



UN
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CONFERENCE

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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Mobilizing Cross-Sector Audiences for Water Action

March 22, 2023 1:30-3:00pm ET
79 5th Ave #300, New York, NY 10003, United States

Organized by: Purpose partnered with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), a UN-accredited (OSAA, DPI) non-governmental organization, the government of Brazil and Capgemini (local hosts).

Background on the event

Despite a recognition that cross-sector collaboration will be critical in solving the water crisis, progress has been limited. Facilitated by Purpose, this 90-minute session gathered 20 participants from within and across different sectors connected to water and explored ideas for turbocharging cross-sector collaboration on water. We discussed how to engage different audiences and foster new relationships and networks to bring these ideas to life—bolstering the ability of all to mobilize audiences to implement SDG 6. A big thanks to the people who joined us from ARUP, Bayer, C40 Cities, Cargill, Google, Kusini Water, Ralph Lauren, SDOH Strategic Initiatives, Societe Generale, the United Nations Foundation, Water Environment Federation, Water Witness and ZDHC. The event was hosted in partnership with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), a UN-accredited (OSAA, DPI) non-governmental organization, the government of Brazil, Capgemini and Purpose (local hosts).

Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))

Our commitment is to elevate stories that cultivate a shared narrative around water action. In order to do this, we have to position multi-sectoral initiatives in ways that foster trust between

sectors, work towards a common language and inspire opportunities to explore creative collaborations. Ultimately, these stories (and broader narrative) can contribute to groundswell support for water action and the financing, accountability and momentum required to achieve (and surpass) SDG6.

Key Issues discussed

- **Public awareness of the issue is limited:** There's been a lack of public awareness, urgency and storytelling on water so it is challenging to mobilise decision-makers around a shared narrative, language and storytelling to support actions. Where there is action, it is tightly project-focused within the water sector with a heavy emphasis on WASH (access, inequality and water management). Outside of the water sector, it is challenging to tell a story that is holistic, systemic, outcome-focused and easy to understand. We're struggling to get political action on water because we do not have public awareness. This is critical for operating in a legal and policy landscape that is ready for the changes needed at a global level.
- **Water is only visible in a crisis:** Storytelling examples on water (e.g. Day Zero) tends to be reactive to a local or national crisis. We're not telling a long-view story that inspires global solutions. Where we have local / national stories, we are not engaging audiences through messages, frames and values that resonate. There is a tendency to discuss water in the abstract and a reluctance to interrogate questions of equity and create meaningful platforms that honours perspectives and experiences from groups most impacted by water crises.
- **Need for collaboration to craft a shared global narrative:** Public awareness is limited because there isn't a shared language or narrative. Collaboration for different sectors (intersectoral, intra-sectoral and extra-sectoral [cooperation for water](#)) is difficult with disparate groups working on similar issues without alignment around a shared goal, lack of investment and short-sighted decision-making. Unlike with climate where audiences understand the global nature of the issue, discussions about water tend to be more localized. For example, water does not have a '1.5 degree' goal that can rally people around it. It is challenging to thread that *global and local story* on water. People struggle with the storytelling around water in a way that's consistent, relevant at a global and local level.
- **The finance sector does not have the knowledge to act on water:** They are a powerful player in direct and indirect investments, but lack awareness, expertise and clarity on the return on investment. There is also room to elevate where they and others in the corporate sector more broadly, are taking positive action on water vs. shame and blame. They're often focused on climate targets and reducing emissions because that's what they've heard investors and regulators care about. The main concern is a lack of awareness of water in order to prioritize it.

- **Lack of trusted messengers:** Where we have platforms for engaging at a global level and storytelling examples that attempt to address this, lack of trust of communicators and messengers is a consistent challenge for a number of reasons including but not limited to accountability for action, transparency. Inclusion of key voices (e.g. youth), who might be able to move this further is stifled as a result.

Key recommendations for action

- Develop and tell a holistic, engaging story about water that is focused on systems, outcomes and real life experience so that we can elevate the importance of water globally in connection to SDGs (e.g. health, education, climate action) and locally to lived experiences
- Position multi-sectoral initiatives as amplifiers of stories that promote a common language so that we can create opportunities for engaging unlikely partners
- Identify opportunities to involve stakeholders in ways that reflect their strengths, coalesce around a common goal in order to build accountability and trust.

Further Reading

- [The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: partnerships and cooperation for water](#)
- [The Water Dialogues, “Key Messages for Accelerating Cross-Sectoral SDG 6 Implementation”](#)
- [Global Water Intelligence, “From Corporate Water Risk to Value Creation”](#)
- [UN Water, “SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework”](#)
- [UNDP, SIWI and UNICEF, “Cooperation Opportunities for Improved Integration Across SDG6”](#)