

»» Water for all: no universal supply without sustainable capacities

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Since the turn of the millennium, the share of the world's population with a reliable supply of water and sanitation has increased significantly. However, there are still 2.1 billion people without access to safe drinking water and 4.5 billion people without access to adequate sanitation. Against this background, this year's United Nations World Water Day is dedicated to the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: "Leaving No One Behind".

To be left behind: an unevenly distributed risk

The successes at global level are misleading when it comes to existing inequalities – even within countries. The difference in sanitation between poor and rich sections of the population is particularly pronounced, and the supply of drinking water in rural and peri-urban areas is significantly worse than in cities.

But fragility and displacement also play a special role in this. According to WHO and UNICEF calculations, people living in fragile countries are two to four times more likely than people in stable countries to have no basic supply. The number of refugees, at 68 million (as of 2018), is higher than ever before. This also increases the strain on the water supply and sanitation systems in the host regions.

Creating access worldwide and for all

The human rights to water and sanitation are universal and thus naturally also apply to the risk groups mentioned. Under SDG 6 the international community has set itself the goal of ensuring adequate and equal

access to water and sanitation worldwide and for all by 2030. According to the current rates of change recorded by UN-Water, however, it will not be possible to achieve this goal in all countries by 2030. In some countries, like Zimbabwe (SDG 6.1) or Georgia (SDG 6.2), access rates are even declining according to WHO/UNICEF.

Securing access while availability decreases

A critical dilemma is the growing disparity between supply and demand. As a result of steady population and economic growth and the associated changes in consumption, not only is the demand for water increasing, but also the quantity of (industrial) wastewater to be treated. Especially in peri-urban areas, the required new connections for water and sanitation can usually not keep pace with rapid urbanisation.

At the same time, water as a resource is becoming increasingly scarce. In addition to falling water tables, salinisation and increasing pollution, climate change also has a negative impact on water availability in many regions. According to UN-Water, about 1.9 billion people already live in countries with regular water stress. As a result, there is also a pressing need to secure access for people who have already been reached.

Establishing sustainable supply structures

Creating and maintaining access – these legitimate claims often stand in contrast to inadequate supply structures. Many water utilities are struggling with ailing infrastructure, high energy con-

sumption and a tariff structure that does not cover costs. Without investments in existing systems and without strengthening personnel capacities, there is a risk that existing access is lost again, e.g. in the event of supply shortages.

System optimisations such as measures to reduce losses or increase energy efficiency make a significant contribution to preventing these deficits. New approaches and the identification of additional technological solutions such as recovery and reuse, rain management and digitised processes are essential as they can help to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusion: functional systems are crucial to provide access for all

Giving all people access to water and sanitation is an important goal of the global development agenda. New connections alone, however, cannot solve the supply problem. Now more than ever, functional support structures and systems are needed to provide the growing global population with a long-term, sustainable supply of water in times of increasing water scarcity. In addition to improving access, it is thus vital to invest in the existing and new capacities of suppliers. ■

Literature

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