

Protecting our water

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The first step for oceans would be to preserve once-flourishing ecosystems. Marine protected areas are one tool to combat further ecosystem decay and encourage regeneration. Biodiversity should be mainstreamed into other policy areas and the legal frameworks around it strengthened. And strong policies to limit pollution should be implemented and enforced, along with policies aimed at limiting consumption of non-recyclable plastics more generally.

Beyond reducing pollution, significant investment should be directed towards building and improving infrastructure for freshwater supply and sanitation, with an eye to nature-based solutions. New technologies can be harnessed to build this sustainable, greener infrastructure and improve water treatment processes.

While working to achieve these advancements, policymakers must also stay mindful of their consequences for daily life the world over. Good water management is a key building block of resilient and stable societies with lower levels of conflict. It also strongly influences social justice due to its interlinkages with poverty and gender equality. For example, African and Asian women travel an average of 6 kilometres daily—time that could’ve been spent at school, work or elsewhere.

Effective governance for all of these intersecting issues requires co-ordination between stakeholders across the public, private and non-profit sectors. As noted at World Water Week 2018, policymakers can push for corporate actors to set common standards. Action at all levels is especially necessary because water and ecosystems do not respect administrative and political boundaries. To address water-related problems with the urgency, care and co-ordination they require and deserve, stakeholders must work together towards shared solutions.

Given the enormity of their reach, water and ecosystem issues are more than just a drop in the policymaking ocean. As Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina J. Mohammed noted at World Water Week, the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), centred on water, is in fact “the docking station” of all other SDGs—the bedrock of human development.

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