

Stakeholder Dialogue of the Preparatory Meeting for the UN 2023 Water Conference

Roundtable on Innovation

14:20-16:05 EDT, 24 October 2022

Conference Room 12, UNHQ

Moderator: Mr Marc Zeitoun, Director General, Geneva Water Hub

Speakers:

Ms Sareen Malik, Executive Secretary, African Civil Society Network on Water & Sanitation

Mr Neil Dhot, Executive Director, AquaFed

Ms Jodie Miller, Head of Section Head of Section, Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications, IAEA

Orientation input

Mr Marc Zeitoun, Director General, Geneva Water Hub

What type of innovation are we talking about? In terms of types of innovation, the most common one is innovation in science and technology. A second type of innovation is innovative ideas and new and better ways of conceiving of the challenges we face, so that we can then put the technology or other ways of addressing those for better use. A third type of innovation is governance, different ways of doing things. The fourth type of innovation is financing. Are there any new models that work better than others?

For whom are we innovating for the sake of innovation? Are we innovating for profit, either financial or reputational, or are we innovating to advance common goals like the SDGs or equitable water sharing?

Ms Sareen Malik, Executive Secretary, African Civil Society Network on Water & Sanitation

We need to start putting people at the center and to seek to lift communities out of poverty by making Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene services accessible 24/7. We need to:

- Create more enabling environments, putting the policies in place.
- Widen the scope between of water and climate innovation and bridge the gap between technological and non-technological innovation.
- Enhance the capacity of water innovators
- Engage the youth, private sector and civil society in innovation and make it part of their core business
- Promote innovation learning
- Reinforce regulatory frameworks
- Strengthen research and development in the water sector

- Promote Grassroots water innovation

The innovation that is urgently needed is the one that will put an end to the burden of fetching water on women.

Mr Neil Dhot, Executive Director, AquaFed

Some of the best innovations are local. It is always local needs that drive innovation. Team building is another aspect of innovation. A very interesting point is about innovating in social terms. The public authorities set tariffs, and innovation is needed for equitable levels of tariffs. Also, It is important to work with women locally to help get people connected.

One specific point on innovation that needs to be mentioned is water reuse. AquaFed has expertise in water reuse and we have to push harder across the world. It is difficult to create the right laws and the regulations that enable reuse to be in place much faster.

Ms Jodie Miller, Head of Section Head of Section, Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications, IAEA

We need to innovate on communications. We need a language that everybody can understand. We need to bring science to people. IAEA is mandated to bring technical capacity development to countries.

A better way of generating the data and transferring technology is to coordinate actions and to invest in a network of laboratories that can underpin the data and information. We want to build a laboratory that people use.

Open exchange

During the section of open exchange, participants raised the following points:

- We need to take advantage of the knowledge, data and technology available, and forge partnerships for risk-informed decision-making across levels of governance sectors and stakeholder groups, in order to effectively address the systemic risks we face.
- It is important to bring the grassroots to the process. Meanwhile, we need to bring the parliament to the process, which is equally important, in terms of financing innovation, governmental subsidies, etc. We need water champions in every single parliament across the globe.
- The water community has the technology in place with wastewater reuse or bubble barriers etc., however, the governments are lagging behind. Everything in the system starts with regulation, with the holistic approach that takes into account all the aspects of water management, including its regulation.

- National governments need to make affirmative policies and actions to ensure financial support and capacity building for innovations that provide cheap, affordable and environmentally friendly technology.
- The right regulatory or policy signals are needed to encourage successful innovation. Policies and regulations should allow people to fail and start again. More government support is needed for innovators.
- It is important to use global platforms (e.g. UN 2023 Water Conference) to share and replicate good practices across the globe so that people can follow.
- Ensure innovations benefit women and girls. For the sustainable and inclusive water and climate solutions, women's access to land and underground water needs to be ensured. Women's access to affordable finance needs to be achieved. That is also very important aspect in women's capacity building in climate and water technologies.
- Research and innovation has to meet the highest priority needs of those who will deliver SDG 6.
- Technologies and innovation should be adapted for local needs.
- A solution-oriented assessment is required to make a transformative change to develop knowledge for evidence-based action. Innovation is important, but we do not need to reinvent the wheel - we can learn from the experience of others.
- The key principle is to ensure that we leave no one behind. We have to be constantly mindful of the beneficiaries, and focus on the most marginalized groups.
- Link innovation with education - create communities of practice connected to education programs.
- Outreach should be beyond water sector.
- The context of fragility, conflict and violence should be in the agenda of the UN 2023 Water Conference.
- Operationalization of the nexus of the humanitarian and development worlds could be a game changer. Bridging the gap between short term humanitarian help and long term development action is possible. New forms of partnerships are being put in action -partnerships between humanitarian organizations, development actors and local service providers are effective for strengthening the resilience of essential services before and during a protracted crisis.

- Technologies can help to make non-conventional water resources more affordable for all countries.
- Innovation needs collaboration among sectors, stakeholders, and generations. It is important to include women, youth, grassroots organizations, and marginalized groups in innovation.

Potential game changing ideas from the roundtable

- Innovation is more than just technology. We have the technological solutions, but we fail at bringing them to scale and to those who need them.
- The policy and regulatory environments are key to allow innovation to grow and develop. Such environments need to allow for the incubation of new ideas and the possibility of failure.
- Leaving no one behind is key, as well as listening to the local level, both communities and governments.
- It is important to bring grassroots and parliaments into the process.
- Create a policy and regulatory environment that fosters innovation (e.g. invest in start-ups, allow and learn from failures).
- Empower relevant stakeholders (e.g. grassroots organizations, local authorities, parliamentarians) to be integral actors in the innovation process.
- Create a policy and regulatory environment that sparks innovation.
- Empower relevant stakeholders to participate in innovations.

Benefits:

- Making financing accessible for all.
- Targeting investments.
- Creating a business case for sustainable development.

Catalysing ideas:

- Creating a market for innovation.
- Licenses and Technology access.
- Including women, youth, grassroots organizations, marginalized in innovation.