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# THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 6 (SDG 6) IN ENDING OPEN DEFECATION AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO SANITATION AND HYGIENE

end

**OPEN  
DEFECATION**



WATER IS LIFE - SANITATION IS DIGNITY



**water & sanitation**

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was agreed to by all 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, seeks to end poverty in all its forms, take bold transformative steps to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path, and ensure that no one is left behind. The 2030 Agenda further established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 global targets that address social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated and cooperative manner. These goals also seek to realize human rights of all in an equitable way whilst achieving gender equality through the empowerment of all women and girls globally.

Of these 17 SDGs, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) is leading SDG 6 on behalf of the country. SDG 6 is critical to sustainable development and it relates to ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services are human rights, as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA). Access to these services, including water and soap for handwashing, is fundamental to human health and well-being. They are essential in improving nutrition, preventing diseases, enabling healthcare, as well as ensuring the well-functioning of schools, workplaces, political institutions and the full participation in society by women, girls and marginalized groups. Sanitation feeds into most of the other sustainable development goal targets, such as improving public health, reducing child mortality, gender empowerment, reducing/ minimising absenteeism from schools, etc. which in turn, holds the key to the realisation of many other SDG 6 targets.

SDG 6, Target 6.2 focuses on Sanitation and Hygiene and seeks to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all as well as end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situation by

the year 2030. When implemented correctly, equitable access to safe sanitation will promote human equality and dignity.

## **2 WHY IS ENDING OPEN DEFECATION AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO SANITATION AND HYGIENE A CONCERN?**

The 2016 National Sanitation Policy defines sanitation as *“the principles and practices relating to the collection, removal or disposal of human excreta and household, public institution, industrial, agricultural and mining wastewater, grey-water waste as they impact upon people and the environment. Good sanitation includes appropriate health and hygiene education and behaviour, hand hygiene and acceptable, affordable and sustainable sanitation services.*

On the other hand, hygiene is defined in the 2016 National Sanitation Policy as *“personal and household practices that serve to prevent infection and keep people and environments clean, and the conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases”.* Hygiene education then relates to all activities that aim to improve an individual’s knowledge about these habits and practices that affect one’s health, particularly in relation to water and sanitation services. Hygiene education includes personal hygiene, water hygiene, food hygiene, human waste hygiene and environmental hygiene education to ensure appropriate sanitation practices for the protection of human waste”.

Poor sanitation acts/ open defecation can pollute the environment and cause health problems and diseases. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Fact Sheet on Sanitation, published on 21 March 2022, poor sanitation as well as poor hygiene is believed to be the main cause of death of 432 000 out of 827 000 global cases. These are also believed to be a major factor in several neglected tropical diseases, including intestinal worms, schistosomiasis, and trachoma. Moreover, high levels of open defecation are linked to high child mortality, poor nutrition,

poverty, and large disparities between the rich and poor.

Poor construction or lack of maintenance is both a hygiene and sanitation issue which causes toilets to be abandoned, resulting to visual pollution, bad odour and contamination. Thus, to improve health status, not only does sanitation coverage have to increase, but there must be increased awareness, education and behavioural change. The latter includes toilet usage and toilet maintenance as well as other hygiene measures such as correct hand washing methods. According to the WHO, hygiene promotion is ranked as one of the most cost-effective public health interventions.

To achieve the 2030 agenda, sanitation needs to be tackled from a multitude of facets. There should be a level of guarantee that the toilets built are safe, usable, and non-polluting to the environment. While on the other hand, there needs to be sufficient education to ensure that the toilets are being properly maintained and used.

### **3 IN WHAT WAYS DOES LEGISLATION REGULATE THE PROVISION OF SANITATION AND HYGIENE, INCLUDING ENDING OPEN DEFECATION?**

The provision of domestic water and sanitation services in South Africa, irrespective of whether the service is provided to a household, school, student residence, clinic, hospital or community site; are regulated under the Water Services Act (WSA, Act No. 108 of 1997) and the National Water Act (NWA, Act No. 36 of 1998). The Minister of Water and Sanitation is the responsible custodian, thus making DWS the regulating department.

According to the above-mentioned Acts, the Minister's mandated functions in the domestic water use sector are to establish, monitor and regulate guidelines to address national water and sanitation policies, the setting of criteria to guide subsidies, to provide minimum standards for water and sanitation services, and to monitor and regulate service provision. However, the actual delivery of the water and sanitation services, in accordance with

the Constitution, is the responsibility of local government. The Strategic Framework for Water Services (DWAF, 2003), states that it is the responsibility of a Water Services Authority (WSA) to ensure that “adequate and appropriate investments are made to ensure the progressive realisation of the right of all people in its area of jurisdiction to receive at least a basic level of water and sanitation services”; i.e. a universal service obligation. Meeting this universal service obligation requires that each South African has access to at least a basic water supply and a basic sanitation facility.

To ensure proper monitoring of sanitation services, the Department developed the National Sanitation Policy in 2016. The Department further Gazetted, on 8 September 2017, the 3rd and final version of the National Norms and Standards for Domestic Water and Sanitation Services.

#### **4 WHICH SDG TARGET PROVIDES FOR ENDING OPEN DEFECATION AND PROVISION OF SAFE SANITATION AND HYGIENE?**

SDG 6, Targets 6.1 and 6.2 build on the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) on drinking water and sanitation; and respond directly to the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Achieving universal access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and ending open defecation is provided for in SDG 6.2, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and all vulnerable and previously disadvantaged groups.

#### **5 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT, REPRESENTED BY THE TASK TEAM FOR TARGET 6.2 IN ACHIEVING THIS 2030 AGENDA?**

The role of the Department of Water and Sanitation in sanitation services is to lead and regulate the sanitation sector in the

country, the provision of regional bulk services, monitoring and macro planning. The Department creates an enabling environment for the provision of sanitation services by developing and establishing sanitation strategies, policy guidelines, development and enforcement of regulations, setting minimum norms and standards, etc.

The Department also coordinates and facilitates joint planning at national level for the delivery of sanitation services in line with national policy and targets (both national and SDG targets). It also has a role to monitor, report on the delivery of sanitation services and the targets and facilitate appropriate interventions where required.

## **6 WHAT DOES SDG TARGET 6.2 MEASURE?**

Target 6.2 measures the population using safely managed sanitation services and a handwashing facility with soap and water. This is measured as the share of the population using safely managed sanitation facilities and at least basic handwashing facilities.

A safely managed sanitation facility is one where excreta is safely disposed of in situ or treated off-site. A basic handwashing facility is defined by the device to contain, transport or regulate the flow of water to facilitate handwashing with soap and water in the household.

Which stakeholders are involved in ending open defecation, provision of safe sanitation and hygiene - and what are their roles?

Water Governance is increasingly moving beyond being the responsibility for only government, considering the importance of cooperation with other stakeholders – including the private sector. Good water governance comprises many elements, but it principally includes effective, responsive and accountable state institutions that respond to change, openness and transparency in

providing stakeholders with information as well as giving citizens and communities a say and role in decision-making. Participation and multi-stakeholder engagement are very important aspects of policy processes.

- **Department of Cooperative Governance and Administration:** According to the Strategic Framework for Water Services, COGTA has the overall responsibility for the affairs of local government, which includes the provision of sanitation services. The National Sanitation Policy 2016 states that COGTA has a responsibility to regulate municipal affairs and interventions in case of municipalities not performing their sanitation services mandate.
- **Water Services Authorities (WSAs):** Have the primary responsibility of ensuring adequate and appropriate investments are made to ensure progressive realisation of the right of all people in its area of jurisdiction to receive at least a basic level of water and sanitation services.
- The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 provides mechanism and procedures to enable municipalities to uplift their communities socially and economically and guarantee affordable universal access to basic services. Chapter 4 focuses on community participation, outlining the mechanisms, processes and procedures to be followed by the municipality in order to create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality.
- **Civil Society:** Forms part of the most important stakeholders, as the Strategic Framework for Water Services notes: ‘the most important and effective monitoring strategy for the sector is strengthening the voice of the consumer.’
- **South African Local Government Association (SALGA):** Ensures provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, which also includes provision of sanitation services. SALGA promotes a safe and healthy environment in local government, promote social and economic development, encourage the

involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government.

- **Water Research Commission (WRC):** An entity of the Department and was established in 1971 in terms of the South African Water Research Act (Act No. 34 of 1971). The WRC facilitates, guides and funds new knowledge generation and development of innovation solutions to respond to SA water and sanitation challenges. It also contributes to the improvement of quality of life for the people of SA, with a vision to contribute to highly informed decision making through research, science and technology at all levels in all water related stakeholder groups in the SA water sector, in the African continent and in the rest of the world.
- **Water Boards:** Water boards derive their mandates from the Water Services Act of 1997 and are listed under schedule 3B in the Public Finance Management Act of 1999. Water boards play a key role in the South African water sector and are primarily mandated to provide bulk industrial and potable water services to municipalities and industries within their gazetted areas of operation. In addition to responding to their core mandate, some water boards provide retail water and sanitation services on behalf of municipalities as secondary activities.
- **Department of Human Settlements:** Ensures that housing programmes allow for adequate sanitation facilities; monitor delivery of housing programmes for sustainability and developing national policy, strategy and guidelines in respect of housing development and sanitation (in consultation with the Department of Water and Sanitation).
- **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs):** The National Sanitation Policy 2016 encourages the participation of community-based organisation, NGOs and community members in the provision of sanitation services.
- **Department of Basic Education:** Provincial Departments of Education are responsible for the provision of school facilities,



which include school toilets and other sanitation facilities. The National Department of Basic Education is responsible for the development of norms and standards for school infrastructure and to improve the funding levels for capital development.

- **Department of Health:** Ensures (together with the provincial departments) that all hospitals and clinics are provided with adequate sanitation facilities and that these facilities are operated sustainably and are adequately maintained. They are also responsible for standardising existing and preparing new norms and standards relating to health aspects of sanitation and water supply; monitoring compliance with health legislation, regulations and norms and standards; co-ordinating interventions when a crisis poses a regional or national health risk (such as a cholera epidemic).
- **Private Sector:** The role of private sector is at the centre of the National Development Plan. Partnerships with private sector are encouraged to deal with solutions to water and sanitation challenges. Private sector bring innovation, funding, skills, infrastructure development, social services and more.

## **8 WHAT ROLE CAN AN ORDINARY DWS EMPLOYEE PLAY IN ENDING OPEN DEFECATION AND PROVISION OF SAFE SANITATION AND HYGIENE?**

Departmental officials need to equip themselves with the information provided to them to gain more knowledge on this topic. The Department has over the years, developed policies, strategies, information brochures and other strategic documents which departmental officials can consume to increase their knowledge and understanding on sanitation and hygiene.

Departmental officials from different units, can play a vital role by effectively and efficiently deliver on their mandates, which in turn link to and support the achievement of SDG 6, Target 6.2.

Additionally, DWS Officials serve as water ambassadors, and therefore play an important role in educating their communities



about all matters relating to sanitation and hygiene. Therefore, should actively contribute toward community awareness programmes on Health and Hygiene End User Education.

## **9 WHAT ROLE CAN AN ORDINARY SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZEN PLAY IN ENDING OPEN DEFECACTION AND PROVISION OF SAFE SANITATION AND HYGIENE?**


Local Municipalities on a yearly basis, develop and present their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) to respective communities. South African Residents need to provide support to their Local Municipalities by participating in the IDP process and implementation thereof. Communities must also be involved in the development of the Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs) in their respective municipalities to ensure their needs are met. Different wards are serviced by Councillors, and the residents need to engage with them to ensure that all water services issues experienced by their respective wards are attended to. Community members are always the first to know about issues of water pollution, vandalising of infrastructure, spilling sewer, etc, and they need to report these to their Local Municipalities in order to ensure a safe environment for all.

## **10 WHAT CHALLENGES ARE ENCOUNTERED IN ENDING OPEN DEFECACTION AND PROVISION OF SANITATION AND HYGIENE?**

Despite improved access to sanitation facilities, South Africa remains with a large number of households without adequate and safe sanitation facilities.

Lack of maintenance of onsite sanitation solutions such as pit latrines not being emptied has resulted in some households reverting to unsafe sanitation solutions including open defaecation.

Insufficient budget allocation for maintenance of sanitation facilities, systems and upgrades of bulk infrastructure.



Mushrooming of informal settlements with no proper plans by municipalities on provisioning of sanitation services.

Emerging challenge of open defaecation in cities due to homeless people.

### **WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION?**

Visit DWS SDG 6 website and have access to information at:  
*<https://www.dws.gov.za/Projects/sdg/default.aspx>*

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