

# UN-Water Briefing Note

*A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations*

Online at: <https://enb.iisd.org/water/un/33/>

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## Summary of the 33rd UN-Water Meeting: 29-30 September 2020

The 33rd UN-Water Meeting offered a brief chance for the Members, Partners, and observers of this UN interagency coordination mechanism to discuss the role of water and sanitation in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and to receive updates on upcoming opportunities to engage at the global level to build momentum for implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) on clean water and sanitation.

This meeting was originally scheduled to take place in August in Stockholm, Sweden, but was postponed, shortened, and moved online due to the pandemic. During the 90-minute open session on Tuesday, 29 September 2020, speakers reminded the over 130 participants that coordination on water and sanitation issues is more important than ever and called attention to the high-level of interest in several UN-Water initiatives. Of particular focus was the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, which was launched in July by UN-Water, with the participation of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres and 11 UN agency heads. An additional area of discussion was the UN-Water “offer,” which identifies ways that UN-Water Members and Partners can help support UN country teams through the UN resident coordinator system. Eight country teams have responded to the offer and will now be part of the pilot phase. Participants were also updated on preparations for high-level events at the UN on water and sanitation issues in 2021 and 2023.

During the closed meeting for UN-Water Members on Wednesday, 30 September 2020, the International Telecommunication Union was welcomed as a new Member and it was agreed that the 34th UN-Water meeting would convene virtually from 16-17 March 2021. This summary reviews the deliberations during the open session on 29 September 2020.

## A Brief History of UN-Water

While over 30 UN organizations carry out water and sanitation programmes, no single UN entity is dedicated exclusively to these issues. In 1977, the UN’s Intersecretariat Group for Water Resources began coordinating UN activities on water. Subsequently, in 2003, the UN Administrative Coordination Committee’s Subcommittee on Water Resources was transformed into UN-Water and was endorsed by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. UN-Water plays a coordinating role within the UN to ensure that the UN family “delivers as one” in response to water-related challenges.

UN-Water Meetings bring its Members and Partners (see the full list below) together twice a year to carry out the mandate of

informing policies, monitoring and reporting, and inspiring action on water and sanitation issues. Participants include representatives of the UN Secretariat and UN agencies, funds, programmes, and other entities, multilateral environmental agreements, civil society organizations, governments, and other organizations.

**Initiatives:** The overarching focus of UN-Water’s Members and Partners is to support UN Member States to sustainably manage water and sanitation. This mission is carried out through three areas of work: informing policies, monitoring and reporting, and inspiring action.

Efforts to inform policies focus on placing water and sanitation issues on the agenda of key UN agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. SDG 6 calls for the international community to strive to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

Efforts to monitor and report seek to provide coherent and reliable data and information on key water trends and management issues. The Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 builds on and expands the experience and lessons learned during implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and aims to:

- develop methodologies and tools to monitor SDG 6 global indicators;
- raise awareness at the national and global levels regarding SDG 6 monitoring;
- enhance technical and institutional country capacity for monitoring; and
- compile country data and report on global progress towards SDG 6.

Efforts to inspire action include coordination of the annual observance of World Water Day on 22 March and World Toilet Day on 19 November. UN-Water releases the annual World Water Development Report (WWDR) on World Water Day.

**Governance Structure:** UN agencies, programmes, and funds with a water-related mandate are Members of UN-Water. Partners are international organizations, professional unions, associations, and other civil society groups that are actively involved in water and that have the capacity and willingness to contribute to the work of UN-Water and meet UN-Water’s partnership criteria.

UN-Water Senior Programme Managers (SPMs) are the representatives of UN-Water Members. They provide the overall governance and strategic direction and constitute the highest operational decision-making body of UN-Water.

The Chair of UN-Water is nominated among the UN Executive Heads after consultations in the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. The current Chair of UN-Water is Gilbert

Houngbo, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The Vice-Chair of UN-Water is elected among the UN-Water SPMs. The Secretary of UN-Water is a senior staff member of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

### UN-Water Report

On 29 September 2020 at 8:00 am EDT, UN-Water Chair Gilbert Houngbo opened the 33rd UN-Water Meeting and expressed regret that, because the event was taking place virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants would not be able to engage in the usual discussions on pressing challenges related to water and sanitation.

Houngbo chaired the two panels that took place during the open meeting. The first panel discussed implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second panel comprised updates on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and upcoming opportunities at the global level to further progress action to implement SDG 6.

### *Taking Stock - Implications of and Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Robert Piper, Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination, UN Development Coordination Office, presented a UN perspective on the COVID-19 response. He emphasized that the social impact dwarfs the health impact of the pandemic. He highlighted that the pandemic has set back SDG progress across multiple targets and emphasized the need for political will to design solutions that were previously unimaginable. He noted that the 2030 Agenda already lays out the agreed endpoint for recovery, which means we do not need to build consensus on where we want to go. He added that the challenge is to agree on how we will get there with a new sense of urgency.

Lindsey Aldaco-Manner, President, World Youth Parliament for Water, presented a youth perspective on building back better. She reported that, in response to a call for proposals from youth on water-related projects, over 200 proposals were submitted. She said this high response rate demonstrates the engagement of youth on SDG 6. She also said the switch to virtual engagement has brought participation from new youth groups around the world.

Antony Currie, Editor, Reuters Breakingviews, discussed media coverage of water, sanitation, and COVID-19. He said his readers want to read about opportunities related to water and what can be done to improve the situation. He noted that the UK has appointed a water champion for the upcoming 26th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 26), and he said there is a need for more such “water interpreters.”

### *Advancing SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework*

On the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, UN-Water Chair Houngbo noted that the UN Secretary-General and 11 heads of UN agencies participated in the launch of the Framework during a special side event during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2020. He discussed the Framework’s focus on building on the UN’s reform efforts and seeking to connect UN country teams with UN-Water Members. He also highlighted that the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework calls for an annual “moment” for SDG 6 during the annual meetings of the HLPF, to provide an opportunity to assess progress and share success stories.

Joakim Harlin, UN Environment Programme, provided an update from the Expert Group on the 2030 Agenda on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. He highlighted that the Framework focuses on driving action related to five accelerators:

- Financing, which relates to better targeting resources, mobilizing domestic and international funding, and securing local ownership;
- Data and information, including efforts to ensure there is informed decision making, and building trust so that leaders can make informed decisions, among other actions;
- Capacity development to use the data properly and to retain a skilled work force;
- Innovation, including innovative practices and technologies, and how to leverage partnerships; and
- Governance, particularly more inclusive institutions that make SDG 6 everyone’s business.

Kelly Ann Naylor, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), provided an update from the UN-Water Task Force on Country Level Engagement, and reviewed efforts to take the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework work to the country level. She reported that the UN-Water “offer” that was sent to UN resident coordinators in January 2020 identified three areas where UN-Water Members can provide support: insight, information, and data; connection to expertise, technical assistance, capacity building, and support; and support for country-level advocacy. She said eight countries have replied (Bahrain, Costa Rica, Guinea, India, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, and São Tomé and Príncipe), and added that coordination is an area where most of the countries have asked for support.

Regarding opportunities for global engagement in preparation for the UN high-level events on water and sanitation in 2021 and 2023, Mahmadamin Mahmadaminov, Permanent Representative to the UN, Tajikistan, and Mark Zellenrath, Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, the Netherlands, discussed their countries’ efforts to serve as co-facilitators for the modalities resolution to be adopted by the UN General Assembly regarding the high-level event that will convene from 22-24 March 2023.

Madhushree Chatterjee, UN-Water Secretary and UNDESA Senior Programme Manager, closed the session with an overview of upcoming opportunities for global engagement in preparation for the UN high-level events on water and sanitation in 2021 and 2023. She said the President of the UN General Assembly will organize the 2021 event before June 2021, so it can contribute to the HLPF in July. She alerted participants to three other events planned for 2021: the UN Ocean Conference, the Food Systems Summit, and the Global Sustainable Transportation Conference. She reported that there will be regional preparatory meetings in 2022 for the 2023 meeting, as well as an in-depth review of SDG 6 progress during the HLPF. She said additional opportunities to engage at the global level to build momentum for SDG 6 include the annual SDG 6 moment during the HLPF, the annual SDG Moment during the September meetings of the UN General Assembly, the annual World Water Day and World Toilet Day events, and the annual release of the UN World Water Development Report.

### *Closure of the Session*

As he closed the event, UN-Water Chair Houngbo requested feedback on what had worked well during the virtual meeting, in case more online meetings are necessary. He called on participants to remain safe and remain connected to water and sanitation. He closed the meeting at 9:30 am EDT.

**UN-Water Members**  
(33 as of September 2020)

**United Nations Secretariat**

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)

**Programmes and Funds**

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

World Food Programme (WFP)

**Regional Commissions**

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

**Specialized Agencies**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

The World Bank Group (WB)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

**Other Entities**

United Nations University (UNU)

**United Nations-related Organizations**

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

**Conventions**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

**UN-Water Partners**  
(40 as of September 2020)

Aquafed

CDP

Center for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST)

Conservation International

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)

Global Water Partnership (GWP)

International Association for Hydro-Environment Engineering and Research (IAHR)

International Association for Water Law (AIDA)

International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH)

International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS)

International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID)

International Groundwater Centre (IGRAC)

International Hydropower Association (IHA)

International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC)

International Water Association (IWA)

International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

International Water Resources Association (IWRA)

Mandate of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Water\*

Mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation\*

Public Services International (PSI)

Ramsar Convention

Sanitation and Water for All\*

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

United Nations Global Compact\*

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)\*

Water.org

WaterAid

WaterLex

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Council of Civil Engineers (WCCE)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

World Water Council (WWC)

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

World Youth Parliament for Water (WYPW)

\* Partner with Special Status