Feedback from the United States on the Draft UN System-Wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation

The United States welcomes the progress of a UN system-wide strategy for water, and supports UN Water’s efforts to draft an accurate and comprehensive strategy. There are three specific areas in which UN Water should consider strengthening the system-wide strategy for water.

Firstly, there seem to be various instances where the strategy mentions areas or topics highly sensitive to Member States and country perspectives. For example, references to technology transfer, Member State commitments, alternative food systems, water as a standalone human right, finance, and the Water Action Agenda, inter alia, are likely to be viewed as problematic and be opposed by some Member States. The United States requests that such references be carefully worded such that Member States do not view the strategy as inappropriately impacting the ongoing conversations between Member States. Consistency and clarification will be needed to ensure that any reference to country-level engagement is only demand driven by the country’s priorities and interest/willingness to engage.

Secondly, the current draft of the strategy opaquely refers to the role UN Water will play in strengthening its coordinative function. As the UN’s coordinator for water functions within the UN system, this role should be explicitly outlined throughout the strategy, including how UN Water’s coordination of UN agencies can reduce duplication, and potential re-imagining of existing UN Water efforts (e.g. the UN Water Task Force on Innovation, the UN Water Integrated monitoring initiative for SDG6, the UN Water Interagency Mechanism, UN Water Inventory) can be more central in the UN’s broader coordination on water.

Finally, the strategy’s chosen terminology of “Outputs” and “Illustrative Supporting Actions” is confusing and could lead to concern from Member States. The United States recommends changing “Output” to “Intended Outcome” or “Intended Result” as the strategy itself cannot fully achieve the listed “Outputs” on its own. There could also be significant consolidation between the written “Outputs” and “Illustrative Supporting Actions” lists, as many points are duplicative in multiple sections.