

## Regional Seminar on Integrated Approaches for SDG Planning:

### The Case of SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation

28-29 November 2016, UNCC, Bangkok, Thailand

#### Summary and Recommendations

##### Background

Implementation of the holistic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require action that embraces interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral approaches to development, an integrated analysis and effective implementation strategies. All of the 17 SDGs are interconnected, and achieving many proposed targets will rely on access to water resources. To address this need, ESCAP developed a tool for analysis of the interdependencies and interlinkages between the 17 SDGs, which are viewed as one indivisible system.

Success in achieving targets under SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation will depend on the understanding of interdependencies of SDG 6 with the other SDGs. Understanding the complementary linkages between targets will assist countries to prioritize SDGs implementation, identify leverage points for high impact action, and attract investments and mobilize resources for implementation.

Water is an essential resource for human life and wellbeing, a key element of all economic activities, and a cornerstone for achieving sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the important role of water in sustainable development: Sustainable Development Goal 6 and its 8 targets focus on ensuring “availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”

The analytical framework developed by ESCAP with SDG6 as the core and applying systems thinking approach and framework, identified a proposed set of high impact leverage points for strategic action to support the water-related SDGs targets and to achieve integrated sustainable development.

Given the macro-level perspective of the assessment conducted, ESCAP also initiated implementation of pilot applications of the systems thinking framework for SDG 6 in selected Asia-Pacific countries, namely Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Fiji. These are currently in different stages of implementation.

The Regional Seminar on Integrated Approaches for SDG Planning: The Case of SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation in the framework of the ESCAP SDG Week was organized from 28 to 29 November 2016 with the objective to present several frameworks for integration of the SDG targets using systems thinking, various modelling frameworks focused on the global SDG indicators with other relevant indicators, as well as examples of national pilot applications. The seminar will provide a platform for discussion on the interrelated nature of the SDGs and for sharing approaches, experiences, and key lessons learned. The

approaches discussed will provide a basis for strengthening national institutional frameworks for SDG implementation.

### **Summary of Proceedings and Discussions**

Participants of the Regional Seminar of Integrated Approaches for SDG Planning: The Case of SDG6 at the UNCC, Bangkok, appreciated the opportunity that the meeting provided to understand better how integrated approaches can assist policy and decision makers with the planning and monitoring of SDG implementation, while engaging various stakeholders at the local and community levels. The overview of existing methods and tools for integrated implementation of the SDGs developed by other UN agencies, and regional and global think-tanks presented at the Seminar was found very useful and enhancing the knowledge of the participants.

The Regional Seminar enhanced understanding of the ESCAP analytical framework for integration of the water and sanitation related SDGs and targets using systems thinking tools. Through hands-on sessions participants were provided with an opportunity to apply those tools to concrete case studies, which enhanced their understanding of the interlinkages between the SDGs and the added value of using causal loops' and feedback analysis.

The participants were informed about different ways the analytical framework could be used and learned from practical examples from Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, while understanding the progress made in planning in Fiji. Sri Lanka spoke on their Roadmap to Sustainable Development, which includes inter-governmental collaboration regarding the sharing of baseline data, to inform a systems' approach towards SDG implementation. Tajikistan informed about their vulnerability to use/access, water-related natural disasters, and climate change – citing a need for an integrative approach, particularly between economic productivity, agriculture, energy, and IWRM through the development of nationally-appropriate indicators. Fiji explained that their Green Growth Framework is annually updated, but monitoring and evaluation could be improved further through a systems' approach integrating various facets for IWRM.

Further, participants were exposed to various challenges in implementation of the SDGs in an integrated manner at the local level, including waste water management and treatment, resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure to disasters, innovative urban governance, water efficient infrastructure and water smart cities.

Integrated strategic approaches and enabling policy tools to facilitate a shift towards water-hazard resilient infrastructure and sustainable cities were presented. These approaches aimed at achieving safe and adequate water supply and sanitation services, sound water-related ecosystems, a high level of water use efficiency, as well as greater urban resilience to water-related disasters within the framework of Integrated Urban Water Management. A set of policy tools, as an integral part of Integrated Water Resource Water Management principles were demonstrated through four case studies on policies promoting a shift towards the water-resilient cities, including:

- Drinking water and human well-being: ensuring access to safe, sufficient and affordable water to meet basic needs and fulfil human rights of urban population for drinking, sanitation and hygiene, and to safeguard health and well-being;

- Urban wastewater as a resource: policies promoting treatment and reusing of wastewater to maximize waste-to-resource opportunities (ex. via DEWATS),
- Urban Ecosystems: preservation of urban natural ecosystems to deliver eco-system services of importance for both nature and people, including the provision of freshwater,
- Economic activities and development: highlighting the importance of water services for production of food and energy production, as well for industry, transport and tourism in cities,
- Water-related hazards: eliciting the policy levers that ensure the resiliency of the infrastructure to the water-related hazards, such as flood, drought and pollution.

Participants also learned that sustainable urban metabolism is upheld intrinsically by systems-thinking values, including in the urban water cycle where alternate purposes for water resources are demonstrated by the integrative approaches applied in cities. In line with the conceptual framework of integration and systems thinking, the four panelists show-cased the following examples:

- Bangkok's case: treated wastewater for re-use in agriculture and industry,
- Nagoya: urban river basin management governed by IWRM and collective stakeholder participation to encourage knowledge transfers about the renewable water cycle and its effects on health and wellbeing,
- Singapore: innovative water and sanitation urban governance engaging the inventive capacity of citizens to increase a healthy and productive economic workforce.
- Daego and Seoul: eco-efficient infrastructure and waste water management for water smart and resilient cities IWRM to mitigate climate-change related hazards like flooding and drought.

Participants discussed the importance of viewing sanitation in a broader context than the MDGs, including important aspects as energy in the waste water, the nutrients in the waste water and their use in peri-urban areas, using flexible systems concept to increase the adaptive capacity of the water and sanitation infrastructure. A notable suggestion was to further international dialogue with the intent of eliminating institutional fragmentation and unrealistic national targets.

Both hands-on sessions organized in small working groups were highly appreciated. The participants applied the analytical framework tools, which showed the maturation of systems-thinking principles. One session discussed the case of Singapore's Kallang River-Bishan Park. Participants undertook systems thinking modelling first on the board with posted-its notes and then using the causal interlinkages and direct relationships with focus either on SDG 6.6: water-related ecosystems or SDG 6.3: improving water quality by reducing pollution and untreated waste water. The second session discussed the Vietnam's Cat-Ba Biosphere Reserve case study, and the practical exercise was designed to explore application of further techniques during the modelling, and for more detailed analysis of interlinkages between the targets including indirect relationships. The models evolved in breadth and allowed for more in-depth analysis. Participants took a circular approach, which allowed them to consider multiple variables and with equal importance to better anchor system dynamics within the model. Though these two sessions were rather short (1, 5 hours each) and for the most participants first time application of the analytical framework, the participants could discern the evolution and observe the benefits of using systems

thinking approach to defining interlinkages, causal loop relationships and even leverage points for effective policy interventions in the context of SDG 6 (Water and Sanitation).

## **Recommendations**

Participants were invited to submit interventions to redefine the goal of strategic partnerships and alliances in the region with regard to further work on integrated approaches to the implementation of the SDGs, and to discuss the role of ESCAP. Participants emphasized that because ESCAP produces and has access to innovative tools and knowledge products, it can easily assume the role of a knowledge bridge for member states between and within sub-regions.

The seminar highlighted the role of ESCAP as a regional coordinator, honest broker and “wise council” for promotion of a shared understanding and vision, as well as the bridge between the global and regional levels for systems thinking and other approaches to enhance integrated implementation of the SDGs. Transitioning to the SDGs requires in-depth understanding of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ESCAP is in a key position to facilitate that, as well as a regional exchange of experiences and peer learning.

Focusing on one SDG for the application of the framework for integration was considered a highly suitable approach in view of the complex systems of the 17 SDGs and given that targets were developed with an intrinsic interconnectedness based on the elements of the water cycle, the symbiosis between natural and anthropogenic water metabolisms, and the use of integrated water resources management (IWRM) for over 20 years.

The importance of government-led stakeholder collaboration in particular for integration of the resource-related SDGs (6, 7, 11, and 13) with direct impact on the social inclusion SDGs (5, 10, and 16) at the national levels was highlighted by all panelists and discussants during the seminar. It was also highlighted that a key characteristic of systems-thinking is the flexibility and adaptability, allowing for expression of broader stakeholder views, while zooming into causal relationships and key leverage points for long term action, that is conditioned by the existing national socio-economic and environment circumstances.

The seminar highlighted that ESCAP has a critical role to play to support integrated implementation and follow-up and review of the SDGs as a provider of a portfolio of tools, prototypes, and mechanisms, as a coordinator of regional learning alliances and re-invigorator of regional partnerships on SDGs, and as the promoter of investments for their implementation. Additionally, participants emphasized the need for ESCAP to provide further capacity development support to policy makers and to develop an information infrastructure for peer learning and sharing including on data and data mapping.

To enhance the implementation of the SDGs, there is a need for a leader at the regional level to promote, to facilitate alliances and to provide platforms for engagement and dialogue, and ESCAP is in the right position to assume this role, especially during future regional conferences (e.g. SDG Week). A number of government officials from countries that were not among the pilots, such as Thailand and Kazakhstan expressed interest to also apply the ESCAP analytical framework to local and national context of integrated SDG planning, Fiji expressed interest for further assistance to have national and subregional outreach of the modelling work. Participants also supported the application of the framework for mapping the governance landscape.

The participants also expressed general appreciation of the ESCAP SDG week and declared intent to hold national SDG Week.