Feedback from UN-Water Partners on the UN-Water Meetings

Background

As highlighted by the UN-Water External Review 2018, meaningful engagement of non-UN stakeholders including academia, the private sector and civil society is essential to channel and guide joint actions for UN-Water as part of the 2030 Agenda. While the External Review recommends that UN-Water "establishes a platform of a wider group of stakeholders including like-minded donors, NGOs and the private sector", in the UN-Water management response it is recognised that UN-Water already provides a platform for international organisations representing civil society, professional associations and the private sector through UN-Water Partners' engagement in UN-Water Meetings, Expert Groups and Task Forces.

In response to the recommendation, feedback has now been collected from UN-Water Partners on how existing structures and processes – in particular the UN-Water Meetings – can be adapted to better serve the needs of UN-Water Partners. The study builds on the UN-Water Guidelines on Partners' Engagement, which provides an overview of the role of UN-Water Partners and ways for UN-Water to improve Partners' engagement. The study allowed Partners to rank the guideline recommendations according to their organisation's preference and priorities, as well as give additional concrete suggestions for how the UN-Water Meetings could be adapted in this regard.

In total, 14 UN-Water Partners[1] responded to the survey, and below follows a summary of the responses as well as some corresponding UN-Water channels and resources currently available to Partners.

Partner priorities for UN-Water Meetings

The overall highest ranked guideline recommendation among Partners is to allow for more substantive, transparent and inclusive interaction and discussion on broad and overarching issues during the Meetings. Partners highlight the need to not cover too many issues at each meeting in order to allow for more in-depth, strategic discussions.

The second highest ranked recommendation is to include more Partner presentations and interventions, as well as break-out sessions, small-group discussions and brainstorming. Partners wish to be able to share their contributions and plans in support of UN Water, in order to increase feeling of ownership and provide a clear entry point to get engaged.

Ranked just as high is the recommendation to have more focus on coordination, including understanding of roles and bridging interests, maximizing information exchange, consensus building, priority setting and discussing strategy and tactics during the Meetings. Partners wish to see a strong focus on coordination, to enable Partners to get specific "jobs" to fulfil in support of UN-Water and to discuss roles and responsibilities of everyone in the room in order to develop a common strategic focus.

[1] WWF, ICID, IHA, IGRAC, International Association for Water Law (AIDA), WaterAid, International Association of Hydrogeologists, World Council of Civil Engineers, AquaFed, Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), SIWI, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, IISD, IRC

The recommendation ranked the lowest in the survey is to consider inviting a provocative but renowned thinker to address a critical issue on the UN-Water Work Programme.

A summary of the ranking of the recommendations is included below, indicating the overall ranking and average ranking for each recommendation.

Overall ranking	Average ranking	Partner priorities for UN-Water Meetings
1	2.4	Allow for more substantive, transparent and inclusive interaction and discussion on broad and overarching issues
2	2.7	Include more Partner presentations and interventions, as well as break-out sessions, small-group discussions and brainstorming
	2.7	Have more focus on coordination, including understanding of roles and bridging interests, maximizing information exchange, consensus building, priority setting and discussing strategy and tactics
4	3.0	Avoid procedural items and internal UN-Water issues and processes and spend less time on routine reporting from Task Forces and Expert Groups
5	4.2	Consider inviting a provocative but renowned thinker to address a critical issue on the UN-Water Work Programme

Some Partners offered additional feedback which did not relate directly to any of the guideline recommendations. These highlighted the need to minimise differences between Members and Partners in the Meetings in order to increase motivation of Partners.

Other feedback stressed the need to provide easier access to UN-Water's work for Partners, including accessing Expert Groups and Task Forces, and considering in timelines and costs that many Partners are voluntary organizations.

Existing opportunities for Partners in line with feedback

In line with the feedback received, some existing channels and resources are highlighted below that can provide opportunities for Partners to increase their engagement.

- **The UN-Water Open Space:** The Open Space session allows for Meeting participants to set the agenda and Members and Partners are encouraged to suggest topics for the session. As such, the session may respond to many of the priorities listed above, including more substantive discussions, small-group discussions and brainstorming.
- **The UN-Water mailing lists**: To share information about Partner activities with other Members and Partners, Partners are also encouraged to use the UN-Water mailing list which is shared frequently by the Technical Advisory Unit and includes the emails of all Member and Partner representatives.
- **The UN-Water Extranet:** The UN-Water Extranet includes information about all active UN-Water Expert Groups and Task Forces. When a Partner would like to join an Expert Group or Task Force, please send an email to the coordinator(s) requesting to join.

- **Expert Groups and Task Forces:** While UN-Water Meetings might include too many actors to discuss roles and responsibilities of everyone, Expert Groups and Task Forces offers a good opportunity to coordinate and discuss roles with the actors active in a specific field or task.
- **The Technical Advisory Unit (TAU):** The TAU is always available for any queries Partners may have about UN-Water activities, Meetings, Expert Groups or Task Forces.

Overview of open-ended responses from Partners

Do you have any other, concrete suggestions for how the UN-Water Meetings can allow for more meaningful engagement of UN-Water Partners and become more effective as a multi-stakeholder platform?

Encouraging partners to share their own contributions and plans to support the UN Water plans will hopefully allow for more ownership. Certainly from a WWF perspective we feel we have plenty to offer and support UN Water but at times the entry points to offer support is not always clear.

The Partners should be allowed to listen to the general discussions of UN-Water members except in special cases where housekeeping issues are being discussed.

Minimize difference between partners and members, partners can do much more if taken seriously and motivated

Ensure an integrated approach to water resource management and protection, with all aspects having adequate prominence.

Invite partners to introduce topics be " easier" on partners wanting to be involved in taskforces and working groups (sometimes it takes three attempts) and be willing for them to take the lead in some cases. Have no closed meetings (but decide on " voting" when it comes to " internal" un agency/ program matters) allow in timelines and cost involved that a lot of the partners are voluntary organizations.

The coordination role is essential. UN Water has to be a stronger force for coordination of all the major international players in the sector. Un Water has to stop the fragmentation and lack of cohesion.

Draft short and communicative documents to prepare for the meeting

Try not to cover too many and too broad issues at each meeting.

No other than the first priority indicated above (Include more Partner presentations and interventions, as well as break-out sessions, small-group discussions and brainstorming)

As one partner said at a meeting, partners are looking for a "job" or how to fit into the partnership. We have become more engaged due to the suggestion of how we could bring our strengths to benefit the partnership. Helping partners to find their niche could bring further engagement.

Discussion of roles, responsibilities of the different partners and agencies around the table. Clear strategic focus.