



# Water for Nature, Nature for Water

## Summary of the Online Consultation Questions

The water that keeps us healthy and fed, and that powers industry and the economy, comes to us via nature. Ecosystem services deliver water and benefits for development that in return rely on water. *The Water for Nature, Nature for Water* sub-consultation asked how healthy freshwater systems contribute to the development of healthy societies and human well-being; it asked how to balance allocation of water for nature while ensuring water security; it asked how to prioritize ecosystem restoration in the development agenda given the wide range of benefits it delivers; and it asked what kind of target and indicator is needed for water for nature in the post-2015 development agenda.

## Key Messages and Responses Received

Responses to the consultation questions came from a variety of stakeholders: international and governmental organizations, private sector, research groups, academia, and individuals. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of water, comments within each discussion thread often addressed issues across the range of topics addressed in the sub-consultation. The following key messages and issues were identified from the responses.

### Making Multiple Benefits from Ecosystems Explicit

*Ecosystems provide multiple benefits for development, but these are not well understood in the development sector.* There was agreement that understanding of the links and range of benefits coming from healthy ecosystems is growing within the water community, as evidenced by the recently released TEEB report on the value of water and ecosystems. A greater effort is needed however to make this knowledge available and understood outside the water sector, particularly in the development community who rely upon economic and developmental indicators to evaluate the value of services. It was acknowledged that individuals and society at large rely heavily on the benefits that ecosystems provide but they often fail to realize this dependence. This led to the next key message in the consultation.

### Communication and Visibility of the Ecosystem Values

*Greater efforts are needed to inform and educate the public on the benefits of ecosystems for development, and to then use valuations of nature's water service in decision making on water security.* Better information and better tools were a key demand of the consultation process. This requires a host of strategies at different levels: decision-makers need evidence-based policy and economic valuations for water and for ecosystems, water users need valuation tools and technical skills, and the public need clear and simple value-based information. Reports and briefings to clearly communicate these topics are needed. The highly publicised launch of the TEEB report was a good example of how important it is to emphasize the value water has on a wide range of ecosystems and the services they provide to development. There is a clear opportunity to use results from this type of analysis now to make available information and tools that stakeholders and institutions can use to better incorporate nature's water services in decisions.



### **More Collaborative Decision-making**

*For sharing arrangements for water to incorporate nature, better platforms, tools and institutional capacities are needed for collaborative decision-making (multi-stakeholder platforms, participatory processes, collaborative learning processes, etc.).* A number of comments pointed to innovations in collaborative modelling and cross-communication in multi-stakeholder environments, such as the Great Rivers Partnership (GRP) and Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS). Institutions, such as river basin organizations, provide a natural home for these activities and provide legitimacy. With the right facilitation they can build collaborative decision-making at multiple scales in river basins in which people can build and negotiate the integration of nature in development solutions.

### **Economic and Financial Innovation for Natural Infrastructure**

*The development agenda should incorporate the economic case for investing in ecosystems and for restoration of critical water-related ecosystems, including rivers and wetlands.* There was a consistent message coming from respondents for greater emphasis on economic valuation of ecosystem services and innovative tools for restoration activities. As stated earlier, clear, relevant, and user-friendly tools for valuing the benefits of ecosystems are needed, including at sub-national and national levels. The TEEB report made a significant contribution in this regard. Gaps still remain in linking the values and benefits of nature's water services to the decision-making process. Contributors therefore called in particular for more innovative approaches to valuing and costing of restoration projects. Floodplain restoration was given as an example of a natural solution delivering a range of benefits to prevent and mitigate extreme events that however often lacks public awareness and priority with decision-makers during the planning process.

### **Implementing IWRM and Potential Indicators**

*Implementing IWRM should have a high priority because when it is done effectively it incorporates the process of making trade-offs over water needs, including sharing water with nature.* Moreover, applying the available methods and tools for effectively, efficiently and equitably integrating the water needs of people and nature directly supports effective implementation of IWRM at local, regional, and national levels. In concert with IWRM principles, potential indicators for measuring water for nature included identifying environmental water requirements, groundwater abstraction levels, and biodiversity metrics, among many others. Tracking the number of water allocation decisions that include ecosystems was an interesting comment and fits well into the IWRM framework. This indicator combined with the percentage of usable freshwater that is governed by collaborative multi-stakeholder processes or institutions, such as RBOs or MSPs, could be the outline of an effective development indicator for water for nature.

### **Poll Results**

A poll was posted during the consultation week. There were 94 responses. The question posed was: "To succeed, the post 2015 development agenda for water must include the maintenance and restoration of nature's water services." Responses indicated that (2%) of respondents chose a) I disagree: nature does not contribute to water security, (2%) chose b) I disagree: we shouldn't be concerned about managing ecosystems until after people's needs are met, **(83%)** chose c) *I agree: nature's water services work alongside engineering and good governance to make development more sustainable, equitable and effective*, and (13%) chose d) I agree: if we could only look after nature, development would be sustainable.



## Key issues for follow-up

The sub-consultation *Water for Nature, Nature for Water*, highlighted key issues for the future of water in the post-2015 development agenda. Gaps in knowledge, awareness, and skills among development leaders, water professionals, water users, stakeholders, and the general public were highlighted. Moreover, results from the consultation illustrated that there are known solutions for water security that incorporate natural infrastructure, but they are not yet widely enough known or used in decision making in development. These solutions enhance efficiency, effectiveness and equity while providing a catalyst for innovation and engagement across a range of stakeholders. A key issue going forward is not only to fill known gaps, but to build awareness and disseminate effective natural solutions that already exist and are delivering benefits. There has been substantial progress incorporating water for ecosystems over the last 15 years. Now is the time to articulate a set of development goals that will guide and track progress for the next 15 years, ensuring no one gets left behind and water and nature are not left out.