

Plenary: Opening and Setting the Scene

Session Summary Report, 15 January 2015

The formal Plenary Opening of the UN-Water International Conference 'Water and Sustainable Development: From Vision to Action' kicked off the conference after the morning regional sessions. It gathered panellist from a variety of international organizations to review challenges and tools for the achievement of the SDGs goals. It also served to gathers stakeholders' views on progress during the *2005-2015 Decade for Action 'Water for Life'*, and placed them in the context of the international Post-2015 Agenda process.

The water related sustainable development goals and targets: progress and challenges

The session was chaired by Blanca Jiménez, UN Water Vice Chair, who provided an overview of the work and progress in the definition of the water related SDGs and their alignment with the international Post-2015 Agenda.

The panel was composed by the following distinguished participants:

- Karin Lexen, Director World Water Week and prizes, SIWI
- Joakim Harlin, UNDP and coordinator of UN-Water Working Group on SDGs
- Richard Connor, Interim Lead Author, fourth edition of the UN World Water Development Report



Discussion panel: from left to right Karin Lexen, Joakim Harlin and Richard Connor.

What is Water and Sustainable Development? The 2015 World Water Development Report

Richard Connor presented the 2015 World Water Development Report. The WWDR 2015 bases its focus on the critical importance of water within the three – economic, social and environmental - dimensions of sustainable development. From a social perspective, it covers the aspects of poverty and equity as main constrainers for extended access to WASH services and economic and human development. From an economic perspective, it explores how investments in water management and infrastructure facilitate the structural changes required in emerging economies to economic growth in line with sustainability. From an environmental perspective, it analyses the environmental dimensions of water management and the role of ecosystem services, arguing for a holistic focus on ecosystems for water and development to ensure that their services are maintained.

Based on the premise that ‘the lack of access to WASH takes a huge toll on health and well-being and drives a huge economic loss’, it highlights the importance to reinforce women’s role, adaptive and flexible approaches, and investment and financing mechanisms in water management, as well as the need to develop governance, risk reduction and social equity responses to push on sustainable development. The report also analyzes the role of ecosystem services in water management

However the success of the reports prepared by the UN will lie not only in their capacity to reach and influence the political process on including water in the next generation of SDGs, but also in their role to inform both the process and the countries about existing needs and options, that can be visible and linked back to the SDGs once they have come out, regardless of the result.

The UN Water Technical Advice and the proposals of the Open Working Group

The UN Water Technical Advice Report summarizes UN Water contribution for the identification, evaluation and monitoring of the main water challenges. The General Assembly Open Working Group has proposed 17 goals and 169 targets, including six essential elements - dignity, people, planet, prosperity, justice and partnership - that should work as a basis for including the water related SDGs in the next Post-2015 development agenda. Among these 17 goals, water issues are directly addressed by goal 6: ‘*Goal 6.: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*’, and indirectly present in goals 1, 3, 11, 12 and 15. This proposal aims to ensure all the essential aspects of the natural and human water cycle are covered: water scarcity, water quality, transboundary management, water-related ecosystems, Integrated Water Management, water efficiency, safe access to drinking water and sanitation and water-related risk reduction. The first proposal was approved by the General Assembly on 10 September 2014, and will serve as the basis to set the final report and resolution on the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda that will be officially approved and adopted in September 2015.

It is necessary to highlight the importance of defining a common and consensual language, not only within the water community but also with the rest of stakeholders, that allows a full understanding and diffusion of the messages and challenges on water related SDGs at all

levels. Only when the full extent of the message is 'caught on' by all actors involved can responses to improve effective water resource planning, access and use be triggered.

Water and the different current intergovernmental negotiations

2015 is going to be a strategic year that will put together four international events where fundamental decisions and agreements to define the post 2015 international roadmap will be taken: the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), the UNFCCC COP21 Conference on climate change and the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development. *'These post-2015 intergovernmental processes provide the international community with a unique opportunity to enhance coherence across policies, institutions, goals, and indicators for implementation. Ensuring credible links between these processes will contribute to building resilience and achieving the global ambition to eradicate poverty'*. Two main challenges arise for this important year: first to drive attention on the key role of water and the importance to have it sufficiently addressed and reflected in these processes, given the limited consideration it has received so far. Whereas 70% of global disasters are water related, the DRR framework only mentions water three times and devotes a small paragraph to the importance of water. Meanwhile, in climate change negotiations water has been almost completely neglected until the last six years, when the work of several water organizations such as the Global Water Partnership, SIWI or the Global Water Alliance for Adaptation has increased awareness on the interconnections between water and energy, and thus driven recognition of the important role water can play in climate change adaptation and mitigation. The second challenge is to advocate for a coherent approach that allows the interconnection of these processes to ensure a coordinated implementation. Different mechanisms, such as the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage or the Green Climate Fund, are being explored to relate water related SDGs to both the Post 2015 DRR and COP 21 negotiations. This may provide a great opportunity for reinforcing these processes, but it also brings up concerns over the main common challenge: the possible competition for funding. Certain promising funding opportunities are emerging, ie. the Green Climate Fund, which is engaging strongly compromised donors. However, the financial requirements and claims for DRR, climate change and SDGs implementation are monumental, thus making the issue of how these funds will be distributed the key aspect to manage in order to avoid water being left out.

On the whole, water is very good example of how all these processes link together and has very valuable knowledge, experiences and information to contribute to this international processes. Thus the water community has a very important role in bringing to the table not only the critical and cross-cutting influence of water, but also its potential piloting experience to come up with implementation solutions that are aligned and coordinated.

Panel discussion

Should COP21 and Post 2015 SDGs process be linked?

In fact the SDGs and the COP21 negotiations are inter-related, as they share the final goal of achieving sustainable development. However, it may be important to keep them as separate processes, though interconnected by shared dialogs and interaction between working groups, to keep its individual strengths and maximize its extent/reach. However, this issue has not yet been discussed in depth, as both processes have frenetically started

running in parallel, though it will need to be addressed for one key reason: both processes will have to get their funding from green funds and donors will not give money for sustainable development twice. This means negotiations will be needed to assert the importance of water sustainable goals and avoid their being left out of the share.

The use of the term water security

Water security is a useful term, especially when having to deal with transboundary issues. But 'when the elephant comes into the room, it stalls other conversations'.

The problem that makes the term water security more difficult to understand compared to energy security or food security is that it refers to both a resource and a service, and the two of them need to be managed. Meanwhile, water is perceived as a public good, a 'Gift from God', which does not happen with energy and food.

Final messages

At the doors of the final approval of the Post 2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the definition of the action roadmaps for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, the water community is making outstanding efforts in getting water adequately recognized and included. Considerable achievements have been made in the inclusion of water issues within the SDGs and recognition of the pivotal importance that water will play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, the discussions are still in the air and reinforcing pressure in showcasing the transversality of water in all these processes and the value of the water sector knowhow to catalyse coordinated implementation will be critical at this stage, especially when the distribution of funds for sustainability takes place.