



2021 GLOBAL WATER POLICY REPORT

LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS



- The highest water-related risks countries face are from climate change and associated pressures on water supplies and worsening floods and droughts.
- The greatest challenges many national water leaders face are with integration and prioritisation of water issues within governments. Administrative problems of fragmented water institutions are of as much, if not greater, concern than factors such as public resistance to reforms.
- COVID-19 has not much affected the priority of water and sanitation services.
- Sustainable Development Goal 6 targets are 'challenging' or 'impossible' for many countries, with governance problems and lack of financing the main reasons for this.
- While groundwater is considered by many national water leaders to be essential to their country's future water supply, far fewer consider their groundwater is being used sustainably.

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WHY IS ACHIEVING THE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER FOR ALL SO DIFFICULT?

The inaugural Global Water Policy Report seeks to answer this question by identifying the key issues faced with improving water outcomes globally, as perceived through the eyes of people with national water leadership responsibility.

This report provides both a comparative perspective and opportunities to learn from others' experiences. In doing so, Water Policy Group hopes to provide a common understanding of these factors to assist governments to overcome them.

This report is based on the experiences and perspectives of people who have responsibility for achieving sustainable water for all in 88 countries of all regions with a combined population of over 6 billion people – 75 percent of the world's population.

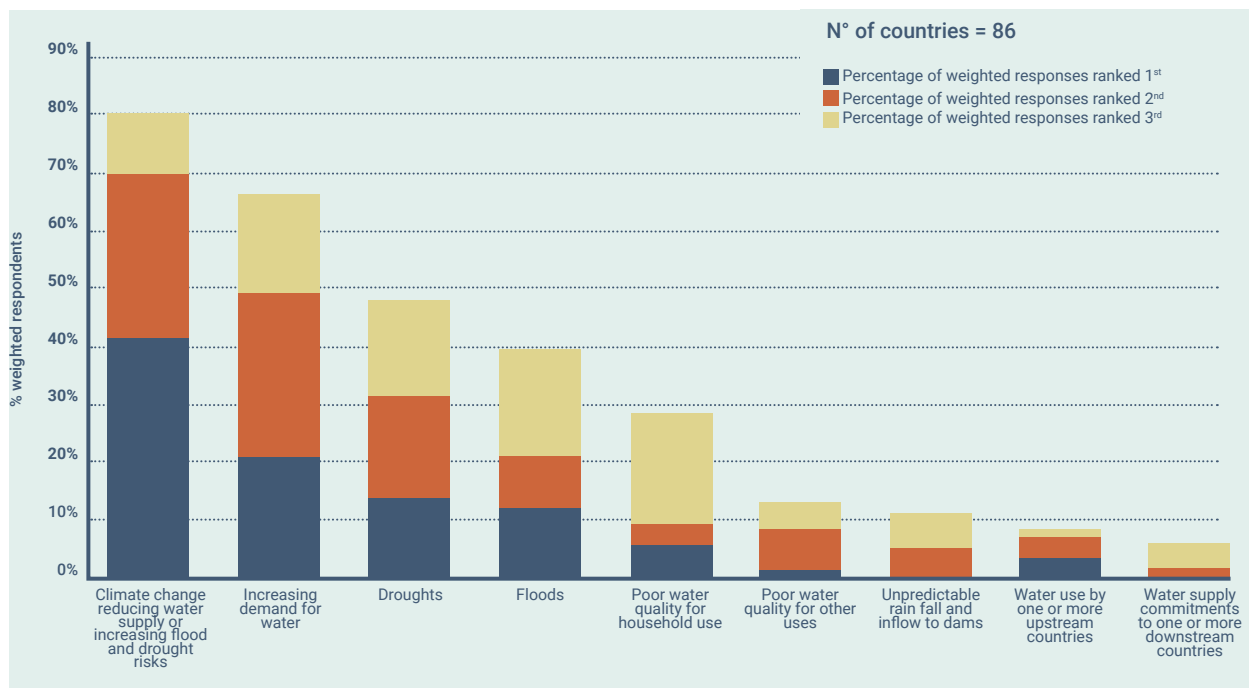
This is what they are saying:

CARING ABOUT WATER MEANS CARING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

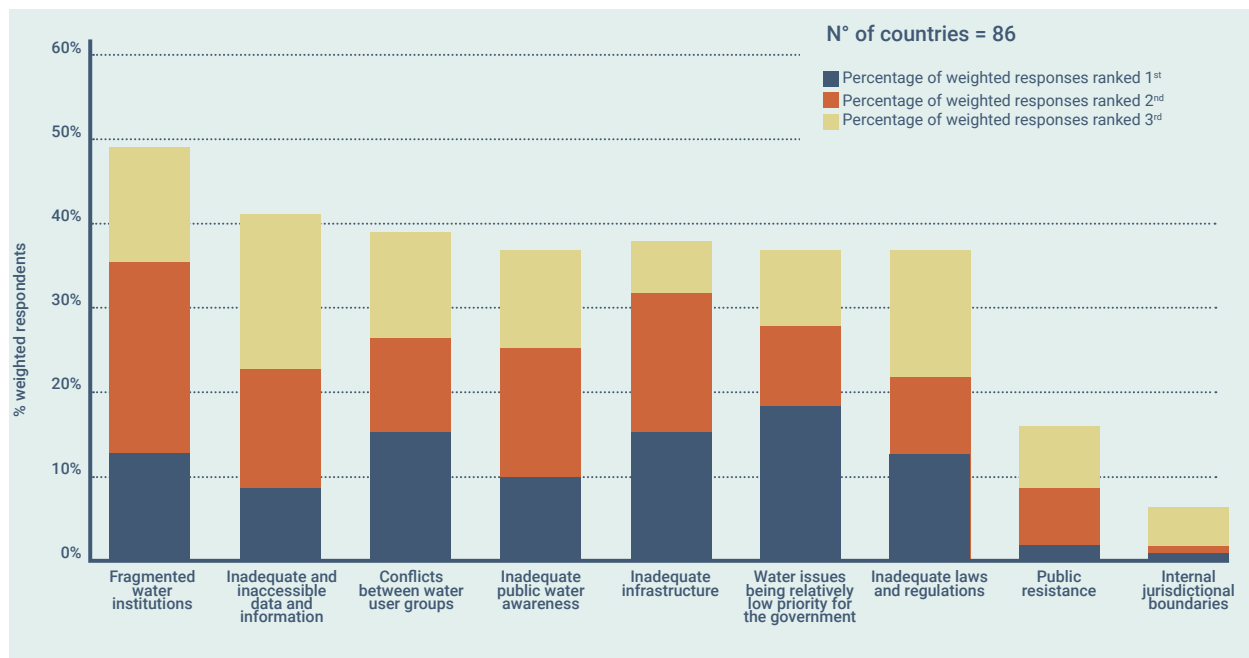
When national water leaders consider the risks their country faces, for most of the surveyed countries, their greatest concern is about climate change reducing water supply or worsening floods and droughts. Increasing demand for water, and more water-based disasters - all amplified by climate change - are also seen as very high risks.

MINISTER PERSPECTIVES

A recent (in the past 5 years) Minister of a country in the Northern Africa and Western Asia region describes risks: *"Drought constitutes the most important risk for [my country]. It has a huge impact on the economy and employment."*



When national water leaders are asked what are the top three challenges to maintaining or achieving good water management in their country, 'fragmented water institutions' is the challenge identified for most countries. If only the first ranked challenge is considered, 'water issues being a relatively low priority for the government' is of as much concern to them as 'fragmented institutions'



AGENDA 2030 TARGETS FOR WATER MAY BE OUT OF REACH FOR MANY COUNTRIES, AND ASSISTANCE WITH GOVERNANCE AND FINANCING MAY BE THE MOST USEFUL

National water leaders of most of the surveyed countries consider the majority of the SDG 6 targets to be 'challenging' or 'impossible' to achieve. This confirms the urgency given by the United Nations to supporting member states to implement SDG 6 through the SDG 6 Global Accelerator Framework - and may bring into question the realism of some of the targets.

'Lack of financing' is the reason most cited for difficulties in achieving the targets on drinking water, water use efficiency, water quality and water scarcity. 'Governance problems' is the most frequently cited obstacle to achieving targets on protecting ecosystems, integrated water resource management, local participation and transboundary cooperation.

On development assistance, there are very different perspectives between donor and recipient countries about the adequacy of current arrangements.

COVID-19 HAS NOT MUCH CHANGED WATER PRIORITIES

For most surveyed countries, national water leaders advise that while the COVID-19 pandemic has made water and sanitation services more urgent for them, overall government attention to water matters has not changed.

MINISTER PERSPECTIVES

A serving Minister of a country in the Latin America and Caribbean region describes another effect of COVID-19: "Spaces for participation with stakeholders were reduced."

SDG Target	SDG Target is 'Impossible or Challenging'				
	All Countries (n=88)	Responses for each Income Group			
		High (n=28)	Upper Middle (n=21)	Lower Middle (n=24)	Low (n=15)
Protecting/restoring water-dependent ecosystems	73%	56%	81%	80%	81%
Increasing water use efficiency	69%	42%	78%	80%	78%
Improved water quality	67%	44%	75%	73%	75%
Safe and affordable drinking water	58%	22%	75%	63%	75%
Implementing IWRM	58%	28%	67%	73%	67%
Impact of water scarcity	56%	23%	75%	63%	75%
Strengthening local participation	46%	28%	56%	50%	56%
Transboundary Cooperation	37%	21%	39%	34%	39%

Figures in red indicate increased proportions of countries finding the target 'impossible or challenging' compared to the all countries aggregate. Figures in light blue indicate decreased proportions of countries finding the target 'impossible or challenging' compared to the all countries aggregate.

GROUNDWATER IS IMPORTANT, AT RISK FROM UNSUSTAINABLE USE IN MANY PLACES, AND NEEDS MORE ATTENTION IN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

National water leaders of more than half of the countries surveyed consider groundwater to be essential to their country's future water supply. Despite this, national water leaders of only a quarter of surveyed countries believe their groundwater is being used sustainably in most locations within their countries. For another quarter of surveyed countries, national water leaders say groundwater is not being managed sustainably anywhere or they do not have enough information to know.

Overall, national water leaders of most of the surveyed countries consider the SDG 6 targets involving groundwater to be less difficult to achieve than for water resources as a whole. With groundwater, the targets rated as 'impossible' or 'most difficult' by the national water leaders of the most countries are those concerning water quality, ecosystems and integrated water resource management.

National water leaders of most surveyed countries identify the top three constraints and impediments to sound groundwater management as 'economic factors', 'cost and complexity of solutions' and 'inadequacy of regulations'.

Group	Number of Surveyed Countries	Importance of groundwater to a country's future water supplies			
		Essential	Very Important	Important	Not Important
All Countries	88	53%	35%	10%	2%
Income Group					
High Income	28	65%	21%	14%	–
Upper Middle	21	40%	48%	14%	1%
Lower Middle	24	66%	20%	7%	7%
Low	15	28%	64%	8%	–
Water Stress					
Low Stress	62	51%	38%	10%	–
Some Stress	21	61%	25%	11%	4%

Note – 5 countries did not have a water stress rating.