



UN
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CONFERENCE

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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Water and Energy for Sustainable Development:
Integrated Solutions Supporting Regional Cooperation,
Climate Resilience and Biodiversity

23 March 2023, 12:30 – 1:45pm, Conference Room 5, UNHQ

Organized by: UN DESA and
Sustainable Water Energy
Solutions Network

Background on the event

Ensuring universal access to modern and sustainable energy, water, and sanitation services, by addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development – the economic, social, and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner, lies at the heart of sustainable development. UN DESA in cooperation with members of the Sustainable Water and Energy Solutions Network convened a Side-Event to bring together multi-stakeholders to discuss and showcase existing initiatives addressing the water-energy nexus and share knowledge on replicable and scalable effective solutions.

Key Issues discussed

- Participants noted that water is a vital source for all, and a prime raw material and natural resource for clean energy. With a growing population, meeting increasing energy demands is a challenge, the most sustainable path forward is to make an energy transition through renewable energy.
- Participants shared about their work supporting two conventions to promote water cooperation and prevent conflicts based on international water law principles, The Convention of the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and

International Lakes and the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus of the Helsinki Water Convention on Transboundary Waters.

- Water insecurity is a major issue in Ethiopia, particularly in rural areas where only 5.2% of the population has access to safe and reliable water sources. Some citizens must walk long distances to access potable water. Particularly in the southern part of the country, upwards of 24 million people, are living in severe drought-affected areas.
- Participants shared about the sugarcane agro-industrial sector in Guatemala, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America and the commitment of the industry to improve the responsible use of water, ensure sustainable development, use resources efficiently, promote a more circular economy and the use of clean technologies.
- Coordination across water and energy as well as joint planning are much needed but also an underused opportunity; and the availability of information across water-energy is a constraint. Cross-sectoral investment programmes have started to emerge in transboundary settings but the economic and financial case for nexus investments needs to be strengthened.

Key recommendations for action

- Participants discussed the importance of benchmarking for assisting water utilities in improving their services. Performance assessment can be used for each area of the value chain including water quality, reliability, service quality (inputs); governance, health & safety, asset management (throughputs) and climate footprint and resilience, energy efficiency, and the SDGs. Improvement can be encouraged by gathering practitioners together for benchmarking workshops and site visits, exchanging good practices and innovations, and discussing performance gaps, and areas for priority action.
- In Ethiopia, the need for additional actors, cross-sector support, and more finance in order to scale programs to tackle the water insecurity problem was emphasized. Ethiopia's rapidly growing population is putting increasing pressure on already scarce water resources.
- To address growing populations, uncertainties around water supply level guarantees, and future climate concerns, it's recommended that water utility companies use a multifaced approach, including but not limited to: replacing pipes to reduce losses, installing smart meters, improving sewage systems, and using social awareness campaigns to build collective concern and support.

- Participants explained that the depletion of water resources has implications for the energy sector. For renewable energy to be more sustainable and impactful, it needs to be used for water systems and water also needs to be mainstreamed into energy discussions. There is a place for energy in water cooperation's regional frameworks: institutional reforms taking place in basin/regional organizations to better tackle energy issues.
- Participants described and promoted examples of cross-sectoral partnerships to improve water quality in large watersheds. A case in Brazil was demonstrated where a municipality, hydropower company, and a sanitation company worked together to reduce domestic sewage and improve a previously eutrophic watershed.