

Advanced Summary of Synthesis Report (Draft) – March 2013

Introduction

Last November, the UN launched an unprecedented series of discussions about securing human development through water. A rights-based approach to water informed the Rio+20 Conference held five months earlier. To give form and content to that approach, a unique collaboration – UN-Water, co-led by UNDESA and UNICEF, and co-hosted by Jordan, Liberia, Mozambique, Netherlands and Switzerland – organised an inclusive and bottom-up consultation process. Partners encouraged stakeholders from around the world to take stock of the lessons learnt from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to formulate the key global challenges in water to inform the post-2015 development framework in ways that are measurable, inter-generational, pragmatic, and rest on the smart and equitable use of water.



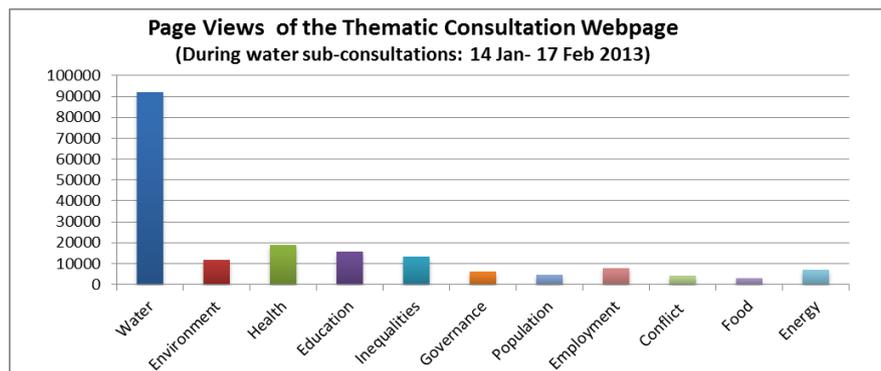
The Water Thematic Consultation combined complementary efforts and audiences. An online, web-based dialogue welcomed all stakeholders to offer a diverse perspective from fresh angles, including academia, civil society, end users, youth groups, and the private sector. Such a massive outreach effort would have been unmanageable before social media platforms eliminated distances between communities and leveled the hierarchies within society. But the effort came together quickly and yielded important outcomes. Countless e-discussions, online surveys, live video feeds and Q&A sessions empowered newer and younger voices to address priority issues with a special emphasis on inequalities in the field of water. Beyond the online platforms for discussion, the water consultation enabled complementary face-to-face dialogues in Monrovia, Liberia; Tunis, Tunisia; Geneva, Switzerland; Mumbai, India and linked up to several other meetings taking place in the context of the consultation. The conversations culminated in a High-Level Meeting on World Water Day in The Hague to round up discussions and sharpen key messages to be taken forward over the summer in the different processes shaping the emerging development framework.

Outreach

The Post-2015 Thematic Consultation on Water went through three stages. Starting in November 2012 it expanded outward through social media, face-to-face meetings, and interactive web platforms to provoke, engage, and amplify thousands of diverse new voices and perspectives from 4,451 people in 185 UN Member States. It then contracted inward to distill, incorporate and organize these responses and debates into one concise document. In the final stage, it will synthesize cross-cutting lessons from past experience to recommend a pragmatic and equitable development path forward, consisting of a vision with integrated goals and specific targets.

The outreach for consultations continues to generate a massive global and diverse response. By any measure – 45,370 unique users generated 143,971 total page views, 1,171 website comments, 3,000 tweets, 885 Facebook likes, 1,906 Facebook posts, comments and stories shared, including 190 from a youth discussion week on our Facebook page– the world's focus on water eclipsed comparable attention on the other ten Thematic Consultations. Water's dominance should hardly surprise. Other themes are as important *as* water, but all remain underpinned *by* water. Linkages are common between two or more themes, but water alone is inextricably woven into the fabric of every single one.

Now recognized as an absolute and central prerequisite to development, water justifies integrated targets, with measurable indicators. To clarify and explore water's diverse role, and following the orientation given by Rio+20, the discussions followed three interdependent dimensions – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Water Resource Management; Wastewater Management and Water Quality – the sub-



thematic tributaries of a single vital current.

What have we heard? Sub-consultation on WASH

Water is life. Yet 780 million people still do not have access to an improved water supply and many more do not enjoy sustainable and safe drinking water. A stunning 2.5 billion people lack access to improved sanitation. The question is not *if* the world can fulfil universal access to **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)**. It can, and will. The question is how and by when.

The start of the WASH sub-consultation discussed **aspirational objectives** of a new framework for WASH and set the stage for the discussions over the next four weeks. Those discussions enriched the two-year Joint Monitoring Programme of UNICEF and WHO, broad consultative expert process on new targets and indicators for monitoring of WASH post-2015. The first week considered the suggested ambitious target to provide universal access to safe and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene – targeting the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in particular. Services must reach everybody within a reasonable time horizon. It is no longer enough to bring services to

“Water is life and must not be used to trade with human life, while sanitation is dignity and must be integrated in national constitutions and legislations.” –Priscilla, answering “What needs to be done to reduce inequities between rich and poor?”

households; water and sanitation must also be in place in equally critical schools and health centres. Vital hygiene issues, such as hand washing and menstrual hygiene management, respectively help determine public health and gender equality. WASH does not lack the technologies to quickly build a pit latrine, drill a borehole, provide soap bottle; rather, the challenge is to ensure these systems are custom designed with community ownership and are built to last decades with reliable daily operation, maintenance and use. This far more difficult task requires government leadership particularly at local levels, and a process-oriented approach that shifts social norms and behaviours for lasting change. In addition, WASH sustainability has complex dimensions, linked ‘upstream’ to water resources and ‘downstream’ to wastewater management. Devolving risks and responsibilities to local or household levels may improve outcomes, but only with support from external institutions.

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In the second week, 83 contributors could easily imagine **Schools without WASH**; several still live with them on a daily basis. A school is more than classrooms and desks. They are a microcosm of their larger community and can often serve as a model for progress. Providing students with access to WASH facilities has been shown to boost attendance, increase achievement and promote equity. However half of low-

income country schools lack WASH services, increasing the risk of disease, drop-outs, and death. Everyone loses, but girls suffer most.

Discussions on **WASH and** governance revealed that institutional capacity is fragmented; roles and responsibilities within government structures are not clear; there is inadequate management of resources and weak regulation. Mechanisms are needed which hold political leaders and Governments accountable for fulfilling WASH-related promises. Consumer's rights should be strengthened through legislation, and communities empowered to demand better services from their governments. There is also need for scrutiny as to where development funds actually end up.

The fourth week explored the links between **WASH and Environmental Sustainability**. It clarified direct, two-way opportunities for development and conservation organizations to integrate policies, plans and projects that combine protection of nature with access to WASH. Healthy freshwater systems improve the reliability, quantity and quality of water for drinking, cooking, irrigation and other uses. Conversely, well-planned sanitation programs protect freshwater ecosystems. Joint advocacy programs can maximize community participation, save funds, build synergies, and amplify the combined voice.

Water and sanitation remain a humane and moral imperative. But the final week's discussions on **WASH and Economic Development** made a compelling bottom-line case for governments to invest in water. Without adequate WASH investments, countries grow poorer, losing on average 1.5% of GDP per year. Children grow sicker, miss school, and erase another 5% GDP per year. And in terms of value, WASH yields a \$4.30 return on a \$1 investment. These estimates are conservative; they exclude revenue from increased tourism (people on holiday don't seek pit latrines), robust fisheries and increased property values.

Emerging Recommendations

- Universal access to safe and sustainable water supply, sanitation and hygiene should be the next global target for WASH.
- We need ambitious new targets that build on the successes of the current MDGs and address the remaining shortfalls and unfinished business.
- We should address hygiene access, including hand washing and menstrual hygiene management, which are critical determinants of public health and gender equity.
- Access to WASH services should be secured beyond households and include other settings particularly schools, health facilities and other public installations.
- Inequalities in access to WASH should progressively be reduced.
- Increased investments in WASH are needed to bring about multiple social and developmental benefits and create incentives for more sectors to work together in an integrated manner.
- Sustainability of WASH services must be at the heart of any new agenda.

What have we heard? Sub-consultation on Water Resources Management

The **Water Resources Management** sub-consultation explored where, how and why water stress will intensify over the coming decades. As countries develop, increasing volumes of water are allocated for energy, food and industry. To achieve sustainable water development and promote needed investments,

an integrated approach to water resources management needs to be implemented. This must ensure a transparent, equitable and sustainable balance of water use that satisfies humans needs – economic and social – as well as ecosystem requirements.

“Water and energy are so intimately linked that actions to increase access to one of them will inevitably have effects on the other. If we are wise we can tap in to the synergies present and increase access to both. If unwise we may trap ourselves in a downward spiral.” – Jens, in “(Em)Powering a thirsty world” sub-consultation.

All energy production requires water. Conversely, it takes energy to transport, treat and heat water as well as to build, operate and maintain water systems. Few fully grasp or appreciate the **Energy/Water** linkages, but they are real and rise with development. Worldwide energy uses 8% of all freshwater withdrawals, but rich countries divert up to 44%. The fast route to efficiency is raising prices on water and power. But this is politically fraught; as both are regarded as basic human needs, often offered free, or subsidized, both to families

and farms. Without better valuation of water and understanding of its link to energy we are ill equipped to deal with a warming world.

Most **Climate Change Related Risks** – urban heat waves, melting snowpack, longer droughts, increased wildfires, drying reservoirs, rising sea levels, desiccating soils - involve **water**. Even regions slammed by storms can't use the extra runoff; to absorb extreme unpredictable floods, dam operators must empty reservoirs. Increased climate variability means increased water variability, and developing countries are most vulnerable. Water is also critical for climate change mitigation, as many efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to sustain carbon storage in plants and soil rely on water availability. While the political world still does not understand the need for adaptation, water managers can work with the right mix of adaptation and mitigation efforts, share knowledge, and build long-term resilience by investing in appropriate infrastructure.

Water for Nature; Nature for Water showed how water comes through and from nature – which stores, conveys, cools and filters it – so, in order to secure these environmental services, institutions should invest in ‘natural infrastructure.’ Natural infrastructure complements augments or replaces traditional (and expensive) reservoirs, dams, levees and canals. Water management can't treat nature as secondary to development, rather good management can empower people to negotiate integrated solutions that offer a high return. The week explored priorities, like how balancing allocation of water for nature can help ensure water or food security.

Each day each human must convert at least 3,000 liters of **Water for Food**. To feed 7-9 billion people, careless decisions could dry up aquifers and streams. Already, 40-50 percent of all nutrition – along with half of all water embedded within food – gets lost in the increasingly long food chain moving crops out from rural farms into urban mouths. Yet efficiency gains from field to fork save water and money. The ‘Green Revolution’ warded off hunger due to finite arable land; today's limits imposed by water call for a Blue Revolution’ that is smart about what to grow, how to irrigate, who demands what, and how to share.

Water for Peace recognized that water remains an incentive for coordinated policy, bilateral trade, shared management, and peaceful cooperation between countries. International water law, including two global Conventions – 1997 UN Water courses Convention and the 1992 UNECE Water Convention, provided the frameworks for cooperation. However more efforts are needed to facilitate transboundary agreements and joint institutions for all basin and aquifers. Furthermore, progress is complicated by demographic shifts and risk multipliers of a changing climate. The quest for water rarely provokes conflict across borders, but

unequal access to water often sparks violence within them. Consequently, the public wants to be more involved in order to have a say in the development of transboundary cooperation.

The water crisis is really a governance crisis. The dialogue on **Governing & Managing Water Resources for Sustainable Development** suggested the crisis is less global than “multi-local” and there is no single blueprint to solve local problems. Governance reforms require a focus on soft reforms as well as on hard investments. What works in one place may not translate to another, which has different needs. An assessment is needed of the types of governance architecture that can deliver on sustainable water development. Stakeholder voice and transparency are important ingredients in effective decision-making on water allocations. An effective water governance system would apply the principles of transparency, accountability and cooperation. This will be crucial in order to promote the needed investments for developing appropriate infrastructure.

Emerging Recommendations

- To achieve sustainable development and promote needed investments, an integrated approach to water resources management must be implemented and water governance systems improved.
- We must ensure water is used in ways that are socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically beneficial by using water efficiently and balancing needs.
- We should include economically viable measures for the protection and sustainable management of water resources into adaptation, mitigation and resilience strategies at all levels.
- We need to establish strong and long-term transboundary cooperation, relying on sound legal and institutional arrangements, such as joint basin governing institutions.
- We need to value and protect water-related ecosystems to draw economic benefits as the return on investment is high.

What have we heard? Sub-consultation on Wastewater Management and Water Quality

For millennia, small agrarian populations could treat rivers as free sewers, but seven billion mostly urban and industrialized individuals mean we all live downstream, in danger. **Wastewater Management and Water Quality** discussions explored why the dilution of pollution is no longer a solution, and reconsidered our uses, treatment, value and even meaning, of “waste.”

When the MDGs were agreed the world was predominantly rural; today most live in cities. That rapid shift will increasingly govern the production and use of **Wastewater in an Urbanizing World** as the majority of

“Any public health initiative has to include an education and awareness component. The other solution is to empower individuals, especially women, at the local level to encourage community ownership of projects, and to make the projects self-sustaining.” – *Raji, on “Wastewater and Health”*.

future population growth will take place in urban areas in developing countries that already have poor infrastructure. Discharge and polluted surface runoff carry water-borne disease, degrade natural systems and has material economic impacts. To address impacts and build capacity you need political will. Alas, politicians rarely act to provide wastewater infrastructure because often benefits are felt after their “political time” and are most visible downstream. Worse, those most affected by bad waste-water management

generate almost no taxes and even less influence. Yet urban areas represent an opportunity in disguise, if leaders can turn liabilities to assets, to introduce sustainable approaches.

Everyone and everything lives downstream, but ultimately the accumulated impacts fall on marine ecosystems. **Impacts of Wastewater on Oceans – The Nitrogen and Phosphorus challenge** linked degradation of marine ecosystems to 90 % of wastewater that flows untreated into coastal areas. The resulting excessive nutrient loads cause eutrophication, and create dead zones, that erode the natural resilience and food sources that support billions. As protein grows more expensive, partnerships to replenish fisheries are looking upstream to slow and stop pollution at its source

An interactive panel streamed live highlighted that **Wastewater reuse – Development and Innovation** remains a complex issue and solutions need to be developed in relation to local circumstances and requirements. Most politicians are unmotivated, unconcerned, and uninformed about wastewater and water re-use. Decision-makers will take action when offered value propositions and potential solutions that show how reuse technologies bring effective, lean, and robust economic benefits. Rather than quantify a fixed outcome, targets must improve the quality of the reuse process, with attention to cultural norms, safety of use, awareness raising and capacity building.

Almost all uses of water cause some form of pollution and loss of quality. Dirty runoff always flows into and pollutes other waterways. The strong case for **Collecting and Treating Urban Water after use** is not only that it protects downstream users, but that it can be used again for other purposes. In moral terms, it was unanimously 'urgent' to reduce the wastewater pollution that are among the leading causes of water borne diseases and degradation of ecosystems. This has material economic consequences, and will become a huge problem in the future if not dealt with.

It can do so, if we reframe our escalating crises as an **Economic Opportunity in Wastewater and Water Quality**. Right now politicians regard pollution from untreated wastewater as purely negative, a danger to confront, top down, as a moral imperative, and at their peril. But the risk reveals a potential reward. From another angle wastewater management processes have the capacity to transform 'pollution' into assets that smart leaders voluntarily embrace from the bottom up. Scale matters. Sound management policies and fair enforcement are best approached as local issues which require local action for local impacts and local rewards. Rewards go beyond public health or natural resilience to boost economic growth, create jobs, provide business certainty, increase revenues, attract investors and improve lifestyles and wellbeing.

Inequalities have been identified as a deficiency of the present MDG framework, often services are not reaching the most deprived and marginalised groups. A 2010 UN General Assembly resolution explicitly recognized the **human right to safe drinking water and sanitation**.

Emerging Recommendations

- To protect water quality, targets to prevent polluting substances entering water bodies need to be devised and implemented.
- To both protect people and nature from the pollution, used water and wastewater requires collection and treatment before it is returned to nature.
- Wastewater needs to be considered as a resource and therefore policies, investments and practices for reuse and recycling of water need to be implemented.

Synthesis Conclusions

The full report distils thousands of outreach responses down to hundreds of valuable contributions. Readers of the entire document will find rich insights referenced therein. For those with time constraints, this synthesis will focus on the more prominent, recurring recommendations to emerge from the consultation and could shape the Post-2015 Development Agenda:

- Water is a key determinant in all aspects of social, economic and environmental development and must therefore be a central focus of any post-2015 framework for poverty eradication and global sustainable development.
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Water Resources Management and Wastewater Management and Water Quality are all indispensable elements for building a water-secure world.
- If water issues are not addressed adequately in the Post-2015 Development Agenda this would not only mean a water crisis, but several other crises in water-dependent sectors. Water security will be of growing importance on the political agenda.
- Governments play a key role in securing water for competing demands; however the quest for a water-secure world is a joint responsibility and can only be achieved through water cooperation at local, national, regional and global level and through partnerships with a multitude of stakeholders ranging from the citizens to policy makers to the private sector.
- Building water-related capacity development, both at the individual and institutional levels, will be fundamental in the realization and implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Fresh water is an absolute prerequisite to attain vital economic, employment, health, educational, agriculture/food, energy benefits; to maintain ecosystems services; and to support resilience to climate change. **Thus water must feature prominently in the new development framework. It must be a standalone goal with clear targets and measurable indicators, so that its fundamental role in support of life, economic development and well-being can be addressed properly in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.**