

A MORE EFFECTIVE GLOBAL WATER  
ARCHITECTURE FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

AN INITIATIVE FOR A  
UN INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
BODY ON WATER

UN  
Intergovernmental  
Body on Water

## BACKGROUND

The **ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted in New York in September 2015, will guide our efforts to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty over the next 15 years. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda.

**The agenda must now be translated** into a strong commitment by all stakeholders to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve its Goals and targets.

Sustainable management of freshwater and sanitation (hereafter water) are vital elements of the 2030 Agenda. It contains a dedicated Goal of sustainable management of water and sanitation, SDG 6, and a multitude of SDGs with targets that are directly related to water and sanitation. Their successful implementation will be crucial for realising the whole 2030 Agenda.

The **2030 Agenda** recognises the need for country-led 'robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review' in order to support national implementation and accelerate progress. It envisages that the global review framework is centred on the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) and that thematic follow-up and review at the global level, while being open and inclusive, will essentially build on the work of UN intergovernmental bodies, such as the ECOSOC functional commissions.

## ANALYSIS

The **final report of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation** (UNSGAB, 2004-2015), highlights that there is currently a mismatch between the holistic and ambitious 2030 Agenda vision of water and sanitation management and the international political structures available to effectively contribute to its implementation. UNSGAB's key recommendations to remedy this deficiency are:

- The creation of a UN Intergovernmental Committee on Water and Sanitation for the thematic follow-up and review at the global level,
- The strengthening of UN-Water; as the coordinating structure of UN actions on water and

sanitation, UN-Water serves as the Secretariat and support entity for the UN Intergovernmental Committee on Water and Sanitation

- The setting up of a comprehensive global water and sanitation monitoring framework to support follow-up and review with high-quality data.

Based on UNSGAB's fundamental analysis, the current setup of the global water institutional architecture will not allow effective and coordinated support for Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. It also does not allow for a comprehensive and integrated follow-up and review of progress towards implementing the new global water agenda.

This is due to the following reasons:

- The **global water governance structure is highly fragmented**. While a multitude of forums, including UN agencies, deal with water, they treat it as a sub-topic and/or look at it from single-issue perspectives. There is disconnection between the water-specific processes that form the current international water policy on the one hand and the international political level on the other hand.
- Unlike for other themes, such as gender or food security, there is **no dedicated UN intergovernmental body** for water endorsed by UN Member States. Such a body is needed in order to deal with water in a comprehensive and integrated manner at the political level within the UN.

## A 'FIT-FOR-PURPOSE' UN INSTITUTIONAL WATER ARCHITECTURE FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

**Provide a dedicated intergovernmental body for comprehensive and integrated follow-up and review to show progress**

- To enable regular dialogue among governments and major groups at the global level, providing guidance and recommendations for implementation of the SDG's targets related to

water, feeding into the HLPF.

- To offer a forum for knowledge exchange and mutual learning, and for building partnerships for implementation and cooperation.

#### Such a body should have the following key characteristics:

- It should be endorsed by the UN Member States as part of the UN system. It should build on and engage with water-relevant thematic networks and multi-stakeholder partnerships, integrating their inputs into global thematic follow-up and review.
- It should foster integrated reviews by linking with other related goals and targets and relevant thematic intergovernmental platforms.

#### Strengthen UN-Water and maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence.

- To streamline and coordinate the water-related activities of the UN system.
- To serve as secretariat and support entity for the UN Intergovernmental Body on Water.
- To coordinate the global monitoring and evaluation of all water-related targets, including means of implementation, and regularly provides the HLPF and other UN intergovernmental bodies and forums reviewing SDGs with water-related targets with an integrated, comprehensive assessment of progress in implementation.

This vision, with the foreseen new intergovernmental body at its core, is in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Report of the Secretary-General, which underlines the central role of the UN intergovernmental process and bodies, and their corresponding supporting entities, for the follow-up and review process – a role currently not filled in the global water sector.

It also follows the logic of the Report that no intergovernmental body can claim exclusive ownership of any Goal and that the SDG-review should be organised in such a way that it promotes 'a cross-cutting understanding of the significant interlinkages across the goals and targets.'

## THE PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

Following up on UNSGAB's recommendations and in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Report of the UN Secretary-General, there is a need to reform the international institutional architecture for water, i.e. to make global water governance more efficient, inclusive, and politically viable in line with the functions described above.

At the core of this effort stands the **establishment of a UN intergovernmental Body on Water**.

This body, supported by a secretariat and potentially linked to ECOSOC, would be tasked with the follow-up and review of the implementation of all SDG targets related to water. It would achieve this by providing the key thematic input to the HLPF regarding SDG 6 and water related targets, incorporating inputs from supporting working structures/entities and other relevant UN intergovernmental bodies, and by supporting reviews of closely related SDGs.

Such a body would safeguard a comprehensive and integrated water perspective in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while reflecting interlinkages with other themes thereby allowing the HLPF to carry out its mandate fully. It should also prepare UNGA sessions dedicated to water. Through the inclusion of existing thematic networks and partnerships and the participation of major groups, it should promote coherence between the activities of the government and other stakeholders, resulting in more effective and efficient use of 'resources'.

The new body should be as lean as possible, with minimal implications on the UN budget. The expenses should be compensated by a more effective, integrated and coordinated approach to support the implementation of the Agenda 2030 with regards to water and sanitation and to review progress.

An adequate UN architecture for the realisation of the 2030 water agenda, including the establishment of a UN Intergovernmental Body on Water should be endorsed by a UN resolution.

This initiative is supported by a group of countries (Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and Switzerland). All interested UN Member States are welcome to join and support the development and further work on a coherent concept for a global institutional water architecture that is 'fit for purpose'.

# PROVISIONAL DIAGRAM OF ENVISAGED GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE FOR WATER

