

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 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 Expert Groups, result-oriented and time-bound Task Forces, Working Groups, and other UN-Water initiatives. 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 Expert Groups – to elaborate possible synergies and cooperation in addressing relevant water-related policy dimensions.⁴

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, Task Forces, Expert Groups or other initiatives.

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.

⁵ Terms of Reference of UN-Water Management Team.

Partners present at the regional, subregional and country levels should engage – in cooperation with the Task Forces on Country-level Engagement and on Regional-level Coordination – 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 on UN-Water activities and initiatives, with the support of the coordinators of Task Forces, Expert Groups, other initiatives, 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 Expert Groups 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. Their role can be significant, particularly at the practical level where they have greater 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

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.

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 Expert Groups 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 to UN-Water networks and media through which Partners can receive and disseminate information;
- Allows Partners to offer a conduit for outreach; and
- 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; and
- 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 to 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.

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

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 Expert Groups 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 to 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 Expert Groups.
- 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