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Water and Sustainable Livelihoods

Water is essential for life on Earth. But what is less well known is the importance of water for people's livelihoods and jobs. About half of the world's workers, approximately 1.5 billion people, work in water-related sectors. Investing in water and water natural water infrastructure can trigger the creation of more and decent jobs and contribute to a greener economy. The quantity and quality of water has the potential to change workers' lives and livelihoods – and even transform societies and economies. Water is at the core of sustainable development. Water resources, and the range of services they provide, underpin poverty eradication, economic growth and environmental sustainability. Having access to water for productive uses including agriculture is critical to realize livelihood opportunities, generate income and contribute to economic productivity.

Importance of water for sustainable livelihoods

- Estimates suggest that 95% of jobs in the agriculture sector, 30% of jobs in the industry sector, and 10% of jobs in the services sector are heavily dependent on water. Additionally, an estimated 5% of jobs in the agriculture sector, 60% of jobs in the industry sector and 30% of jobs in the services sector are moderately dependent on water (UN Water)
- An estimated 40% of the global economically active population work in crop and animal production, fisheries or hunting. 20% are employed as waged workers (World Bank, 2005), the remaining are self-employed or contribute family labour to around 570 million farms (UN Water)
- Worldwide, some of the most water-intensive industry sectors employ vast numbers of people: 22 million in food and drink (with 40% women), 20 million in chemical, pharmaceutical, and rubber and tires, as well as 18 million in electronics (UN Water)
- Water supply and wastewater facilities operators employ about 80% of the workers in the water industry (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012)
- Investing in improved water management and services can help reduce poverty and sustain economic growth.



Convention on
Biological Diversity



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Biodiversity and Water

Economic productivity is dependent on functioning ecosystems. And biodiversity is critical to the maintenance of both the quality and quantity of water supplies and plays a vital but often under-acknowledged role in the water cycle. Well-functioning watersheds, encompassing forests and grasslands; and wetlands, including watercourses, lakes, swamps and floodplains; provide water storage, clean water, manage flood flows and supply society with a vast array of benefits. These are the “natural water infrastructure” upon which human well-being depends. Experience from around the world is showing that natural infrastructure provided by ecosystems can be conserved and restored to manage water for a variety of objectives including mitigating flooding and drought, reducing vulnerability to erosion and storm damage, providing sustainable clean supplies of water, supporting food production and regulating global and local climatic processes. Increasingly, hard hitting economic arguments are demonstrating that the protection, management and restoration of natural infrastructure are providing cost effective and sustainable solutions to deal with uncertain future events. While approximately one trillion dollars per year is presently being spent on built water infrastructure, natural infrastructure can often replace, or increase the sustainability and efficiency of, built infrastructure at a much lower cost. Restoration activities include renaturation of rivers and opening dikes for natural overflows during floods etc. as ecosystem based adaptation measures.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has actively been working alongside many partners to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystems into development:

- **Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** Water is mentioned 22 times in 5 separate Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 3, 6, 11, 12 and 15) that touch climate change, biodiversity, food security, energy security, health, gender equality, urbanization, institutional capacity and sustainable consumption and production. Goal 6, with six targets on outcomes across the entire water cycle and two targets on the means of implementing the outcome targets, is the dedicated goal on water and sanitation that sets out to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.” Because water is at the very core of sustainable development, Goal 6 does not only have strong linkages to all of the other SDGs, it also underpins them. Thus meeting Goal 6, and in particular, 6.6 that addresses biodiversity and ecosystem services, would go a long way towards achieving much of the 2030 Agenda.

- **2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030:** The 2015 Sendai Framework explicitly recognizes the value and role of ecosystems to reduce the vulnerability to disasters. Water is specifically noted in Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. “To support, as appropriate, the efforts of relevant United Nations entities to strengthen and implement global mechanisms on hydrometeorological issues in order to raise awareness and improve understanding of water-related disaster risks and their impact on society, and advance strategies for disaster risk reduction upon the request of States.” To achieve Priority 4, governments need to “promote the resilience of new and existing critical infrastructure, including water, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, educational facilities, hospitals and other health facilities, to ensure that they remain safe, effective and operational during and after disasters in order to provide live-saving and essential services.”

Further information:

- CBD Programme of Work on Inland Waters Biodiversity: www.cbd.int/waters/
- Natural Solutions for Water Security: www.cbd.int/idb/doc/2013/booklet/idb-2013-booklet-en.pdf
- Aichi Biodiversity Targets: www.cbd.int/sp/targets/
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- UN Water: www.unwater.org/
- Water for a Sustainable World: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002318/231823E.pdf>

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