

UN-Water – United Nations’ Inter-agency Coordination Mechanism for Water and Sanitation

Terms of Reference

Background

1. The High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) established UN-Water in its meeting held on 18 and 19 September 2003 in response to the need for strengthened coordination of United Nations’ work on water and sanitation-related issues. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) endorsed this decision at its fall 2003 session in New York.

UN-Water

2. The scope of UN-Water’s work encompasses all freshwater related matters, including sanitation. It includes surface and groundwater resources and the interface between fresh and sea water, and freshwater resources in terms of their quality and quantity, their development, assessment, management, monitoring, and use (including, for example, domestic uses, agriculture, and ecosystems requirements). The scope of work related to sanitation encompasses both access to and use of sanitation by populations and the interactions between sanitation and freshwater. UN-Water’s scope of work further includes water-related disasters, emergencies and other extreme events and their impact on human security.
3. UN-Water is the inter-agency mechanism that promotes coherence in, and coordination of, water-related UN system actions aimed at the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant policy frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development and the New Urban Agenda.
4. UN-Water is comprised of Members representing UN entities and Partners representing non-UN system actors. Each Member is represented by a Senior Programme Manager and the Senior Programme Managers group is the governing body of UN-Water. The UN-Water Senior Programme Managers approve the work programme and budget of UN-Water, set the policies, define the long-term programmatic agenda, and monitor and evaluate the products within the remit of UN-Water at its biannual Meetings and, where

necessary, through intersessional electronic dialogue.

5. UN-Water has grown out of extensive collaboration and partnership among the UN entities. These efforts have contributed to the achievement of significant progress and have helped to bring water-related issues to the top of the political agenda.
6. Advancing the implementation of this 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 partners and stakeholders, including among them organizations from the public and private sectors, civil society and labour – towards a global, comprehensive effort.
7. The main purpose of UN-Water is thus to complement and add value to existing programmes and projects by facilitating synergies and joint efforts, so as to maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence as well as effectiveness of the support provided to Member States in their efforts towards achieving the time-bound goals, targets and actions related to its scope of work as agreed by the international community.
8. UN-Water will interface with other inter-agency mechanisms, including UN-Energy, UN-Oceans, the Environment Management Group (EMG) and others, on issues of common concern.
9. In carrying out its work, UN-Water will closely adhere to the generic objectives for inter-agency mechanisms established by the HLCP¹ and annexed to this document.

Terms of Reference

10. UN-Water will seek to enhance the coherence, credibility, and visibility of UN system actions related to its three main lines of work, and, in particular:
 - a) Informing policy processes and addressing emerging issues related to water and sanitation:
 - i. Identify strategic issues and priorities for system-wide action, and facilitate timely, coordinated and effective responses by the UN system at global, regional, and country levels in relation to both policy development and implementation.
 - ii. Promote the elaboration and facilitate the dissemination of system-wide positions shared by UN-Water Members and act as the UN system's "voice on water" when needed.
 - iii. Facilitate inter-agency information exchange, including sharing of experiences and lessons learned, and serve as a clearing house for policy-relevant information, assessment, and advice on status and

¹ Reference: CEB/2003/7, Report of the High Level Committee on Programmes at its sixth session

trends at global and regional levels, and for providing Member States with a collective point of entry to the system's initiatives and responses in areas within its purview.

- b) Supporting monitoring and reporting on water and sanitation:
 - i. Facilitate and support work being carried out at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, both within and outside the UN system, to follow-up on relevant goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant frameworks, working through the Regional Commissions and relevant inter-agency mechanisms.
- c) Building knowledge and inspiring people to take action:
 - i. Coordinate the United Nations international observances on freshwater and sanitation, including World Water Day (March 22), World Toilet Day (November 19) and the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018-2028 campaigns, and commission UN-Water publications such as the World Water Development Report drawing on the experience and expertise of UN-Water Members and Partners.
 - ii. Promote effective communication and collaboration between the UN system and civil society and private sector partners.

11. Management of UN-Water will be performed by a UN-Water Management Team composed of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and a Technical Advisory Unit (see Annex 1 for the UN-Water Management Team's Terms of Reference).

12. The UN-Water work programme will be updated every two years.

13. The above terms of reference will be periodically updated.

Modalities of Work

14. UN-Water seeks to add value to activities related to its scope of work at three levels with objectives and modalities outlined below.

a) Global Level

UN-Water will promote greater system-wide coherence through systematic exchange of information, policy dialogue, effective programme coordination and common positions on policy and programme issues. Through strong internal and external partnerships, UN-Water will add value to the water-related work in the UN system taking place at the headquarters level. This will include:

- Networking and frequent interaction among the Senior Programme Managers, including at the biannual UN-Water Meetings;

- Coordinated actions and thematic joint initiatives – to be pursued through expert groups and result-oriented, time-bound task forces with the participation, as appropriate, of non-UN system actors – will be identified and outcomes reviewed in UN-Water Meetings; and
- Consolidating information on relevant policy and programme issues and developments as a basis for promoting continuing informed exchanges within the UN system, within the international community and particularly among Member States in their inter-governmental dialogues.

Where a need emerges, from UN-Water’s work or from new inter-governmental policy directives, for policy guidance and political impetus, such needs will be brought to the attention of the CEB through the HLCP. Provision may be made for *ad hoc* meetings/consultations of Executive Heads of concerned UN entities to provide strategic guidance to UN-Water’s work.

b) Regional Level

Encouraging effective system-wide action and inter-agency collaboration at the regional and sub-regional levels is an integral part of UN-Water’s functions. This will be pursued by facilitating exchange of information, policy and programme dialogue and by promoting mutual support between regional and headquarters levels. To foster these linkages, some UN-Water Meetings may be organized in conjunction with regional counterparts. Communication strategies of UN-Water will build on, and be coordinated with, relevant regional inter-agency initiatives.

c) Country Level

Coherence of UN system actions at the country level is crucial to achieving the overall objectives underlying the establishment of UN-Water. UN-Water’s contribution to country-level coherence will be pursued through the Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in close cooperation with UNSDG. Emphasis will be given to supporting Resident Coordinators and Country Teams, particularly in relation to progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant frameworks.

Involvement of Non-UN System Actors

15. UN-Water will encourage the contribution of non-UN system actors in its thematic work, including participation in relevant expert groups and time-bound task forces, and in discussions at UN-Water Meetings. Collaboration with non-UN system actors, including organizations from the public and private sectors, civil society, and labour that are active in UN-Water’s scope of work, will be facilitated by:

- a) Involving non-UN system actors as UN-Water Partners in accordance with the UN-Water Partner Criteria and following approval by the Senior Programme Managers;
- b) Arranging for direct participation in UN-Water’s activities; and
- c) Facilitating the involvement of key actors in the inter-agency dialogue on major issues of common concern.

List of Annexes:

1. [Terms of Reference for UN-Water governance structures](#)
2. [CEB/2003/7, Report of the High Level Committee on Programmes at its sixth session, p. 50-53](#)
3. [UN-Water Organizational Chart](#)