

# ACCELERATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER-RELATED SDGS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Under increasing urgency to respond to water-related sustainable development, national governments need to accelerate progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 to assure “sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. Since 2017, a consortium of partners (UNU-INWEH, UNOSD, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea, and the Korea Environment Corporation(1)) has implemented the project “Water in the World We Want” to investigate how countries can address critical evidence gaps and deliver better policies to achieve SDG 6. The consortium collaborated with the experts and policymakers from the project partner countries to develop SDG 6 Policy Support System (SDG-PSS), the key output of this project, to help create evidence for the enabling environment of SDG 6 in countries with limited or missing data.

## Implementing SDG-PSS in The Republic of Korea

During the first phase (2017–2018) of the project, a national workshop in the Republic of Korea (4 July 2017, Incheon) was hosted by the Ministry of Environment, K-eco, and United Nations Office for Sustainable Development, where experts from water ministries and public agencies participated. This workshop aimed at demonstrating the potential use of SDG-PSS and providing a forum to discuss approaches for generating missing data on SDG 6 Targets and Indicators. As an outcome of these efforts, participants agreed to compile datasets related to the policy components of SDG-PSS.



In the second phase (2019–2020), the Republic of Korea acted as the main partner and regional-hub in Asia. Participants from Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkey and Vietnam met during the regional workshop in Asia (4–5 September 2019, Daegu) to learn from two regional-hubs (Republic of Korea and Pakistan) about implementation and use of the SDG-PSS. As the SDG-PSS is often associated with new approaches for finding evidence on the SDG 6 enabling environment, countries from Asia learned from the Korean approach to compile data and validate the evidence produced by the SDG-PSS through extensive consultations with water experts. During the regional workshop, participants highlighted the importance of nominating a focal point for national implementation of the tool and strengthening regional cooperation.


## MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTING SDG-PSS IN KOREA


The Ministry of Environment is the national entity involved in the implementation and use of the SDG-PSS. The ministry provided support and cooperation by defining the composition of expert pools and by coordinating workshops to collect SDG-PSS data. This started with a national workshop, held in 2018 and featured an in-depth discussion for each SDG 6 Indicator. To address data gaps highlighted by the SDG-PSS, interviews with key areas related experts were conducted. These interviews enabled stakeholders to produce enough data to cover the critical components of the tool. National coordination was a key factor in creating shared knowledge for effective use of the SDG-PSS, and third-party verification of data and evidence from water experts was critical to ensure the cohesive and effective use of the tool. While this verification was done by national statistics authorities, the challenge of collecting data on the national enabling environment was mitigated by revising data from existing policies and programs. Overall, 77 water and non-water professionals participated in several workshops in the process of using SDG-PSS.

[1] UNU-INWEH: United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health; UNOSD: the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development

## PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

Implementation of SDG-PSS has benefited Korea in two critical dimensions: (i) developing capacity and (ii) addressing Target 6.3 (water quality) and Target 6.4 (water use efficiency).

 **Capacity building:** SDG-PSS workshops significantly helped improve the understanding of SDG 6, especially in public sector environments. Challenges remain for the components “Gender Mainstreaming” and “Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience”, which are difficult to evaluate. Experience with the implementation and use of SDG-PSS highlights the need to overcome water-related data gaps and include the tool in high-level processes of national SDG 6 implementation.

 **Addressing Targets 6.3 and 6.4:** SDG-PSS helped address SDG 6 Target 6.3 (water quality) and 6.4 (water use efficiency). South Korea currently has the highest nitrogen-phosphorus balance in the OECD countries, which results in frequent algal blooms, and which also explains the increased attention to Targets 6.3 and 6.4. Given the already high-water stress and water pollution of total available water resources, Korea will need to make substantial efficiency gains in water use and water allocation as well as efforts to improve water quality to meet future water demands and maintain economic growth. Korea has already defined numerical goals for Indicator 6.3.1 and aims to achieve a sewage supply rate of 96.0% by 2025. However, there is little reliable data on Target 6.4. In this regard, SDG-PSS helped understand the specificities of this Target and stimulated the exploration of pathways that could be adopted to meet the challenging problem of missing data. The tool also helped increase understanding of other Indicator’s applications, such as water stress and water use efficiencies.

## PERSPECTIVES

The Republic of Korea is planning to find other mechanisms to produce more reliable data and to use SDG-PSS accordingly. The focus will be to gather stakeholders around every Indicator to acquire more accurate data and to increase awareness about the importance of producing and reporting high-quality data to achieve SDG 6.



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