VICE-MINISTRY OF WATER AND BASIC SANITATION
INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES – WATER CONFERENCE 2023

1. Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

In this first dialogue it is important to underline the linkages between SD6 and SDG 3 targets related to health. Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene are essential components of providing basic health services, as it prevents infections and the spread of diseases, as the COVID-19 pandemic showed.

SDG 6 establishes the goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, therefore, states must progressively expand water and sanitation services, particularly in rural and marginalized urban areas, considering the needs of indigenous peoples, local communities, women, and children, to promote comprehensive and sustainable development and thus reduce existing gaps and progressively eliminate inequalities.

To advance in the universalization of access to these services and reach those in rural and semi-urban areas where basic services are still lacking due to difficulties in implementing traditional solutions, stakeholders should develop frameworks and actions that guarantee the human right to water, bearing in mind that this right shall be satisfied in an integral manner, guaranteeing availability, access, and quality of the service.

This challenge requires the development of "*Differential Schemes":* institutional reforms, including technical, operational and management conditions, that allow the regulatory frameworks to adapt the formulation of projects that contribute to improve the conditions of access to drinking water and basic sanitation in rural areas where there is traditionally a lag in this area, and where the use of conventional technologies and solutions is not sustainable.

Based on this premise, there is a range of technological and organizational possibilities for access to drinking water and basic sanitation services in rural populations and dispersed communities. Given that the current territorial conditions make it unfeasible to apply conventional service delivery models, we propose an interactive dialogue that focuses on the set of technical, operational, and management conditions that would guarantee this access, based on the use of non-conventional technologies, as well as guidelines and regulatory instruments that allow the implementation of differential schemes.

Taking into account the need to ensure that every any and all solutions effectively leave no one behind, it's critical to consider the following: (i) availability of the resource not only for personal, but also for domestic uses; (ii) accessibility; (iii) affordability - that the price of the service does not become another obstacle; (iv) acceptability - that the solutions are tailored to the cultural context of the communities; and (v) quality - that the water is suitable for human consumption.

In addition to the aforementioned, the dialogue would be an important opportunity to promote joint cooperation projects to strengthen technical capacities on alternative water solutions in rural areas, and the development of non-conventional systems for water supply and sanitation. Consequently, yielding the perfect environment to discuss collaborative initiatives in science, research, and innovation for the sustainable development of water resources at the local, national, and regional levels.

Lastly, during the dialogue it would be important to acknowledge that achieving the SDG 6 targets requires constant articulation and dialogue with communities and other actors that play an important role in advancing access to water and sanitation. For this reason, it is crucial that stakeholders, especially governments, promote community-based water management and inter-institutional synergies, embracing a more interdisciplinary approach and working together with communities and marginalized groups for the implementation of meaningful solutions and operation of water and sanitation services.

This requires a greater understanding of different schemes that are applicable to the provision of public water and sewerage services by community aqueducts and small rural providers, and the dialogue create a perfect scenario to learn more about other countries experiences in formulating incentives, increasing quality, and improving service provision of water, sewerage, and sanitation services, with the help of the communities and small service providers.

2. Water for Sustainable Development: Valuing Water, Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development

As stablished in different conferences and in the Bonn Key Messages, water is a key enabler providing multiple co-benefits to other sectors and answers for global challenges. To ensure sustainable development, water should be at the center of the planning and decision-making activities.

Climate change directly impacts water availability and quality; and urbanization and population growth generate more pressure on the already scarce resources, which leads to an increase of threats to ecosystems and biodiversity. Hence, it is necessary to strengthen the comprehensiveness of actions and interventions harmonizing the countries' water potential with the fundamental right to access; democratize its use and management; promote the protection of moorlands, aquifers, and watersheds, guarantee the connectivity of wetlands; recover the space of rivers and their natural conditions; protect biodiversity, recover marine ecosystems, among other aspects.

Furthermore, lack of resources and non-conventional solutions that are sustainable for small communities, there is an inefficient wastewater management and a lack of adequate wastewater treatment facilities. In addition, environmental pollution, water contamination and deforestation constituted challenges for water resources, which hinder food security and consequently sustainable economic development. It is crucial to address this financial gap, and establish a route to ensure structural, innovative, and sustainable financing on water.

Another aspect to addressed in the dialogue is that stakeholders should strive to strengthen the water-energy-food nexus in all future projects and interventions. This, considering that SDG 6 is interlinked with SDG 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. SDG 6 has a key role in anchoring the growth, production and preparation of food and reducing undernutrition through access to safe and adequate WASH services.

However, it is important to note that there might be a negative effect of agriculture on water, therefore stakeholders from the national, provincial, and municipal spheres also need to collaborate and partner more with the private sector, farmers’ associations, and local people to promote smart approaches to water use in agriculture.

3. Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate Resilience and DRR

It is very important to support initiatives that can bridge coordination and cooperation efforts to accelerate progress that can jointly contribute to both SDG14 and SDG6, taking water as a strategic resource for livelihoods and human health, and therefore should be at the center of many policies that take care of social and economic development.

Fresh water and salt water are closely interconnected. The oceans and seas are major sources of water in the hydrological cycle and therefore require coordinated sustainable management through integrated water and coastal management with the involvement of other water actors.

Halving the proportion of untreated wastewater contributes greatly to both reducing marine pollution and adverse impacts on the marine and coastal environments and allowing for their restoration. The implementation of integrated water resources management at national and transboundary levels therefore has positive effects on sustainable freshwater management and use and in turn on marine and coastal pollution and ecosystems management.

Climate change is altering weather patterns and raising sea levels, leading to increased disasters such as droughts and flooding. Increased droughts are reducing the availability of water, especially in arid regions. At the same time, floods are becoming more frequent and intense, causing contamination of available water as well as increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. The UN 2023 Water Conference should address the effects of climate change on water availability and quality. The Conference should prioritize leaving no one behind, as marginalized communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters

During the dialogue, stakeholders should underline the lack of access and accountability of funding, which hinders progress especially in the Global South and least developed countries. Participants should emphasize the need for long-term funding of climate projects that will protect both the environment and water resources.

Alternative water resources should be explored to preserve water availability and reduce further groundwater exploitation. Brackish and wastewater treatments should be further developed, improved, and distributed to avoid using freshwater. Rainwater collection should be increased to avoid excessive groundwater extraction and preserve water for use during drought conditions. Within the dialogue it would be important to advance in the exchange of experiences in these fields and in the management of resources oriented to the financing of these initiatives for their sustainability.

Furthermore, it is important to discuss about risk management approach in the water and sanitation sector. Exchanging experiences and best practices on this topic, and the development of projects related to climate change adaption in the watersheds.

Lastly it will be important to discuss the sectors actions to decrease GHG emissions. Considering the strategies implemented by different countries for the water, agriculture, urban development, and financial sectors, with a community approach.

4. Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda

To achieve progress, water must be embraced as a human right and not perceived as a commodity. Stakeholders should discuss and agree that all sectors should provide a collaborative response to address water security challenges, such as water and justice, promoting equity and social inclusion in public policies.

Moreover, there is a range of technological and organizational possibilities for access to drinking water and basic sanitation services in rural populations and dispersed communities and informal settlements. The Water Conference will be an ideal space to learn about successful experiences, new solutions and cost-efficient, effective, and appropriate technologies and non-conventional systems that will make it possible to advance access to these services. Hence, sharing innovative technologies, increasing accurate data, and promoting the role of researching institutions should be supported as transformative actions.

Furthermore, capacity building and experience and knowledge exchange within local communities should be considered in long-term plans towards “Water for Cooperation”, To bridge the gaps within the science-policy-practice interface to influence sound decision-making based on scientific knowledge and evidence.

In sum, cooperation mechanisms are required, including the provision of financing, as well as technology transfer and capacity building, technical knowledge and alternative technologies for water resource management, water, and sanitation services, with emphasis on the circular economy, risk management and climate action.

5. Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the UN Secretary-General’s Action Plan.

To achieve SDG 6 by 2030, national governments must invest more in the water and sanitation sector. This includes the establishment of financial mechanisms that allow the development of ambitious infrastructure, not only in urban areas, but also in rural and semi-urban areas where investments may be different given the magnitude of the projects. Furthermore, there is a need to reestablish the relation between water for domestic needs, including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and water resource management (WRM), to work more coordinated to achieve SDG 6 goals.

During this dialogue it is important to discuss the requests by many member states to the Secretary General to appoint a UN Special Envoy for Water. This, taking into account that we consider it as a great opportunity for the implementation and realization of SDG 6, since giving "a voice and a face" to the vital resource could ensure that water remains a priority in the political agenda inside and outside the UN. The Special Envoy should help draw attention to this vital resource and integrate water issues into intergovernmental initiatives on climate, food security, energy, environment, health, and other relevant sectors that are closely related to the availability and management of water resources.

To conclude the discussions this interactive dialogue should address the needs in each accelerator (financing, governance, data and information, capacity development, and innovation)

Optimized financing: improve targeting, and a better utilization of existing resources and mobilization of additional domestic and international funding to ensure efficient service delivery and implementation. Governments, national and international financial institutions

and multilateral actors need to improve targeting and effective use of existing funding, mobilize domestic resources, and attract additional investment from private and public sources.

Improved data and information: Data generation, validation, standardization, and information exchange will build trust so leaders can make informed decisions and increase accountability. There is a need for high-quality information on SDG 6 indicators that is shared and easily accessible by any decision maker for analysis, planning and implementation of effective cross-sectoral action to leave no one behind. Only with capacities to effectively collect, analyze, and share data informed decisions and policies, planning and investments can translate data to action.

Capacity development: Inclusive human and institutional capacities at all levels will enable improved service levels, operating and maintenance technology, increased job creation in the water sector and the retaining of a skilled work force. However, capacity development needs to holistically transfer knowledge beyond training to foster cross-sectoral decision-making, planning and implementation, intensifying horizontal and vertical cooperation on all levels.

Innovation: Innovative practices and technologies will be leveraged and scaled up and ultimately lead to improved water resources and sanitation development and management. Decision-makers need to combine traditional knowledge with modern technology and innovative methods by involving multiple stakeholders to increase efficiency of water use and ensure sustainable freshwater supplies, especially in water-stressed and transboundary regions. Research and development, innovative technical as well as financial solutions, but also new inclusive governance and circular business models are a must when working towards accelerated cross-sectoral implementation of SDG 6.

Governance: Cross-sector and transboundary collaboration, clear roles, stakeholder involvement and effective and inclusive institutions will make SDG 6 everyone’s business. This will lead to the establishment of efficient mandates for SDG 6, and the strengthening of institutions to deliver and the establishment of intersectoral coordination mechanisms that operate effectively.

While SDG 6 is an essential enabler of the 2030 Agenda, water issues suffer from lack of visibility in international processes. Water governance, from the local to the global level, is highly fragmented, with roles and responsibilities for closely linked water aspects assigned to different entities. Multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approaches are needed at the systemic level to optimize the use of scarce resources, accounting for the maximization of co-benefits and minimization of trade-offs to manage conflicting and cross-sectoral interests and to ensure accountability