

Guidelines on Partners' Engagement

The Terms of Reference of UN-Water state that “advancing the implementation of UN-Water’s complex and ambitious international agenda is a collective responsibility and challenge which calls for coordinated action – beginning with the UN system but also progressively involving other concerned ‘non-traditional’ partners and stakeholders, including among them organizations from public and private sectors, civil society and labour – towards a global, comprehensive effort.” The Terms of Reference identify the need for the United Nations system to work with partners in relation to policy development and implementation and, in particular, in thematic initiatives.

The number of Partners has steadily increased with two or three applications being accepted annually in recent years. Nonetheless, UN-Water Members and Partners have been concerned that this partnership has not been as effective as it might be or that it has not satisfied the expectations of Partners or of Members.

To strengthen Partners’ engagement in UN-Water, the UN-Water Senior Programme Managers decided at the 17th UN-Water Meeting (Stockholm, August 2012) to establish a Working Group on Partners’ Engagement to draft (i) guidelines on the role of Partners and their expected contributions to the work of UN-Water and (ii) guidelines on how UN-Water can improve the way it engages Partners.

The Working Group on Partners’ Engagement was coordinated by Nicholas Bonvoisin, replacing Francesca Bernardini (both of UNECE). The Working Group comprised Josefina Maestu (Coordinator of UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication), Reza Ardakanian (Director of UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development), Bert Diphorn (UN-HABITAT), Zafar Adeel (United Nations University) and Carlos R. Carrión-Crespo (ILO).

The resulting guidelines were first drafted on the basis of the responses to a questionnaire issued by the Working Group to the coordinators of the UN-Water Thematic Priority Areas and Task Forces, as well as the results of an earlier survey of Partners of their views of UN-Water’s engagement with them. They were then revised in the light of comments by the Members and Partners. Finally, additional comments were sought from Partners that had limited participation in UN-Water Meetings.

The UN-Water Senior Programme Managers approved the guidelines the 22nd Meeting of UN-Water, 2–4 February 2015.

The role of Partners and their expected contributions to the work of UN-Water

What is a Partner?

A Partner is any organization, professional union or association or other civil-society group actively involved in water that has the capacity and willingness to contribute tangibly to the work of UN-Water. The organization needs to be active internationally and have a structure and membership that is international, not only regional. Partners are organizations outside of the United Nations system. The procedure for applying for partnership is set out in the UN-Water Operational Guidelines, complemented by a set of Partner Criteria.¹

In contrast, UN-Water Members are United Nations entities including those responsible for major funds and programmes, specialised agencies, regional commissions, conventions, etc.

Advancing the implementation of UN-Water's complex and ambitious international agenda is a collective responsibility and challenge for UN-Water Members and Partners.²

What UN-Water expects of Partners

Partners should bring their expertise, knowledge and networks to UN-Water in support of UN-Water and the internationally-agreed agenda on freshwater-related issues, including sanitation.

Partners should participate, as appropriate, in coordinated actions and thematic joint initiatives, to be pursued through result-oriented, time-bound Task Forces and Working Groups, Thematic Priority Areas, Projects and UN-Water Programme activities and Reports. They should also participate in discussions at UN-Water Meetings to monitor progress in relation to such initiatives.

The above UN-Water initiatives should seek to assign specific and time-bound tasks to each Partner. UN-Water may also seek to facilitate ways to insure the involvement of key Partners in the interagency dialogue on major issues of common concern.³

Partners may also work with the UN-Water Chair – in cooperation with the coordinators of Task Forces and Thematic Priority Areas – to elaborate possible synergies and cooperation in addressing relevant water-related policy dimensions.⁴

¹ Article II on membership, UN-Water Operational Guidelines, with the Partner Criteria reproduced in annex below.

² Terms of Reference of UN-Water are available on www.unwater.org.

³ Terms of Reference of UN-Water.

⁴ Terms of Reference of UN-Water Management Team.

Partners can, with the support of the UN-Water Secretary, contribute to ensuring a common understanding of critical points related to UN-Water management and operations.⁵

Partners will be requested to provide regular feedback, on their work on UN-Water activities and initiatives, to UN-Water through the UN-Water Technical Advisory Unit and, if necessary, with the support of the Unit, coordinate action with UN-Water Members, other Partners, Programmes and coordinators of Reports, Projects, Task Forces or Thematic Priority Areas.

Partners present at the regional, subregional and country levels should engage – in cooperation with the Country- and Regional-Level Coordination Thematic Priority Areas – in providing mutual support and exchange of information regarding the actions of UN-Water between the global level and the regional, subregional and country levels.

Partners should interact and coordinate with UN-Water Members and other Partners and the Programmes on UN-Water activities and initiatives, with the support of the coordinators of Task Forces and Thematic Priority Areas, Reports, Projects and Programmes and the UN-Water Technical Advisory Unit.⁶

UN-Water Meetings are held twice each year, once typically in the first quarter and a second time in the third quarter. UN-Water Members are represented in those Meetings by Senior Programme Managers. The designated focal point of the UN-Water Partners and one alternate of each focal point will be invited to participate at UN-Water Meetings but some parts of the agenda of each Meeting may be closed to Partners. The Management Team will maintain an updated list of designated focal points and alternates of Partners, including full contact information. It is the responsibility of the Partners to inform the Management Team of any changes.⁷

UN-Water Partners should report annually to the UN-Water Management Team prior to a UN-Water Meeting on their contribution to UN-Water (see annex, criterion number 16).

Opportunities for Partners

Partners can participate actively in the work of UN-Water Thematic Priority Areas and Task Forces, in their meetings and in consultations convened by them. Partners can review and comment on their outputs and can help to finalize recommendations for UN-Water.

Partners can provide substantive technical input and information to the activities of UN-Water, including UN-Water Reports, Programme activities and Projects. Their role can be significant, particularly at the practical level where they have greater

⁵ Terms of Reference of UN-Water Management Team.

⁶ Terms of Reference of UN-Water Management Team.

⁷ Section III.4 on UN-Water Meetings of Members and Partners in UN-Water Operational Guidelines.

flexibility than UN-Water Members; this may include leading an activity if approved by the SPM.

Partners can contribute to the formulation of the UN-Water biennial Work Programme and can execute specific and time-bound tasks as assigned.

Partners can raise awareness, strengthen communication and disseminate information. They can play an advocacy role that is sometimes closed to UN-Water Members.

Partners can coordinate with other stakeholder communities and particularly at the country level.

Partners can support fundraising and provide financing.

Partners can contribute to the preparation of strategic advice documents and events.

Financial considerations

Members and Partners to UN-Water pay no membership or partner fees. Members and Partners are generally expected to cover their own expenses associated with their engagement in UN-Water activities, unless other arrangements have been agreed upon in the case of specific activities.⁸

How UN-Water can improve the way it engages Partners?

What do Partners want?

Different Partners have different expectations of partnership with UN-Water. In particular, some are more interested to engage in UN-Water Thematic Priority Areas and Task Forces and substance, whereas others are more interested in the platform offered by UN-Water. Some Partners are interested in all the aspects of UN-Water's work.

For some Partners, and perhaps not all, partnership with UN-Water:

- Provides a means to reach all United Nations system organizations interested in water and sanitation, but also allows Partners to build relationships with individual Partners and Members
- Offers a platform for discussion with UN-Water Members and Partners, with some preferring that it be as informal as possible
- Allows collaboration with UN-Water Members in delivering UN-Water's mission by contributing Partners' knowledge, skills, experience and networks
- Means recognition by the United Nations system
- Helps coordinate actions by Members and Partners
- Gives access UN-Water networks and media through which Partners can receive and disseminate information
- Allows Partners to offer a conduit for outreach

⁸ Section I.3 on UN-Water budget in UN-Water Operational Guidelines. See also section III.6 on Cover of expenses.

- Leads to a better understanding of the strengths and knowledge of UN-Water Members and the political and institutional pressures at the international level.

Some Partners would like more than UN-Water currently offers them:

- They want to contribute to strategic decisions of UN-Water, not just at the technical level
- They would like UN-Water to take on a stronger advocacy role and express stronger positions.

Many Partners would like to understand better what the UN-Water vision of partnerships is and what role Partners are expected to play. They want to know that they are true partners, not add-ons.

A lack of participation in UN-Water Meetings does not necessarily equate to a lack of interest in UN-Water. However, Partners expect other Partners be active in UN-Water in some way; this is a reflection of the UN-Water partner criterion that indicates that prolonged inactivity can be a reason for UN-Water to terminate the partnership (see annex, criterion number 19). A passive Partner may harm the reputation of UN-Water and become an irritation to those Partners who invest actively in UN-Water's activities.

How better to engage Partners

To engage Partners better, UN-Water should:

- Communicate to Partners what UN-Water wants of them – what is the vision? Make clear that Partners are not an add-on but an integral part of UN-Water
- Ensure Partners are given opportunities to intervene and have their voices heard
- Actively seek and, where possible, take up suggestions made by Partners. If suggestions are not taken on board, clearly explain why; a failure to recognize such contributions discourages further engagement. When inviting inputs from Partners, the process should be transparent and collaborative, with effective feedback to contributors
- Recognize that Partners provide diverse views and input that improve the quality of outputs and deliverables as well as their acceptability. In UN-Water Thematic Priority Areas and Task Forces, if, for example, Partners' opinions differ from those of Members, coordinators should record those differences and communicate them to the Senior Project Managers
- Always acknowledge the contributions of Partners
- Keep Partners updated
- Engage Partners in Work Programme implementation
- Take a collegial approach. Only formal decisions need be limited to UN-Water Members
- Offer for UN-Water to participate in meetings and events of Partners, and vice versa, either as UN-Water or as individual Members
- Consider Partners when arranging thematic UN-Water meetings, conferences or workshops

- Take note of and follow up on possible activities and initiatives suggested by Partners.

In the UN-Water Meetings, UN-Water should:

- Allow for more substantive, transparent and inclusive interaction and discussion on broad and overarching issues
- Have more focus on coordination; understanding of roles and bridging interests; dealing with Work Programme topics; maximizing information exchange; consensus building; priority setting and discussing strategy and tactics; and discussion related to major upcoming issues and events
- Avoid procedural items and internal UN-Water issues and processes and spend less time on routine reporting from Task Forces and Thematic Priority Areas
- Include more Partner presentations and interventions, as well as break-out sessions, small-group discussions and brainstorming
- Consider inviting a provocative but renowned thinker to address a critical issue on the UN-Water Work Programme.

Annex. UN-Water Partner Criteria

1. Any organization, professional union or association or other civil-society group (jointly referred to as organizations) actively involved in water-related activities and that show a willingness to contribute tangibly to the work of UN-Water and are active internationally and/or multinational in structure and membership, may request Partner status with UN-Water. Such an organization should have a registered legal status.

2. The request for Partner status should be sent on the attached form to the UN-Water Management Team for consideration by UN-Water, stressing in particular how the organization will contribute to the work of UN-Water. Requests are reviewed and discussed during the regular scheduled Meetings of UN-Water (normally first and third quarters) and should reach the UN-Water Management Team at least four weeks prior to the next UN-Water Meeting in order to be considered within the agenda. In granting Partner status, preference will be given to organizations that fulfil the below criteria:

a. Extensive global networks of members or partners or a high global presence or visibility, through regional or country offices, on ground project activities or globally recognized events/publications;

b. Specific expertise with a strong emphasis on water related issues in their organizational mandate;

c. Focus on the improvement of global welfare, rather than primarily the advancement and interests of their members (if a member's organization).

3. UN-Water will seek a balance among partners from various major groups.

4. Partner status will not be granted to any political party or state or government agency.
5. Partner status will not be granted to organizations dominated by single-issue advocacy or single country focus.
6. Partner status can only be granted to non-profit organizations. “Non-Profit” in these criteria means that the organization is not established for the purpose of distributing profits to employees, owners or shareholders. This does not exclude umbrella or network organizations related to for-profit sectors to apply for partnership as long as they themselves are a non-profit organization and do not act as advocates for for-profit organizations.
7. Organizations applying for Partner status need to certify on the attached form that they will fully support and adhere to the “UN-Water Operational Guidelines” (available at <http://www.unwater.org/documents.html>) and that they will follow the criteria stipulated for Partner status as defined in this document.
8. The Partner organization should appoint one focal point and one alternate as principal contact persons for UN-Water matters. The full contact information of the focal point and the alternate should be provided to the UN-Water Management Team at unwater@un.org. Each Partner will be responsible for providing information regarding any changes in relation to focal points or contact information.
9. Both the focal point and the alternate of the Partner will be invited to UN-Water Meetings.
10. If a Partner wishes to attend with additional representatives, a written request should be sent to the UN-Water Management Team at least two weeks prior to the UN-Water Meeting.
11. Partners may not invite individuals from other, non-Partner organizations to participate in UN-Water Meetings.
12. No fees are associated with the UN-Water Partner status. Partners are expected to cover their own expenses associated with the Partner status with UN-Water, including the participation in UN-Water Meetings.
13. After clearance from the UN-Water Management Team, each Partner may display the UN-Water visual identifier and link to the UN-Water web-site on their own web-site. Each Partner will have their logo on the UN-Water web-site with a link to the Partner’s web-site. Partners will have an opportunity to display information on the UN-Water web-page, but only if it is directly related to activities that are part of the agreed UN-Water Work Programme. Such information will need to be cleared by the UN-Water Management Team.
14. A Partner may only use the UN-Water visual identifier in relation to activities that are part of the UN-Water Work Programme after clearance by the UN-Water Management Team.

15. A Partner to UN-Water may request to become a member of the UN-Water Thematic Priority Areas and Task Forces and any other activities that are part of UN-Water Work Programme. UN-Water will not provide financial support to a Partner for such participation.
16. Each Partner should provide to the UN-Water Management Team on an annual basis a short summary on how the Partner has engaged in activities with the UN-System on water related issues, including a short assessment on their Partner status with UN-Water.
17. Any Partner may at any time withdraw from the Partner status with UN-Water by giving notice to that effect to the UN-Water Management Team. Any such notice to withdraw shall take effect from the date specified in the notice or, if no such date is specified, after receipt of the same by the UN-Water Management Team.
18. If a Partner fails to meet the conditions indicated herein and in the UN-Water Operational Guidelines, it will be notified to comply with these requirements within a well-defined period of time, otherwise its status will be terminated.
19. If a Partner is considered inactive for more than two years, UN-Water will evaluate the partnership, preferably in collaboration with the Partner itself. Prolonged inactivity can be a reason for UN-Water to terminate the partnership.
20. Organizations requesting partnership status will be informed of UN-Water decision within two weeks after the decision is made in a UN-Water Meeting.