High-level Symposium on SDG6 and targets: ensuring that no one is left behind in access to water and sanitation

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GWP speaking points for Thematic Session 1 Multi-stakeholder Partnerships initiatives for the SDGs and the International Decade for Water and Sustainable Development

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GWP: example of a global multi-stakeholder partnership

GWP is a response to the UNCED (1992) call for IWRM based on public participation. Founded in 1996, it has grown to a network of 3000+ partners in 187 countries that are structured around regional (13 RWPs), national (85 CWPS) and sometimes sub-national multi-stakeholder platforms (area water partnerships and urban water partnerships).
The GWP network is supported by the Intergovernmental Organization GWPO, a partnership of countries and intergovernmental organizations that promote IWRM and participatory and inclusive water governance, through supporting the work of the GWP network of partners.

GWP composition:
- At global level: truly multi-stakeholder, encompassing State and non-State actors, international and intergovernmental organization; representatives of all Major Groups of Agenda 21; and many GWP partner organizations are networks and umbrella organizations themselves.
- At regional, national and sub-national levels, partnership composition is more divers and not all stakeholder groups are included at all times and at all levels. EXAMPLES

A network with purpose
A key feature of an MSP is that different stakeholders come together to pursue a common objective. In the case of GWP: achieving a water secure world as the foundation and the glue for sustainable and equitable development through promoting integrated water resources management and participatory water governance.

Key functions of GWP
There are many different partnerships under the global GWP umbrella. The key functions can be rather different, depending on a country or region, the local conditions, the status of IWRM policies and implementation. They typically relate to creating an enabling environment for IWRM implementation and include: peer learning and knowledge exchange, providing a neutral platform for dialogue, policy support and agenda setting, promoting and facilitating cooperation.

Increasing integration through inclusive MSPs

When involving diverse stakeholders as equal partners in the development of policies and programs, the water issue is viewed from different perspectives, and various needs, experiences and views are integrated into a holistic approach that is not restricted to water per se. And necessary trade-off can be made that are understood and accepted by the different beneficiaries in contention. That is the concept described by Dublin Principle 2, one of the four guiding principles for IWRM.

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GWP experience with integration through MSPs

1. Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSPs) unite different stakeholder groups that work jointly to achieve their agreed objectives. Partnerships are voluntary associations → not necessarily all relevant actors are included. EXAMPLES
   An analysis of key functions of the partnership and which stakeholders are needed to perform those functions is an absolute prerequisite to create functional and effective MSPs that practice an integrated approach.

2. Stakeholder consultations are often confused for partnerships. Inclusive consultations are essential for integrated planning. All stakeholder groups should be included and special efforts need to be made for the full inclusion of vulnerable groups and their empowerment so that their voices are heard. Otherwise the outcome is biased and lack of ownership and trust will often thwart future implementation. One should not assume however that consulted parties are automatically committed partners. Going from consultation to engagement is a process that requires considerable effort, time and resources.

3. Reality is that some partners are more equal than others. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development envisages an all-of-society engagement and partnership ensuring that no one is left behind. → serious pre-investment in strengthening those stakeholder groups that are often and easily left behind is an absolute prerequisite to make the all-of-society engagement and partnership a reality on the ground.

In preparation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, GWP has developed an SDG preparedness facility. Meaning that we support our Country Water Partnerships to be fit for purpose for implementation of the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda is an agreement of member states. Countries will have their own development priorities and have different environmental and social circumstances. GWP therefore sets out to inventory the water nexi in the different countries where we have active Country Water Partnerships (water – food security – gender nexus; water –DRR – climate –gender nexus…). The role of the CWP in the nexus is defined and the composition of the CWP in terms of stakeholder groups is assessed and expanded/strengthened where needed. This way we hope to contribute to effective MSPs for water and sustainable development at country level.

Managing complexity

Managing the diversity of a global multi-stakeholder network like GWP has many challenges.

- all partners are independent organizations with their own governance structures and modus operandi. They are very divers, may or may not have a legal status, work in different legal systems etc. → communication often has to be tailor made taking into consideration the different organizational cultures, languages, capacities…
- diversity is a strength but can also be a weakness → accountability frameworks have to allow for diversity but still provide common denominators that all partners can abide by.
- Roles and functions are often not clear, or change over time creating friction or even conflicts → the network has to be regularly assessed
- When applying top-down monitoring, bureaucracy rules and transparency is compromised → decentralization is needed without losing accountability.

To manage vertical integration, responsibilities need to be assigned to the lowest appropriate level. Agenda 21 already said: think globally, act locally.

GWP increasingly uses mechanisms of peer learning and peer reviewing. This builds local capacity, increases horizontal coordination and cooperation and strengthens MSPs. A feature of an effective MSP is that it relies on trust and reciprocity, and that the participating actors hold each other accountable.

Concluding thoughts

- serious investments are needed to create and maintain effective MSPs for water and sustainable development;
- form follows function → first agree on objectives, what the role of the MSP is and what are the key actors/stakeholders that the MSP needs to be able to fulfill its role.
- Decentralize, where possible; do not do at global level what can be done nationally or sub-nationally. Better invest in local capacity which in the long run is more cost efficient and certainly more effective.
- Some good partnership analysis: see background document