THEMATIC CONCEPT PAPERS

DRAFT OUTLINE

(Template)

I. Introduction

This section will introduce the thematic topic in the context of the UN 2023 Water Conference and set the scene for the concept paper.

As part of the organizational arrangements mandated in A/RES/75/212, paragraph 9 (d), the Secretary-General of the UN 2023 Water Conference will prepare concept papers on the themes of the interactive dialogues, finalized during the one-day preparatory meeting for the Conference convened by the President of the United Nations General Assembly on 25 October 2022. This concept paper is on the theme: [name of theme].

The world is not on track to achieve SDG 6 and related goals and targets by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the challenge, and the world must quadruple the rate of progress to ensure sufficient quality and quantity of water and adequate sanitation for all by 2030. Water is inextricably linked to the three pillars of sustainable development, and it integrates social, cultural, spiritual, economic, environmental and political values. It is cross-cutting and underpins the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achievement of its SDGs, as well as the goals and targets of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), through close linkages with biodiversity, climate change, energy, cities, the environment, food security, poverty alleviation, gender equality, peace, and health, amongst others. Meanwhile, the full implementation of existing frameworks, such as the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, and the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, would directly contribute to the advancement of water security. Water-related issues are at the center of many negative impacts that exacerbate biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation and desertification, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates degradation. Creating systems that deviate from purely exploitative practices and shift towards those in which water is valued, protected, and restored would ensure its sustainable use.

II. Overview of the challenge, current status and interlinkages

This section will highlight the current status, trends and the need for progress on the theme. In doing so, it will also highlight interlinkages across the theme, in particular the relationships inherent between the theme and the most relevant SDGs and the goals and targets of MEAs, with emphasis on the most relevant targets and facilitate their effective and synergistic implementation.

Points to consider:

- In order to provision sufficient quality and quantity of water and ensure water security, water sources need to be identified, protected, and sustainably used through integrated water resources management (IWRM).
- There needs to be a process to identify, map, and align new and existing initiatives, and encourage concerted efforts.

III. Overview of opportunities for progress and transformative solutions

The existing and future water-related challenges we face require the rapid development and deployment of innovative and transformative solutions that go beyond business-as-usual. The international community must strive for actionable and transformative solutions that can foster progress in a holistic/synergistic manner.

Points to consider:

- The success in achieving SDG 6 will rely on the success of societal transition that must take place within this decade. For example, agri-food systems are deeply entwined with water resources – such that the sustainable transition in one cannot happen without the other.
    - Almost all of the liquid freshwater in the world is groundwater, supporting drinking water supplies, sanitation systems, farming, industry and ecosystems.[1] About 40 per cent of all the water used for irrigation comes from aquifers.[2]
- In 2020, the SCBD published its flagship report, the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook.[3] Two of the main outputs is an assessment of progress towards the elements of all 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including Targets 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, and 15, as they relate to inland waters, and a summary of the kind of transitions needed in particular realms and areas of human activity, such as a sustainable freshwater transition.
    - One-pager assessments of Targets 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, and 15, as they relate to inland waters can be found here: https://www.cbd.int/waters/doc/gbo5-inlandwaters-en.pdf
    - A one-pager summary of the sustainable freshwater transition can be found here: https://www.cbd.int/waters/doc/gbo5-inlandwaters-transition-en.pdf
- It is important to protect and effectively manage areas that are known to be sources of water and water towers (such as mountains), on which millions of people depend:
    - By providing 60 to 80% of all freshwater resources for our planet, mountains (known as 'water towers') fulfil the needs of more than half of humanity. Mountains matter for disaster risk reduction, water and food security, tourism, the youth, and IPLCs. People in lowlands/downstream

[1] https://www.un.org/development/desa/un-desa-voice/things-you-need-to-know/2022/03
[2] https://www.fao.org/3/AL816E/al816e.pdf
[3] https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo5/publication/gbo-5-en.pdf

depend on these services, including opportunities for recreation and spiritual renewal.

- Protected areas are the source of 20% of all continental surface water runoff, potentially supplying freshwater to two-thirds of the global population.[4] One-third of the world's largest 100 cities, rely on forest-protected areas for a substantial part of their domestic water supply.

The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework aims to deliver fast results at an increased scale. The themes of the interactive dialogues will be addressed through the lens of five cross-cutting and interdependent accelerators namely: Financing, Data and information, Capacity development, Innovation, and Governance.

1. **Financing**

This section will examine how to improve targeting, better utilization of existing resources and mobilization of additional domestic and international funding for delivery and implementation of all SDG 6 targets, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other goals and targets. It may also explore the barriers that preclude finance mobilisation to date and offer action-oriented solutions.

Points to consider:

- Need for accountability and transparency in future allocation of resources.
- Identification, mapping and alignment of existing water-related initiatives, programmes and projects, and planning new integrated projects synergistically, could facilitate allocation of scarce resources and time and cost-effective implementation.
- At the planning and decision-making level, there is a need for vertical (from field to policy) and horizontal (intersectoral/cross-sectoral) integration of water issues, particularly at the national and regional levels, as some of the issues require transboundary collaboration.
- It is also vitally important to ensure the appropriate use of financing for the future and to avoid the collapse of aquatic/freshwater ecosystems. Many incentives exist that may be valuable to support a sustainable transition, however they are incompatible with many of the harmful subsidies that still exist. The top 20 known financial institutions have provided US$2.5 trillion in financing to the world's most water-impactful companies over the past 10 years.[5]
- A 2019 report from the Network for Greening the Financial System found that "environmental degradation [including water pollution and scarcity of fresh water] could cascade to risks for financial institutions, as reduced availability of fresh water or a lack of biodiversity could limit the operations of businesses in a

[4] https://www.cbd.int/waters/doc/gbo5-inlandwaters-en.pdf

[5] https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/media/financial-institutions-deeply-exposed-to-stranded-assets-caused-by-global-water-crisis

specific region. These could turn into drivers of financial risks and affect financial institutions' exposures to those businesses."[6,7]

- Additionally, "one third of listed financial institutions were not assessing exposure of financial activities to water risks, suggesting that many financial institutions may be underestimating their exposure and as such, over-allocating capital to high-risk activities."[4,8,9]

2. **Data and information**

This section will discuss how data generation, validation, standardization and information exchange can build trust and support leaders in making informed decisions and increase accountability and transparency. It will discuss how to ensure that high-quality information on SDG 6 indicators is shared and can be easily accessible by any decision maker.

Points to consider:

- The SDG 6 indicators will inform decision makers – however, as water issues vary from country to country and region to region in terms of problems and also in priority solutions to bring about transformative change, an information sharing mechanism (including best practices, different initiatives, barriers and transboundary issues to overcome…) may need to be available to countries (i.e. more information than what is generated by the indicators).

3. **Capacity development**

This section will explore how inclusive human and institutional capacities at all levels can enable improved service levels, operating and maintenance technology, increased job creation in the water sector and the retaining of a skilled work force.

4. **Innovation**

This section will discuss how innovative practices and technologies can be leveraged and scaled up to ultimately lead to improved water resources and sanitation development and management at the country level.

Points to consider:

- Ecosystem-based approaches should be prioritized, when possible.
    - Ecosystem-based approaches such as ecosystem-based adaptation, nature-based solutions, disaster risk reduction and sustainable forest, agriculture, fisheries and wildlife management, would provide multiple benefits and

[6] https://cdn.cdp.net/cdp-production/cms/reports/documents/000/006/321/original/High_and_Dry_Report_Final.pdf?1651652748
[7] https://www.ngfs.net/sites/default/files/medias/documents/ngfs_first_comprehensive_report_-_17042019_0.pdf
[8] https://cdn.cdp.net/cdp-production/cms/reports/documents/000/005/741/original/CDP-Financial-Services-Disclosure-Report-2020.pdf?1619537981
[9] CDP 2021 Climate Change data set

could foster synergies between biodiversity and climate change and sustainable development agendas.[10]

- While future trade-offs between certain of nature's contributions to people are inevitable, the severity of the trade-offs may be mitigated by timely, progressive, and proactive policy interventions and environmental safeguards based on the most up-to-date evidence, and by mainstreaming/integrating environmental issues (e.g., biodiversity, climate change and land degradation) into all socio-economic sectors, such as agriculture, water, energy, health, transportation, and infrastructure, as well as cities.

- Further information on biodiversity safeguards principles and safeguards are presented in the voluntary guidelines for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction that were adopted by the Conference of the Parties in decision 14/5, found here: https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-93-en.pdfThis section should also include how to increase research and development to better use and improve the quality of water resources. For example, technologies that improve irrigation systems, avoid and treat pollution, and guarantee water quality, have significant implications for biodiversity and ecosystems.

5. **Governance**

This section will focus on the need for cross-sector and transboundary collaboration, clear roles, stakeholder involvement and effective and inclusive institutions to ensure the effective implementation of SDG 6 for all people.

Points to consider:

- Stakeholder involvement and effective and inclusive institutions require appropriate equity measures that facilitate fair and equitable access and benefit-sharing from sufficient quantity and quality of water resources, and that facilitate a sense of ownership, safeguard and stewardship among people who depend on water resources for their livelihoods and those most vulnerable to variability in water resources. This requires the full and effective participation of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and local communities.

IV. Recommendations

This section will outline the main recommendations for the theme, including possible voluntary commitments that would be relevant to address the global water challenges, specifically with respect to the theme of this concept paper. Please build as appropriate on and with reference to the three principles of the Conference:

1. Inclusive (e.g., who are the actors that should work together)

[10] https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/c429/2df7/dc8cc589bbf1f5b58f8a1d63/cop-14-inf-22-en.pdf

- Indigenous peoples and local communities; women; youth; public and private sectors; business and finance community; scientific community; academia; non-governmental organizations; citizens, producers and consumers; and all other stakeholders that have impacts on the quantity, quality, availability and use of water.

2. Cross sectoral (e.g., what are the sectors that need to be mobilized)

- Virtually all sectors that use water, including but not limited to: public health; production; manufacturing; industry; finance; agriculture and aquaculture; forestry; tourism; energy; transportation; infrastructure; etc.

3. Action oriented (e.g., what needs to be done).

- In addition to identification, restoration and protection of water sources and towers, and integrated management of water resources, we will need adjustments in governance and institutional frameworks and policies, mainstreaming and awareness-raising.

Due consideration may be given to contributions from other water-related meetings that served to provide input for the preparatory process for the Conference.

V. Guiding Questions

This section will present the guiding questions that will shape the discussion during the relevant interactive dialogue at the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Questions to consider:

- What (and how much) should freshwater ecosystems be restored and protected to ensure the health of water sources?
- What is the current status of water quality, quantity, and accessibility at the local, national, regional, and global levels?
- What are the global goals and targets and how can they be implemented in a pro-active and synergistic manner to ensure time and cost-effective implementation?
- How can countries be assisted in their efforts towards effective implementation and reporting? What are their needs (in terms of finance, data, capacity building, etc)?
- How can the integration of water considerations be approached if water is vital to all/most sectors? For example, vertical integration (field to policy/decision making) and horizontal integration (intersectoral/cross-sectoral).