

2022 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION ON THE PREPARATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS 2023 WATER CONFERENCE

UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK AND ONLINE

Excellencies, colleagues,

With appreciation of this consultation initiative by the President of the UN General Assembly, I would like to present you two game-changing proposals that Water Policy Group respectfully brings forward: (1) listening to national water leaders, and (2) mainstreaming water into all UN conferences.

(1) Listening to national water leaders

Water Policy Group, as a part of the commitment that it registered with the UN Water Action Agenda, undertook in 2021 a global survey of national water leaders from 88 countries to understand their personal views, and not official government positions, on the risks and challenges they faced in water management in their country and specifically their views on the difficulties of meeting SDG6 targets. This provided insight into the relative importance of the five accelerators of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and other key issues facing governments in the water objectives. The survey revealed governance was the biggest challenge, with financing a close second.

Water Policy Group offers to support the United Nations 2023 Water Conference by drawing on the collective experience and perspective of Ministers and national water leaders with specific goal of contributing to the substance of Water Action Agenda and Water Action Decade, and improving alignment between water and other public policy outcomes.

The survey will seek the aggregated opinions and perspectives of all Water Ministers globally on:

- the benefits of platforms, like the proposed Water Action Agenda;
- how multilateral processes can help with achieving better water outcomes at the national level (relevant to ID theme 5), with a particular focus on science-policy interfaces and a global-level science initiative;
- alignment between them and ministers responsible for other sectors on how good water outcomes contribute to their public policy objectives, revealing their perception of the reasons for any misalignment (relevant to ID themes 1-4); and
- risks and challenges that impact on their work.

Survey responses will be anonymous. They will be collated and reported at the global scale, according to income category, and, if useful, SDG region or level of water stress. The survey will be available in the six UN languages and is ready to be sent out this week, with results to be made progressively available during January and February.

(2) Mainstreaming water into sectoral UN conferences

Secondly, to give life to the interactive dialogue themes, and get right out of the water box, let us think about whether and how the UN 2023 Water Conference could call upon the UNGA to authorize that all sectoral conferences of the UN include in their agendas an item about how improved water outcomes can contribute to their sectoral objectives and also how they can contribute to improved water outcomes. This would ensure cross-sectoral engagement on UN platforms with positive trickle-down effects on regional and national levels.

In addition, we also need to think seriously as a global community how we can best support those countries that have the most to do to get on track for achieving their water related goals. In many countries the challenge lies at the policy level, with choices being made everywhere about how water resources are allocated, water use and quality are regulated and water services are funded.

While every country needs to work out its own pathway for resolving these kinds of issues, WPG believes there could be real benefits for governments to have access to a comprehensive set of basic policy principles and strategies based on successful experiences globally. WPG thinks of this as 'policy scaffolding', supporting Ministers in their difficult policy work. What kind of scaffolding can the multilateral system provide that would make it easier for Ministers to advocate for necessary water reform within their governmental processes and provide a starting point for the necessary work at the national level?

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Water Policy Group (www.waterpolicygroup.com) is a global network of water sector experts who have been decision makers and trusted advisers within governments and international bodies handling water policy and strategy. The members of the group have had direct experience in working with complex water policy issues, and share a common goal that their knowledge, networks and experience can help achieve the sustainable development of water resource to serve the global public interest.