

11th Meeting of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation
17 – 19 Nov., 2008, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Short Report

Background

The 11th UNSGAB meetings were generously hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and co-organized and supported by the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Water Council. On Nov. 16, The Board attended the Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz International Prize for Water award ceremony where the Chair commended the Prize winner's achievements. A Regional Dialogue on water and sanitation with states from the Arab League was held on Nov. 17 with participants engaging in an open discussion on critical water challenges in particular relating to securing financing (the Chair's Summary is attached as Annex 1). UNSGAB and the Islamic Development Bank signed a Joint Statement outlining areas for future collaboration (the Joint Statement is attached as Annex 2). The UNSGAB working groups organized according to the Hashimoto Action Plan (HAP) chapters all advanced their work and the two ad-hoc working groups on the G8 and Africa developed short-term action plans.

Opening Remarks

The UNSGAB Chair, Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands welcomed participants and thanked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Water Council for their support. Board member and Chair of the Arab Water Council, Dr. Abu Zeid described the Council's work to promote integrated water resource management plans as well as capacity building through the Arab Water Academy. Dr. Mohammed AlSaoud, Deputy Minister of Water for Saudi Arabia said water demand is sharply increasing and the Kingdom is enhancing conservation through reuse and reducing network losses while also applying water's economic value. Calling for a new water culture in the region, Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali, President of the Islamic Development Bank stressed the need to deal with water use for agriculture and noted that the only viable way to meet water demand was through desalinization using solar energy. Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General, UN-Department of Economic and Social Affairs stressed that the meeting provided an opportunity to coordinate actions on water and sanitation within the UN family.

Presentations

UN-Water - Johan Kuylenstierna, Chief Technical Advisor, UN-Water presented the Global Annual Assessment on Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) a pilot project which he described as an analysis of the Joint Monitoring Programme Report which assesses countries' institutional, the human resources and financial capacity to meet the Millennium Development Goal targets for water and sanitation. In addition, Mr. Kuylenstierna updated member on UN-Water activities.

- next steps: Board members agreed to comment on the GLAAS report and to provide input into the next phase of the programme through the monitoring working group.

Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs) – Faraj El-Awar, Senior Advisor, UN-Habitat WOPs Alliance updated members on establishing programmes in new regions. UNSGAB will have an observer status seat on the WOPs steering committee.

- next steps: Board members will support the planned donors meeting scheduled during the Istanbul World Water Forum.

Global Framework for Action – Peregrine Swann, Senior Water Advisor, DFID described the Framework's five components: an annual review, an annual high level meeting, a global task force, a commitment that no credible national water and sanitation plan should fail for lack of finance; and a catalytic fund/fast track initiative. He asked if UNSGAB would join the list of on-board organizations joining UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank and others.

- next steps: In a subsequent session, Board members agreed to provide input into the Global Framework for Action process while not joining the list of on-board organizations at this point

Location and organization of the 12th UNSGAB meeting Representatives of Bulgaria and Singapore presented their proposals to host the 12th UNSGAB meeting in May 2009.

- next steps: The Board accepted Bulgaria's proposal and agreed to meet on May 26 – 28, 2009 in Sofia. Singapore's proposal was also accepted for mid-2010 on the margins of the 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Forum. Singapore will consider this proposal.

Supporting the G8 and African Union Processes

G8 – Mr. Endo, Senior Coordinator for Sectoral Development Policy, Japan updated the Board on the G8 decision in July 2008 to review the Evian Action Plan on Water which requires a progress report and an implementation strategy. An experts group meeting, Dec. 15 & 16 in Japan will facilitate the production of these documents. As incoming G8 Chair, Mr. Sforza, Senior Advisor for Foreign Affairs, Italy stated his country's desire to produce a strong political commitment on water. The representatives asked for UNSGAB's support to this process. Members stressed the need to be aware how the financial crisis will impact the next G8 and how to think creatively in this context.

- next steps: The ad-hoc G8 working group will provide input to the Evian Action Plan progress report and implementation strategy as well as to participate in sessions planned by Italy in early 2009. UNSGAB will prepare an Evian review and proposed focus areas for the implementation strategy as an input to the G8 experts group meeting by Dec. 14.

African Union – Mr. Taal, the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) Executive Secretary, said Heads of State showed their commitment to water and sanitation issues by adopting the Sharm El-Sheik Declaration on Water and Sanitation at the African Union Summit in June 2008. Now, responsibilities for implementation are being defined for national governments, the African Union and the World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme with a meeting planned in late Nov. 2008. He noted that the AU will report to the 2009 G8 meeting in Italy and that continued UNSGAB support to

catalyze implementation is requested. Members discussed ways to take advantage of the synergies between the Sharm El-Sheik Declaration and the Evian Action Plan follow-up.

- next steps: The ad-hoc Africa working group will support the Sharm El-Sheik Declaration and AMCOW activities.

Working Group Reports

Integrated Water Resources Management – The group will continue to advocate for ratification of the UN Watercourses Convention. HAP actions regarding IWRM Plans have been achieved however some follow-up to the 16th meeting of the Convention on Sustainable Development is necessary. Some members suggested that UNSGAB should try and inject a water angle into the UN Task Force on Food Security. The IWRM working group concluded its work at the 11th meeting.

- next steps: A letter drafted by Ushi Eid encouraging states to ratify the UN Watercourses Convention will be sent. The secretariat will explore how UNSGAB could bring a water perspective to the UN Food Security Task Force.

Financing – The group reported on follow-up to UNSGAB agreements with regional development banks, local financing for local utilities, continuing work with donors and contributing to the G8 process.

- next steps: The secretariat will facilitate reviews of the UNSGAB agreements with regional development banks to be considered at the next meeting. A meeting with the Chair of OECD DAC will be scheduled. An UNSGAB meeting with donors will be organized during the WWF5.

WOPs – The group is encouraged to see the UN-Habitat WOPs programme takes shape and will support a donors meeting during the WWF5.

- next steps: The WOPs working group will attend the first WOPs steering committee meeting and will conclude its work at the 12th UNSGAB meeting.

Monitoring – The group reported on the GLAAS project, communication to the Secretary-General, the status of the UNSGAB report on monitoring, and a monitoring session during the WWF5, and a beyond the MDGs programme.

- next steps: The secretariat, following the advise of Mr. Stelzer, will follow up on communication to the Secretary-General regarding monitoring activities. The secretariat will prepare a two page summary of the UNSGAB report on monitoring for wide dissemination. Working group members will share their comments on the GLAAS report which will be summarized by the secretariat and shared with UN-Water by the end of 2008.

Sanitation – In follow up to the International Year of Sanitation, the group would like to fully understand the process for reporting on IYS results. In addition monitoring the implementation of regional IYS conferences is critical along with focusing on the challenges municipalities face in delivering sanitation services. The need for UN-Water to look at waste water issues was stressed.

- next steps: The working group will work with the UN-Water sanitation task force to support the IYS reporting process. The secretariat will prepare a proposal on

how to partner with relevant organizations to monitor the implementation of the regional sanitation conferences. The working group will contact UN-Water regarding a possible “sanitation-2 task force” to look at waste water, infrastructure and related issues.

Water and Disaster – The working group welcomed the report of the high-level expert panel and recommended that UNSGAB endorse the report and assist in its implementation.

- next steps: The working group will champion the report within the UN system following the recommendation of Mr. Stelzer. The working group will work with partners to host a session during the WWF5.

WWF5, CSD-17 & Human Rights

WWF5 – Although there will be no formal UNSGAB meeting in connection with WWF5, the Board will co-sponsor and members will participate in, a variety of events including: panels convened by the OECD; a donor meeting hosted by WOPs of UN-Habitat; a parliamentary event in which Ushi Eid will participate; an UNSGAB meeting with the honorary president, His Imperial Highness of Japan; an UNSGAB convened donors meeting on financing; a G8 preparatory meeting hosted by Italy; a beyond IYS event; UN-Water sponsored activities as a theme coordinator; and the launch of the high-level expert groups report on water and disaster.

- next steps: The secretariat will prepare an WWF5 work plan including names of participating members and partner organizations for circulation by Dec. 22. Funding will be sought for working group chairs requiring support.

CSD-17 – The 17th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, May 2009 will focus on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa with the Dutch Minister of Agriculture serving as Chair. Members discussed how to introduce water into the CSD discussion either through the formal process or via a side-event. It is important to emphasize demand management of water especially in relation to agriculture and rural development. In these efforts, UNSGAB will work closely with UN-Water.

- next steps: The secretariat will explore with UN-DESA’s water branch and UN-Water how water may be introduced into the CSD discussions.

Human Rights – Members briefly discussed the appointment of Catarina de Albuquerque as the Independent Expert on human rights obligations related to safe drinking water and sanitation and the fact she had requested a meeting with the Board.

- next steps: The secretariat will contact Ms. Albuquerque to arrange an appropriate meeting, possibly during the 12th UNSGAB session.

Closing

In closing the 11th UNSGAB meeting the Chair thanked all participants and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting the meeting and the Islamic Development Bank for their support.