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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

The power of public-private water alliances: accelerating innovation and policy transformation

Friday 24 March, 11.30 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

APCO Worldwide, 1250 Broadway, 31st floor, New York, NY 10001

Organized by: 50L Home Coalition, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the World Economic Forum.

Background on the event

Water stress is globally widespread, and numerous cities have been close to ‘day zero’ scenarios in the last decade – the day when the municipal water would be turned-off for people. As many cities, states, and countries are accelerating their efforts to mitigate their carbon emissions and adapt to climate change, public-private collaboration to bring together city leaders and innovators has never been so urgent and relevant to our future. The 50L Home Coalition partners announced new efforts to test collaboratively the feasibility of water innovations in Los Angeles, California and Phoenix, Arizona, and called for further action to step up public-private action and funding for water resilience in cities.

Water Action Agenda

The 50L Home Coalition’s ambition is to build an enabling environment to transform water systems and prevent day-zero scenarios globally by bringing together policy makers and innovators. Together, coalition partners will co-create the policy templates that will prepare cities for a new generation of water efficient solutions and resilient infrastructure access for all. In the next few years, this coalition will help cities by supporting and organising network gatherings with city and utility leaders, seed funding grants for cities to design and execute scaling-up projects and/or small pilots, and a collaborative platform for policy and co-development.

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/50l-home-champion-cities>

Key Issues discussed

- Public-private collaborations can shape new solutions for complex problems and facilitate the adoption of innovations to ensure sustainable outcomes for all. However, water innovation alliances are still uncommon; in this context, how can we bring together diverse groups of actors and do things differently?
- Leadership is required to bring together actors from different stakeholder groups and shape public-private collaborations. What are the key public-private collaboration examples for water in the US? Whose work should we support and scale up?
- What are the areas where governments and the business community can collaborate to shape sustainability initiatives and build water and energy resilience? What examples of best practice should we consider?
- Many innovators and entrepreneurs in corporations and startups have embraced water stress challenges and are shaping new solutions to live in a net zero carbon future with less fresh water. How can we create stronger collaborations and accelerate water innovation?
- What are the key enablers that have driven the adoption of water innovations in the last few years, especially in the public-private space? How can we use these enablers to scale up innovations and accelerate systems transformation?

Key recommendations for action

- Private sector shall collaborate with cities. Innovative cities (e.g. Phoenix, AZ; San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles, CA; and Curitiba, Brazil, to name a few) offer opportunities to shape laboratories where the private sector can participate, collaborate, and legitimately inform future policy ideas and actions.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships have the power to unlock innovations that create multiple savings simultaneously (e.g. benefits to the natural environment, cost savings for citizens, systemic efficiencies) and thus build systemic resilience.
- Understanding the private sector and leveraging their strengths to support and scale up successful approaches is key. Complementarily, businesses have responsibility over their societal impacts. Deep collaborations to innovate and transform water systems at the scale and speed we need are good investments too.
- Rigorous data is essential to transform systems concurrently (e.g. water *and* energy). To drive efficiency, a priority is to look where water is going, what appliances are using it, understand households, and catch leaks. It is difficult to enable savings and help people unless they understand how they are using water and energy.
- To shape effective partnerships, cities can incentivise a different approach by embracing/adopting new ideas in a sustainable and safe way instead of fighting them (e.g. water reuse, decentralised systems). Incentivising and exploring out of the box solutions is a first step.