

Intervention by Jack Moss of AquaFed in the briefing on:

## Targeting Water in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Sponsored by UNECE, the Government of Switzerland and UN Water, at the  
World Meteorological Organisation in Geneva.

14 March 2014

*Note: this is the full version of the prepared text that was shortened and adapted due to the time constraints of the actual session.*

### 1. Introduction

I consider myself very fortunate to have been working on this very important issue with UN Water. I am here representing AquaFed, the International Federation of Private Water Operators, and also the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, both of which are members of the Global Business Alliance for Post-2015.

I hope that my varied experience will enable me to make a constructive contribution to today's discussion. As a partner of UN Water, I would like to address my remarks to the member states present here and also to UN Water itself.

As a Geographer, I was trained to see interconnections and diverse parameters as a whole. As a building project manager, I know that it is necessary to start a construction from the foundations, proceed through the structure and install the services. It is only then that you can complete the finishes. You cannot do the penthouse flats or the executive suite before you have the foundations in place, even if your client is interested only in the top floor flat or the corner office. I will come back to this later.

In my daily job at AquaFed, I work in the unusual business of the private sector in the delivery of public services. I have also had the good fortune to have been involved in business, water and sustainable development with the World Business Council for Sustainable development more or less from the beginning. I will also come back to that later. So I can look at water from several different angles.

First however, I want to look at how these things fit together in the context of the post 2015 development agenda.

### 2. Water in the post 2015 development agenda

#### a. UN Water's role and task

The first thing is for UN Water to work on the issues in an integrated view from the "technicians" point of view. This is to enable the various agencies and partners to come together and develop the ideas and information that support member states in making complex political decisions.

In this context we would like to recognise the very significant achievement of UN Water in putting together these recommendations. It is important to note the integrated water cycle approach they have taken. This is exactly what Manuel Thurnhofer meant when he talked about “Big Water” and “Big Sanitation” in his presentation this morning. This integrated approach brings together four key aspects of water cycle and water services plus the cross cutting “glue” of governance. It has been a challenge and the work to get to this point, even if there are some minor details that could be improved, is a major accomplishment.

Now what’s next? We see three major tasks ahead.

- i) To help member states and other stakeholders know and understand the content of, and logic behind, these proposals.
- ii) To work out how to help the negotiators
- iii) To see where and how to refine the work in the light of the experience of the above and to start to anticipate the needs of implementation.

We also need to avoid the “Danger of Divergence” and to make sure that UN Water continues to speak with one voice for all the agencies. It must ensure that there are no diverging or conflicting positions by continuing to find coherent answers and agreement on apparently diverging interests. Agencies must also avoid the temptation to “go it alone”.

## **b. Water in coherent SDG framework**

As has already been mentioned by other speakers, we need to find a structure to provide order in this complexity. As has already been said, water is one of the “fundamentals” of sustainable development. It provides the platform on which the services of social and economic infrastructure can be built and these in turn will make it possible to achieve the desired outcome of well-being and poverty alleviation.

I will come back to this later, but before doing so a few words on the role of business might be appropriate. Where does business come in?

## **3. Business, Water, and Post 2015 development agenda**

Business can be seen as the action arm of societies and economies (now global society and global economy). In this view, business is complementary to the public governance arm and the society that needs products and services. How do we play our role and how do we interact with these other arms of society?

Water has always been a high priority for business, though not always specifically seen as such. Many businesses are located where they are because of water. In WBCSD we have a slogan “No water, no business”. More recently we have added “No water, no energy – no energy, no water”.

For many years businesses have been reducing their water needs and improving water use efficiency. Water productivity has increased in key industries by many orders of magnitude, paper, steel, petrochemicals, etc. all provide good examples. Water service operators have

improved performance and reduced water losses considerably. Businesses have developed technologies to achieve these results and many of these are now readily available to enable new industries and new infrastructure to start from a base of higher efficiency than their predecessors. Technologies and know-how are also readily available for transfer to countries that need them for development.

Water is now seen more often as a key part of the whole product life cycle and is being built into product design and product use. Now we are seeing the product life cycle being built into the water cycle.

In thinking about the post-2015 development agenda, both WBCSD and the Global Compact have produced visions, architectures and action plans that place water right in the centre. If I had been able to show you slides I would have shown you these, but you can find them on the AquaFed web site ( <http://www.aquafed.org/page-5-123-44.html> ) and from there links to their source.

Business recognises that water resources in many places are facing un-sustainable use and this picture is degrading rapidly.

Businesses now see water risk as one of the most important (Ranking at #3 and playing a large role in #6 of the top 10 global risks. (See the World Economic Forum annual risk survey: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GlobalRisks\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalRisks_Report_2014.pdf) ).

Water service operators identify stress on resources, pollution of resources and lack of investment in infrastructure as most serious threats to service continuity. See the EIU/Oracle survey ( <http://digitalresearch.eiu.com/water-for-all/> )

Business organisations like AquaFed and WBCSD have been playing an active role in the development of ideas by participating in events such as the Budapest Water Summit.

#### **4. The Political Landscape**

Now if we turn to the current political landscape, what do we see? Water is a politically weak sector. Water is everywhere and therefore it ends up being nowhere in most high-level policy making.

But water has a very powerful nature. When we ignore it, it has a devastating capacity to call us to order. Water events change political outcomes very quickly. You only have to look at the current difficulties for David Cameron in the UK, even though the floods have actually been pretty well managed. Water events can also change economic performance. For example, agricultural and industrial outputs have been impacted for several years by the effects of floods or droughts in many key locations.

The negotiations over the Post-2015 Development Agenda that have now started will involve very difficult choices and these will have to be made on the basis of limited understanding by negotiators who have to balance many divergent interests.

Our job, both as business and through UN Water, is to help these people reach the best possible outcome.

The concept of SDGs is a good one. Let us remember that the structure of Goals, Targets and Indicators should be designed to drive action. The results of the negotiation must be practical and drive real action on the ground. From this point of view the Targets and Indicators may be more important than the Goals themselves.

The demands and pressures for Goals, Targets and Indicators are enormous and diverse and it is impossible that all of them can be included. It is therefore necessary to find a structure that by taking the smallest number of key issues will carry all the rest with them.

This is why we propose an architecture that starts by building from the “foundation” and platform of vital natural resources, which support all forms of life - air, water, land, energy, food and absorption of waste created by using these resources. On this base the “services” that sustain societies and economies, - public health, education, employment, housing, transport, trade etc. can be built.

The “finishings” that we are all aiming for, - poverty alleviation and well-being, are far more likely to be reached if we take this approach than if we use a disparate shopping list of goals and targets that are chosen for their political correctness or for short-term facility.

We need to concentrate on the basics, the “must haves”, if we are to succeed in meeting our aspiration of a “World we Want.

This is why we have argued consistently against “stand alone” goals and stress that water is so important that it must have a “dedicated goal” that is interlinked with other fundamental goals, particularly energy and food. This goal needs to be recognised as being vital to the “next tier” of service and infrastructure goals that can open the way to poverty alleviation and well-being, including all the attributes that go with those such as equality and respect for human rights.

We think that this is entirely consistent with the “integrating approach” proposed just now by Colombia. It would help the integrating approach to structure the way it clusters the Targets in a robust and coherent way and avoid the risk of unstructured groupings. It would avoid the confusion and dilution that Manuel Thurnhofer explained so clearly with his “spaghetti” slide.

## 5. Conclusion

United we stand

### a. United within UN Water

In UN Water, we need to continue to work together to sharpen the proposals and particularly the indicators. We need to listen carefully to questions and concerns from the negotiators and find answers for them as they come up.

To maintain our credibility, we need to concentrate on speaking with a united voice. UN Water has done a remarkable job of setting out a common position. It would be disastrous to weaken this now with dissenting voices. If we still have difficulties and differences, and there are likely to be some, we should work them out internally and not put forward dissenting or even nuanced differences as this will destroy the bigger whole.

As partners to UN Water, business and our other civil society colleagues may have a little more liberty to advocate that the UN Structures themselves. Let us work out together how we do this for the best.

We all need to work on showing the benefits of taking the actions we propose and the costs of inaction. The balance of the water equation is undoubtedly very positive as Federico Properzi pointed out. It is well worth taking this action.

## **b. United within sustainable development**

We need to reach out to the other specialist areas in these discussions on a sustainable future. We need to build bridges that allow two-way traffic between different specialist areas. We need to recognise that different specialists use different visions and language, even when talking about the same things.

We should not reduce the specialisation of the specialists, but work to help them to understand the inter-linkages and inter-actions so that they can co-operate better.

## **c. United within the restraints of natural resources**

Water is one of the absolute natural resources. It may be renewable if we behave properly, but it is not replaceable. Our responsibility is to help the policy makers to see this and to protect water in its life sustaining role into the future.

This is no longer a choice, it is a necessity.

This is why in business we are calling for a dedicated goal for water that is linked with other goals.

Water is now too important to be brushed aside.



*Response made to a comment from the audience on the importance of data and the costs that collecting data could involve.*

It is absolutely right that lack of data is an important issue, but if we make too much of an issue of the cost of data we will create serious barriers to progress. In business, we know that good management is only possible with good data. We also know that good

management creates good data. The opposite is also the case. Bad management is a result of lack of data and does not create good data to work from. Good data is therefore the product of good management and the benefits of good data almost always outweigh the cost of collecting it.

There is also the question of the need to be very careful with the definitions we use. For example the use of the indicator “improved”, as a poor proxy to measure water safety, has led to claims that the MDG Target for safe drinking water has been met. It has not. All that has been met is the indicator. This is obscuring the fact that billions of people still do not have access to safe water on a reliable basis.

I have been working specially on the wastewater and water quality part of the UN Water proposals. The reported figure of 80% or more of wastewater being discharged without treatment is a very dubious figure, because nobody really knows. This is because the question of wastewater has largely been ignored by policy makers. Because of this it is going to be difficult to demonstrate the real situation. Producing a meaningful set of indicators and a monitoring system will be a real and urgent challenge.

When it comes to the even bigger challenge of managing nutrient pollution, which comes mainly from agriculture and is probably by far the biggest threat to water resources and water quality, we are even more in the dark. This is very serious, because we know that facing the challenges of negotiating issues related to agriculture is usually very difficult, involving questions of national importance but with significant international implications. It is going to be very challenging to help the negotiators when we have so little data to go on. However, this is one of the most serious issues surrounding water and its relationship with the agricultural production of the food, feed, fibre and fuel that future populations are going to need. We need to focus a great deal of effort on this challenge. If we let it drop because we cannot find a practical indicator and monitoring process we will be failing future generations in a very serious way.