

1st August, 2017

Mr Léo Heller
UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva

Re: Open letter to the WHO/UNICEF JMP from the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation on 28th July 2017

Dear Mr Heller,

On behalf of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), we would like to thank you for your letter referring to the recent JMP 2017 report “Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG baselines”, released on 12th July.

WHO and UNICEF established the JMP in 1990. It has published regular global updates on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and has been instrumental in developing norms to benchmark progress across countries and drawing attention to inequalities around the world. The WHO/UNICEF JMP was previously responsible for tracking Millennium Development Goal target 7c and is now responsible for global monitoring of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets related to WASH.

The JMP strategy (2016-2020) vision of “progressive realization of universal access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, and the reduction of inequalities in service levels by 2030” is closely aligned with the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, but while our mission is “to produce reliable estimates of national, regional and global progress on WASH to inform decision making by government, donor and civil society organisations”, human rights monitoring is beyond the mandate of the JMP.

The JMP approach to monitoring the SDG targets is nevertheless directly informed by the outstanding work of your mandate in recent years. International consultations convened by WHO and UNICEF recommended that global monitoring should progressively address the normative criteria of the human rights to safe water and sanitation, and the JMP has updated its service ladders to incorporate new information on the quality, availability and accessibility of services provided. WHO and UNICEF also support other types of monitoring including the GLAAS report, and human rights principles are central to wider strategies guiding our ongoing support to the implementation and monitoring of WASH programmes in over 150 countries.

The 2017 update is by far the most comprehensive global assessment of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene to date and includes a wealth of new information on the types of facilities people use and the levels of service they receive. The SDG baselines reveal previously undocumented disparities in access to basic handwashing facilities and significant inequalities in the accessibility, availability and quality of drinking water services and in safe management of excreta and wastewater. As you note these estimates and analysis will be invaluable for ongoing efforts to reduce inequalities in WASH services.

The SDGs have a much stronger focus on inequalities and the JMP global database has been further expanded to include new estimates by wealth quintile and by subnational region for over 80 countries. This is a major step forward but as you rightly note more needs to be done to ensure that no one is left behind. The JMP task force on inequalities identified a number of other priorities for future disaggregation including by individual and group characteristics. The lack of

disaggregated data remains a major constraint but the JMP 2016 snapshot on inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean illustrates the type of analysis that is possible where national data are available.

Monitoring the affordability of WASH services is very important but there is as yet no commonly agreed upon way to measure it. Furthermore data on household expenditure and WASH service levels typically come from different sources and are difficult to integrate. The JMP team is collaborating with the World Bank, academics and others to develop and test indicators that will enable more systematic and consistent monitoring of affordability in future but in the meantime data on affordability will continue to be analysed separately.

In this first report of the SDG period, the WHO/UNICEF JMP has focused primarily on establishing baseline estimates for all indicators for the year 2015. While annual rates of change have been calculated for basic water and sanitation services and for open defecation, most countries currently have insufficient data to produce robust estimates of trends for basic handwashing and for safely managed drinking water and sanitation services. As the availability of data for these new indicators improves the JMP will be better able to estimate whether countries are “on track” to achieve targets for universal access and also to assess progress in reducing inequalities between population sub-groups.

Finally, we would like to convey our appreciation for the ongoing engagement of your mandate with the work of the WHO/UNICEF JMP and look forward to continued close collaboration to enhance future monitoring of inequalities in drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

Yours sincerely

Sanjay Wijesekera

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