

Domestic water quantity, service level and health

Second edition

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Preface

The publication of the World Health Organization (WHO) *Domestic water quantity, service level and health* in 2003 attracted renewed attention to the importance of these factors for health, well-being and prosperity. In its 2003 General Comment 15, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights interpreted and comprehensively defined the right to water (UN, 2003). It listed availability, quality and accessibility of water as normative dimensions to judge water supply adequacy. WHO documents influenced the discussion on the human right to water – the first edition of this volume and the *Guidelines for drinking-water quality* are referenced in defining sufficient water quantity and safety, respectively, in General Comment 15. In 2010, 122 countries recognized the human right to water in United Nations Resolution 64/292 (UNGA, 2010a). A second resolution (Resolution 15/9) affirmed the legality of the right as derived from the right to an adequate standard of housing, and called Member States to take action towards realizing this right by maximizing their use of available resources (UNGA, 2010b).

In 2015, the 193 United Nations Member States approved Resolution 70/1 – Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – which laid out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA, 2015). The SDGs are intended to promote sustainable and equitable development, and eradicate extreme poverty. Under SDG Goal 6, Target 6.1 calls for universal and equitable access to water by 2030.

The formulation of the SDGs was influenced by the United Nations human rights framework, with explicit references to the human right to water in the Transforming our World document: “In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision. We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world ... where we reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and where there is improved hygiene ...” (UNGA, 2015, paragraph 7).

By linking development with the human rights framework, the SDGs address poverty reduction and inequality. For water, this means shifting the emphasis: from increasing the proportion of the population with access to water, to attaining universal access to water and ensuring the quality of services, including use of sufficient water for health and development.

The term “service level”, used in the first edition to signify proximity of access, is now interpreted by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene to include accessibility, availability and quality for monitoring SDG Target 6.1. Given the changes in preferred terminology, “service level” is no longer used in the second edition of this document to indicate proximity of access. This is replaced by the term “accessibility”, which is defined in this document.

In this second edition, new literature concerning water quantity, water accessibility and health is reviewed. The coverage has been extended to include the effects of water reliability, continuity and

price on water use. Updated guidance is provided on domestic water quantity and accessibility, and their relationship to health.

The second edition of *Domestic water quantity, service level and health* continues to provide evidence and guidance that will be useful to policy-makers, health regulators and practitioners. It concerns water accessibility, its effect on water use, and the effect of both on health. It recommends targets for domestic water supply to ensure beneficial health outcomes.

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