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The post-2015 development agenda

Nepal stakeholder perspectives on a water goal and its implementation



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1 Introduction

A National Consultation Workshop on Water in the Post 2015 Development Agenda was jointly organized by Jalsrot Vikas Sanstha/GWP Nepal and National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal on 6 April 2014 in Kathmandu. National Planning Commission is the focal institution for preparing SDG agenda for Nepal on behalf of the Government of Nepal. The workshop was attended by 68 participants from 33 organizations representing government, non-government, academic and international organizations in Nepal. The workshop was chaired by Dr. Yub Raj Bhusal, Secretary, National Planning Commission, and co-chaired by Mr. Iswer Raj Onta, Regional Chairperson of GWP South Asia (GWP SAS). Among the high official participants were the secretaries of Water & Energy Commission, Ministry of Irrigation, Ministry of Agriculture, and Joint Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (See Annex 1 for list of participants and organizations).



All the participants and the invitees were provided in advance with background documents including the UN-Water Paper and Output from the Budapest Water Summit along with the official invitation letter. This arrangement provided sufficient time to the participants and the invitees to get acquainted with the background to the workshop and the objectives and expected inputs in the workshop.

With the objective of obtaining focused inputs, the workshop program was structured with presentations on a particular target followed by open discussion on each target. Wherever feasible, the officers in –charge of the subject matter from the concerned government line agencies were requested to present their analytical view and targets on their relevant target themes. Mr. Abadh Kishore Mishra, joint secretary from Ministry of Urban Development and Mr. Kamal Prasad Regmi, Director General of Department of Water Induced Disaster Prevention made presentations on Target A & D and Target E respectively. Targets B & C, which were not directly linked to any particular agency but were more cross-cutting, Dr. Dibya Ratna Kansakar, Executive Member of GWP Nepal/JVS made the presentation. These presentations were made with the purpose of stimulating discussion in order to gather feedback from the participants.

The introductory presentation by Dr. Dibya Ratna Kansakar, Executive Member of GWP Nepal/JVS on the purpose and process of national consultation and the Potential Global Goals on Water provided a dedicated platform for inputs by the invitees during remark notes in the plenary session and by the participants during the discussion in the thematic sessions.

Outcome of the presentations and the discussions are summarized in the following sections.

2 Comments on Recommended SD Goal and Targets for Water

2.1 PROPOSED GOAL AND TARGETS IN RELATION TO NEPAL'S DEVELOPMENT AIMS

The proposed goal, the five targets and their elements are all relevant to and in line with the national development goals, plans and the policies of Government of Nepal namely Water Resources Strategy (2002), National Water Plan (2005), Long Term Vision on Water Resources Sector (draft, 2013). However, doubts have been expressed on the viability of monitoring some of the indicators that are proposed in the UN-Water Paper (2014).

2.2 APPROACH FOR TARGET SETTING

The consensus of the workshop participants was that the second approach for target setting, i.e. "an agreed set of broader target statements ('dashboards') with each country setting their own target values to meet the aims articulated in a globally agreed statement" would work better than the first approach of "globally set targets agreed by the UN General Assembly for all countries". Although 'globally set targets agreed by the UN General Assembly for all countries' could have its own advantage, this approach may not suit because of a wide diversity in the status of access, development, management and availability of water resources among countries in the world. Moreover, the 'dashboards' approach with each country setting their own target values have worked well in the case of Nepal during the course of MDG program.

2.3 PROPOSED GOAL AND THE TARGETS AND INDICATORS

2.3.1 Proposal Global Goal for Water

'Securing Sustainable Water for All' very well captures the development aims of Nepal as it has been adopted and reflected in several of its strategy, policy, plan and draft vision documents on water resources sector. Hence, this Goal Statement for water is appropriate and is acceptable for Nepal for the post-2015 SDG.

2.3.2 Target A

Target A: "Achieve Universal Access to Safe Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene"

Nepal has already achieved 85% household coverage in basic (improved) water services and 62% coverage in sanitation against the MDG targets of 73% and 53% by 2015 respectively. Against this backdrop, the only logical step forward for Nepal is to achieve universal access to safe drinking water by upgrading quality of drinking water, expanding the access at household level, schools and health facilities and sustain the drinking water service systems.

Element 1: "No Open Defecation": The target of eliminating open defecation and the core indicator of 'percentage of population practicing open defecation' are appropriate.

Element 2: "Basic Access": The target element, "to achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation, hygiene for households, schools and health facilities", is appropriate. The proposed indicators (1) to (5) are also appropriate.

Element 3: "Safely Managed Service": The target element, "to halve the proportion of population without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation service" is appropriate. Currently, the "improved drinking water access" coverage is in majority at community level and the rate of access 'at home' is also much low. The proposed core indicators (1 and 2) are appropriate and feasible.

Element 4: “Equality”: The target element, “to progressively eliminate inequalities in access” is important for Nepal. At present, the disparities in access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are among rural (78%) and urban households (94%), between geographic regions (74% in Mountains; 78% in Hills and 93% in Terai plains), and between rich and poor within the rural-urban and geographic regions.

As to the core indicator 1, disaggregated data is necessary, but only the data disaggregation by urban/rural, rich/poor and disadvantaged groups/general population would be practically feasible. The core indicator 2, ‘difference in rate of change for the disadvantaged groups versus general population, is however, feasible.

2.3.3 Target B

Target B: “Improve by (x%) the sustainable use and development of water resources in all countries” The Target B is very important for sustainable develop and this goal should be an integral part of the SDG. However, quantifying the target is not a practical proposition as it cannot be measured without an objective baseline.

Element 1: “Bring freshwater withdrawals in line with sustainably available water resources”

Water resources in Nepal are yet to be developed to its optimal level. Only about 10% of its freshwater resources are withdrawn for various uses at present. Not counting the non-consumptive water use in hydropower generation, 98% of the water withdrawal in Nepal at present is in the irrigation sector. This trend cannot be, however, continued for long because there is already increased competition for water between irrigation and domestic use sectors in many sub-basins. Therefore, water allocation and re-allocation framework along with water conservation practices becomes necessary for SDG.

The core indicator 1 and 2, i.e. “change in withdrawal-to-availability ratio” and “ % of basins with an allocation framework” can be measured, but core indicator 3, “storage capacity per capita per percentage of available water”, though very important from the viewpoint of securing water in the context of climate change, may be too pre-mature for Nepal to propose to monitor because, besides small rainwater harvesting structures at household and community levels, Nepal has not built any infrastructure to store surface water storage in sizable volume. Natural lakes and pond, snowpack in the Himalayas and groundwater reservoirs are the only water storages available in Nepal. Lucrative packages are being promoted to encourage people in rainwater harvesting.

Element 2: “Restore and maintain ecosystems to provide water-related services”

As elsewhere, the freshwater ecosystems are increasingly under threat in Nepal. There is some level of data on freshwater ecosystem area, but there is no data on their condition. The Freshwater ecosystem are important not only for sustainable water resources and environment, but also for the ecosystem service on which the poor and indigenous communities rely most for their livelihoods. Therefore, this target element of restoring and maintaining ecosystems has importance for Nepal, but in the absence of baseline data on the ecosystem condition in the country, it is difficult to perceive core indicator 1, ‘% change in freshwater ecosystem condition or ecosystem health’ as a monitoring indicator though % change in freshwater ecosystem area could be possible for Nepal. Likewise, core indicator 2, ‘Threatened Species (Red List) index and Living Planet Index could be monitored if baseline data is established at the beginning years of the SDG period. However, the core indicator 3, ‘Environmental water stress’, while could be applicable at certain sub-basin/s, would not have significance at national level.

Element 3: “Increase water productivity for all uses”

Water productivity is increasingly becoming an issue in the water stress areas in Nepal. Hence, this is an important element of the water target for Nepal.

The core indicator 1, 'Change in agricultural GDP per agricultural withdrawal' is a viable indicator for Nepal. This indicator apparently dwells only on the irrigation use of water, but the water use in livestock and fishery, other important components of agriculture should not be neglected. In the absence of basic data on water withdrawal for industrial uses, the core indicator 2, 'Change in industrial GDP per industrial withdrawal' may be difficult to monitor. The core indicator 3, "Change in electricity production per unit of water' is not applicable to Nepal because there is no coal based thermal or nuclear power plant that require water for cooling towers. This indicator is not applicable in the case of hydropower plants which is and will remain the primary source of electricity in Nepal in the years to come. The core indicator 4, 'Change in withdrawal for domestic use per capita', is a useful indicator and is viable to monitor.

2.3.4 Target C

Target C: "All countries strengthen equitable, participatory and accountable water governance"

Element 1: 'Implement integrated approaches to water management at local, basin and national levels including participatory decision-making'

Core Indicator 1: 'Percent of countries implementing IWRM Plans'

Nepal has already adopted IWRM principles in its Water Resources Strategy (2002) and National Water Plan (2005). It has also prepared Integrated Water Resources Management Policy draft, but implementation of these policy, strategy and plan is weak or absent altogether. At present, there is no institutional mechanism in place neither at the central level nor at river basin level to implement IWRM approach to water resources management in Nepal. After the abolition of Ministry of Water Resources a few years ago, there is no national institution to own IWRM policy, strategy or plan nor water legislations. People's Water Parliament, Area Water Partnership and Basin/sub-basin level stakeholders' management committees along with water allocation system exercises, despite their piloting in selected river basins, are yet to receive legal recognition and IWRM planning support.

Element 2: 'Deliver all drinking water supply, sanitation and hygiene services in a progressively affordable, accountable, and financially and environmentally sustainable manner'

Sustainability of the water infrastructures and water services are the key issues for Nepal. There is lack of accountable, and financial and environmental sustainability in the water services, and there is inequity in water service fee. The proposed indicators for this element would be appropriate for large drinking water service systems, operated by public or private sector, but they may not be feasible, particularly core indicator 4. Almost all rural water supply systems are community managed. Water tariff are collected only for regular O&M and pay for the service providers and service fee varies from system to system. There is no provision for ongoing sustainability of the system i.e. rehabilitation. Development partners support is therefore vital for sustainability of the system.

Element 3: 'Ensure regulatory frameworks are in place for water resources, infrastructure and services, and enhance the performance of responsible public authorities and their water operators'

The proposed core indicator 1 for this Element 3 are highly subjective, for example measuring the 'enforcement capacity'.

Element 4: 'Strengthen knowledge transfer and skills development'

While the proposed indicators could be useful at global scale, significance of their monitoring at national level may be low in the case of Nepal.

2.3.5 Target D

Target D: 'Reduce wastewater pollution and improve water quality by reducing untreated domestic and industrial wastewater by (x%); increasing wastewater reused safely by (y%) and reducing nutrient pollution by (z%) to maximize water resource availability and improve water quality'. For Nepal, the target figures in the proposed 3 elements are proposed as below:

Element 1: 'Reducing untreated domestic and industrial wastewater (including point source agriculture) by (50%)'

Element 2: 'Increasing wastewater reused safely by (25%)'

Element 3: 'Reducing nutrient pollution by (50%)'

All the five core indicators and the supporting indicators are appropriate and are feasible for monitoring.

2.3.6 Target E

Target E: 'Reduce mortality by (x%) and economic loss by (y%) from natural and human-induced water related disasters'.

The target figures for Nepal in this target E are proposed as below:

Target E: 'Reduce mortality by (50%) and economic loss by (50%) from natural and human induced water related disasters'.



Element 1: 'Increased knowledge and understanding of nations with respect to communities at risk to water-related disasters, especially in a changing climate'

Element 2: 'Adoption of integrated disaster risk management, including an appropriate mix of structural and non-structural approaches, to reduce mortality and economic losses for water related disasters'.

Element 3: 'Adoption and implementation by nations of monitoring and people-centered early warning systems for communities at most risk to water-related disasters'.

Element 4: 'Application of an end-to-end preparedness approach to water-related disaster management which sees the needs of user communities being met, to the last mile'.

It's been suggested that the proposed core indicator 1 be re-phrased as 'Mortality due to water-related disasters and mortality by gender' because disaggregation of data by vulnerable groups may not be feasible in Nepal. The core indicator 2 and 4 are suitable for monitoring but in the absence of water related disaster risk assessment, the core indicator 3 may not be possible for Nepal.

For Nepal, the supporting indicators should be as below:

1. Number of total victims per year (persons)
2. Gender of victims per year (male/female)
3. Age of victims per year (year)
4. Income of victims per year (USD)
5. Direct economic losses per year (USD)

3 Implications of the Proposed Targets

3.1 Institutions and Costs

Though Nepal has adopted IWRM as the approach to its water resources development in its policy, strategy and plan documents, its implementation has remained miserably poor. The main reason for this deficiency is the lack of institutional setup and mechanisms to implement the policy principles. There is no mechanism nor institution framework for water allocation or re-allocation in the country. The regulatory frameworks need revision in the light of integrated water resources management at basin and sub-basin levels. The need is also the ecosystem approach to water allocation and utilization in order for quality and quantity-wise conservation and wise use of water resources at basin and sub-basin levels. Appreciation of economic value of water has to be built-in in the decisions of allocating of water resources and pricing of water services.

Sustainability of the existing water infrastructures and the affordable, equitable, accountable and financially sustainable water services are the other fronts where institutional and regulatory reforms are needed. This should go hand-in-hand with the human resource development and capacity building of the institutions as the reforms demand. Reinstatement of Ministry of Water Resources, legal recognition to basin/sub-basin level stakeholders' organizations and implementation capacity building along with targeted program execution are therefore the pre-requisites for competent water governance.

3.2 Infrastructures and Capital

Investment in physical infrastructures is the primary constraint in Nepal for enhancing water services to the Nepalese population. Except for the natural water storages such as snowpack, lakes and groundwater reservoirs, there is no water storage infrastructures in the country. This involves increased and accelerated rate of capital investment for which both domestic as well as external financial resources needs to be mobilized. A dedicated global goal for water could be a catalyst for mobilizing capital investment in water sector.

3.3 Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring requires baseline data, but as has been mentioned in the previous section, baseline data for many of the proposed indicators do not exist. Therefore, investment in establishing baseline data and institutional mechanism for gathering for data should be the initial and integral parts of the programs that are proposed for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goal.

4 Concluding Remarks

The approach of “an agreed set of broader target statements (‘dashboards’) with each country setting their own target values to meet the aims articulated in a globally agreed statement” is the more practical approach for setting global goal for water in the forthcoming SDG agenda.

The proposed global goal for water is in line with the development aims of the Government of Nepal in water sector.

The proposed elements in the five identified target areas encompass the essentials and essence of sustainable water resources management and utilization.

The proposed indicators are appropriate in most cases for monitoring. However, a few indicators are not applicable to or feasible to monitor and some others need re-phrasing in the context of Nepal.

Investment in baseline data collection for effective monitoring and reporting and reinstatement of Ministry of Water Resources at the center, legal recognition of stakeholders' organizations at the river basin/sub-basin in different regions along with building their implementation capacity are critical for Nepal to achieve the proposed sustainable development targets.

Annex 1: List of Participants

National Consultation on Water in Post- 2015 Development Agenda

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