



**Submission to the Senate inquiry into the United Nations  
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

February 2018

## About WaterAid Australia

WaterAid is an international non-government organisation focused on ensuring every person has access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene by 2030. Across Africa, Asia, Central America and the Pacific, we work with local partners, providing them with the skills and support to help communities set up and manage practical, sustainable projects. Drawing on the evidence gained from our on the ground experience we also advise on the necessary changes to policy and practice to ensure everyone, everyone can enjoy access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

For more information visit: <http://www.wateraid.org/au>

## Overview of our submission

WaterAid was founded in recognition of the simple fact that extreme poverty cannot and will not be eradicated without universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. These basic services are human rights: every person on our planet needs them to lead healthy, dignified and productive lives.

Throughout our existence we have sought to ensure that water, sanitation and hygiene's critical role in development is more widely recognised. We lobbied to have sanitation included in the Millennium Development Goals, and in collaboration with others, we played a crucial role in advocating for a dedicated water, sanitation and hygiene goal in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This culminated in the adoption of Goal 6 which strives to: "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all".<sup>1</sup> Through our global programming and policy work, we continue to advance the implementation, monitoring and accountability of Goal 6 and its accompanying targets.

Given our background as an international development agency focused on water, sanitation and hygiene, we have chosen to selectively respond to the terms of reference dealing with Australia's Official Development Assistance program (items e-g). We argue that a focus on Goal 6, particularly targets 6.1 and 6.2 on access to water, sanitation and hygiene must be given greater prominence within our ODA program, as key drivers of development.

## Response to selected terms of reference

### **E. What SDG are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program**

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is acknowledged by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as, "an essential foundation for people's health and quality of life"<sup>2</sup>, and as such is being supported in a number of ways through Australia's ODA – via bilateral country programs; the Civil Society WASH Fund (to be replaced by Water for Women); and multilateral global programs.

Recognising the myriad ways in which water is critical to people's lives, DFAT groups community-level access to water, sanitation and hygiene – WaterAid's focus – with water resources management (WRM) and the building, operation and maintenance of large-scale water and sanitation infrastructure under the *Water for Development* portfolio. In financial year 2017-18 an estimated \$106.6 million of Australia's ODA (approximately 2.7 percent of total ODA) will be invested in this area.<sup>3</sup>

### **F. Which of the SDG is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDG**

Despite the investments outlined in the preceding section, it is our belief that water, sanitation and hygiene has historically been viewed as a secondary issue and has not been given the prominence or priority it deserves within Australia's ODA. This must change. If Australia is committed to ending poverty, strong investment in initiatives focused on achieving Goal 6 must be central to Australia's aid. As the Government's recent Foreign Policy White Paper itself acknowledges, global population

growth, increased consumption and climate change will place water resources under greater stress,<sup>4</sup> putting the very existence of future populations at risk.

Beyond the importance of access to water, sanitation and hygiene for future human prosperity and well-being, Goal 6 is also an SDG that Australia is particularly well-suited to helping others countries achieve. As a vast, dry continent ourselves, DFAT acknowledges that, “Australia is well-placed to assist countries in the Indo-Pacific region by sharing our experience and expertise in managing complex water and sanitation challenges.”<sup>5</sup> The Government has established the Australian Water Partnership precisely to share this expertise, while Prime Minister Turnbull has also been selected to join the UN-World Bank High Level Panel on Water which aims to accelerate global progress on Goal 6. Given these existing opportunities to advance action on Goal 6, WaterAid would therefore argue that Goal 6 should be seen as a core SDG by Australia.

However, in advancing the achievement of Goal 6 we must address the significant financing gap required to deliver the level of ambition the goal contains. The estimate is that annual capital financing will need to triple on current levels of spending, growing to US\$114 billion per annum.<sup>6</sup> While ultimately strong domestic resourcing will be key to achieving Goal 6, for the most vulnerable and under-resourced countries, international public finance still has a vital role to play. **WaterAid therefore recommends that Australia lifts its proportion of ODA for water, sanitation and hygiene to at least the OECD average – 3.6 percent in 2016.**<sup>7</sup>

Beyond simply an increase in the volume of financing, where it is spent and in what fashion is just as important. **WaterAid also therefore recommends that DFAT undertake a strategic review of the Water for Development portfolio.** A light-touch review would result in a new Australian Government ‘Water for Development Strategy’ that would guide investments in this area through to 2030, enhance quality and effectiveness, foster enhanced collaboration, and drive integration with other core Australia Government development priorities, integrating water, sanitation and hygiene considerations into Australian investments of ODA in health, education, nutrition, gender equality and climate change adaptation.

### **G. How countries in the Indo-Pacific are responding to implementing the SDG, and which of the SDG have been prioritised by countries receiving Australia’s ODA, and how these priorities could be incorporated into Australia’s ODA program**

In addition to the importance of Goal 6, and the suitability of Australia to contribute to its achievement, there is both a need to address water, sanitation and hygiene challenges in the region, and momentum to do so.

The Pacific is one of just three regions—Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia being the others—that missed the Millennium Development Goal targets for both water and sanitation.<sup>8</sup> Within the Pacific, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands have some of the lowest rates of access to water and sanitation of anywhere in the world.<sup>9</sup>

However, there is locally-led momentum to address these shortfalls. The Government of Papua New Guinea identified water and sanitation as key to their ability to meet the SDGs in their 2014 National Strategy for Responsible Sustainable Development.<sup>10</sup> Also, between 2012 and 2014 WaterAid supported the Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the National WASH Task Force with the development of the country’s first ever National Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Policy, which was launched in early 2015. The policy is a milestone towards the achievement of Goal 6 in Papua New Guinea and The World Bank, the European Union, UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank are now working in partnership with the Government of PNG, and NGO partners, to support its implementation.

Similarly in Timor-Leste, their *National Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 (SDP)*, which aims to bring Timor-Leste onto an equal economic footing with Malaysia and Singapore by 2030, identifies 100 percent coverage with improved water and sanitation as critical to development.<sup>11</sup>

These are clear examples of where via strengthened ODA investment into water, sanitation and hygiene, supported via a renewed strategic intent, Australia could align our ODA with the SDG priorities of our ODA recipients and drive sustainable development in our region.

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<sup>1</sup> “Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation,” United Nations Development Programme, accessed 12 January 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-6-clean-water-and-sanitation.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Overview of Australia’s assistance for water, sanitation and hygiene,” Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 12 January 2018, <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/investment-priorities/education-health/water-sanitation-hygiene/Pages/water-sanitation-and-hygiene.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> “Water for development,” Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 12 January 2018, <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/water-for-development/Pages/water-for-development.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> “Water for development,” DFAT.

<sup>6</sup> UN-Water, *Global analysis and assessment of sanitation and drinking water (GLAAS) 2017 report: financing universal water, sanitation and hygiene under the sustainable development goals* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> “Development finance data: Aid by major purposes in 2016 (education, health etc.),” Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, accessed 12 January 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2013 Progress Chart* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> “JMP: WASH data,” WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, accessed 12 January 2018, <https://washdata.org/data#!/table?geo0=region&geo1=sdg>.

<sup>10</sup> Government of PNG, *National Strategy for Responsible Sustainable Development for Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby: Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Government of Timor-Leste, *Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030* (Dili: Government of Timor-Leste, 2011).