

Editorial

The year 2015 marks the end of the Millennium Development Goals, one of the most ambitious anti-poverty global roadmaps developed so far. The Millennium Development Goals process, developed in 2000, has left us with 15 years' worth of lessons, both positive and negative, including the need to reduce the gap between planning and effective and timely implementation. As noted in the UN's (2015a) report, there are reasons to celebrate the overall progress achieved during the last 15 years in all eight of the goals: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; universal primary education; gender equality and women's empowerment; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combatting HIV, malaria and other diseases; environmental sustainability; and development of global partnerships. Very serious gaps remain in all of them, but overall, the world as a whole has made commendable progress in all these areas.

The international community is now moving towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This makes it of utmost importance to reflect on the previous lessons learnt, successes and failures and the reasons for them, as this will help in developing realistic road maps to achieve more sustained progress into the future.

One of the goals where the announced achievements seem to have been masked by statistics is the one that relates to clean water and sanitation. Definitions and statistics have been conveniently modified during the past decades. In the case of clean water, these have varied from "clean water" to "improved sources of water" (which has no relation to quality of water), and finally, as mentioned in the 2015 UN report, to "improved drinking water" (UN 2015a). Because of the report's interchangeable use of the terms "improved sources of water" and "clean water", the world now believes that improved sources of water actually means clean and safe water, which is of course totally incorrect. Therefore, the conclusion of the international organizations involved that the water goal was achieved in 2010, five years ahead of schedule (UN, 2014, p. 4), is very far from the truth.

Changeable definitions and conveniently presented statistics may have served the purpose of making some international organizations look good. Nevertheless, over the long term, this will be detrimental to their credibility, since they masked the seriousness of the problems related to water supply, water quality, sanitation and wastewater all over the developing world and, to a certain extent, in the developed world. The goal of reducing by half the number of people without access to clean water between 2000 and 2015 was not achieved, numerous statements by UN agencies notwithstanding. The progress on goals regarding improved sanitation is equally unacceptable. The situation in the developing world has only become worse. The current unwarranted state in many countries says more than all the UN statements put together during the last 15 years. These include degradation of water resources, poor sanitation, extensive pollution because of millions of litres of untreated wastewater discharged into the environment, and negative impacts in the quality of life of billions of people.

The now widely known Sustainable Development Goals represent a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” (UN, 2015b). Seventeen sustainable development goals and 169 associated targets have been agreed by consensus among the UN member states. In only 15 years, the international community is determined to end poverty and hunger, combat inequalities, foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, develop global partnerships and achieve numerous other laudable goals. What is difficult to see is how these complex problems, which have been around for many decades, can be solved with the next 15 years. They might be significantly reduced, but they are unlikely to be eliminated.

Goal 6 aims at ensuring “availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. Universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, and access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, are expected to be available by 2030. Such an ambitious but equally necessary goal is likely to be achieved only with full political will and full support of formal and informal institutions all over the world. Of fundamental importance will be that the future discussions and analyses do not mask the situation on the ground but focus on actual achievements, failures, challenges and possibilities. This is the only way to advance towards the expected and desirable ends. It is the role of the international organizations to present the situation as it is and not as they would like it to be because of their own interests.

By supporting the new global agenda, the academic and research communities also have the opportunity to contribute to bridging the gaps between academia and policy making. Generation and dissemination of factual data and advancement of knowledge for policy making are absolutely essential. It is also necessary to challenge the traditional perceived wisdom of policy makers, bureaucrats and national and international organizations, to ensure positive impacts on society.

For our part at the *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, we shall join the global discourse by continuing to provide a forum for analysis and discussion that advances knowledge and contributes to positive impacts.

From 2016, the journal will publish six issues per year, instead of four as has been the case from its beginning some three decades ago. This is the result of an increased number of good submissions and our desire to publish them as quickly as possible in both electronic and printed forms. At present, for the average good paper, 6–8 months elapse between submission and electronic publication. We expect to reduce this time period in the coming years.

The current issue, the last one for 2015, includes 19 excellent contributions, a response to a previous opinion piece, two conference reports and one book review. The articles cover wide geographical areas, including Central Asia with a study on Afghanistan (Groninger, Ruffner, & Christenson, 2015) and two on Iran; the Middle East (Israel); Southeast Asia (Laos and Cambodia); East Asia (China and Korea); South Asia (India); three contributions on Australia; Africa (Ghana); Europe (Spain and Greece); two on Canada, including on the influence of global management paradigms (Shapiro & Summers, 2015); and Central America, with an analysis on Nicaragua (LaVanchy & Taylor, 2015). One of the papers on Spain includes an excellent state-of-the-art review on groundwater (De Stefano, Fornés, López-Geta, & Villarroya, 2014). This is just an indication of the journal’s continuing coverage of water issues from all corners of the world. We shall continue this practice and will strive to improve the coverage with excellent contributions.

As we do every year, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the members of our editorial board, especially Dr James Horne, Dr M. Dinesh Kumar, Dr Francisco Gonzalez-Gomez and Dr Kai Wegerich, all of whom have contributed enormously to the journal. We are extremely grateful to our external reviewers for their prompt and objective reviews. This ensures the high quality of the papers published and also the independence of the journal. We sincerely appreciate the efforts of our guest editors, and of course our authors, for their trust and their interest in the journal. Last but not least, our heartfelt appreciation to our readers, who have consistently supported the journal for over three decades.

We continue inviting the water and development communities to put forward ideas, challenge traditional wisdom and join us in the advancement of knowledge with high-quality discussions.

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Cecilia Tortajada

Editor in Chief

Email: cecilia.tortajada@gmail.com

Asit K. Biswas

Editor