation drive, along with the dissemination of information materials and stakeholder engagement at events, training sessions and seminars, the Decade helped maintain momentum, provided the impetus for continued actions and activities and helped water become the focus of a level of attention greater than any witnessed previously.

43. Notwithstanding all the positive outcomes of the Decade, there is still much work to be done. In the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2016/75), it is stated that an estimated 663 million people in 2015 were still using unimproved sources or surface water and that in 2012 it was estimated that at least 1.8 billion people were exposed to contaminated drinking water. In 2015, about 2.4 billion people were still using an unimproved sanitation facility; among them were 946 million people without any facilities at all, who continued to practise open defecation. The unsafe management of faecal waste and wastewater continues to pose a major risk to public health and the environment. There is always room for improvement on cooperation. This is the case for cooperation not only of countries on the issue of transboundary waters, but also between ministries at the national level, as well as for cooperation on the implementation of integrated water resources management, which is in the process of development in most countries, but still calls for a high degree of progress. The level of participation of women and stakeholders is still far from what it should be with regard to the sustainable management of water resources; and the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is still far from realization in a majority of countries. The Decade has been a success, but it also offers a reminder of how much work there remains to be done.

44. The Decade has also shown where the shortfalls lie and what slows down progress on water-related goals and targets. There are still a myriad of constraints on human, institutional and financial resources. With respect to access to clean and safe drinking water and sanitation, discrimination and inequalities are still pervasive in many societies, with marginalized populations being denied the opportunity to share in the achievements of the Decade.

45. For the advancement of progress, there needs to be greater investment in the sustainable management of water resources, not only in the financial sphere, as was noted in the midterm review of the Decade, but also in terms of improving knowledge, research and innovation, all of which should be accompanied by sound policy and adequate means of implementation, with a focus on funding, capacity

¹⁹ Resolution 66/288, annex.

development, technology and good governance. Consistent and continuous monitoring, evaluation and reporting are required to maintain commitment and need, and should be extended to areas beyond drinking water and sanitation. Special attention still needs to be paid to stakeholder engagement and participatory approaches, especially in the case of women. While progress has been made during the Decade on women's engagement in projects and programmes related to water, one of the goals of the Decade, the gap in this area is still a large one.

46. The Decade demonstrated that leadership is needed at the highest levels. When this need is fulfilled, action occurs. With regard to future activities on water within the United Nations system, more leadership and action are needed on the part of Member States. Such leadership within the context of high-priority issues, as witnessed during the “drive to 2015”, in the area of sanitation and in the observance of World Toilet Day, does produce results.

47. As the Millennium Development Goals had been launched only a few years before the commencement of the Decade, it was impossible to predict at that point whether the United Nations system would agree upon a new set of water-related goals in 2015, which would extend beyond drinking water and sanitation. With the Sustainable Development Goals now in place, along with a much more comprehensive development agenda for water, the way forward is appropriately ambitious, as the Goals and the agenda take into consideration the many facets of water associated with livelihoods and ecosystems.

48. The International Decade for Action, “Water for Life” 2005-2015, proved that through milestones attained consistently over a given period, results, at many levels, can be achieved. After 10 years of concerted effort and in comparison with the situation in 2005, the global water community is now in a much different position and has acquired a more positive orientation. While a large amount of work remains to be done, it is clear that much can be accomplished by building on the steps taken during the Decade.
