



WATERS IN THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

An Expert Group Meeting was convened in Barcelona, 1 February, 2016 to provide inputs on the role of waters in the New Urban Agenda.

The Expert Group offers a series of strategic recommendations to the Habitat III process on integrated urban water management, which is fundamental to the health and equity of our cities. These recommendations reaffirm and draw from the international agreements articulated in the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, adopted by the UN General Assembly in the resolution 64/292 on 28 July, 2010, and the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in the resolution 70/1 on 25 September, 2015. These recommendations recognize that water is an engine for development and is essential to the inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities that are called for in the SDGs. To drive this progressive urban agenda, it is critical that water and sanitation services be universally accessible and affordable, in particular for vulnerable populations. Here, we

use the terminology “urban waters” to highlight the many forms of water in cities and to elevate water beyond its common understanding as a basic service. Urban waters refer to all types of water flowing through and residing in cities, including all water sources, piped water, waste water, storm water, reused water and recreational water. Urban waters management relates to a range of interrelated services, among which water resources protection, abstraction, transportation and distribution, collection, treatment and discharge, recycling and reuse, recharge and recovery, and storm water management are central. Taking a holistic approach to waters in cities is critical for safeguarding public health, minimizing disaster risks, guaranteeing water security and upholding human rights in the urban space.

The Expert Group Meeting and Waters in Cities consultation involved participants from the Association of German Cities, the City of Barcelona, the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance, the Global Water Partnership, Human Cities Alliance, the International Water Association, the International Water Management Institute, OECD, the Office Nationale de l'Eau et Energie (Morocco), PSIRU at University of Greenwich, the UNDP Water Governance Facility, UN-Habitat, UNESCO-International Hydrological Program, WaterAid, the World Water Council, Aqua Publica Europea, Transnational Institute, Public Services International, the Municipal Services Project, the Asociación Española de Abastecimientos de Agua y Saneamiento, ICLEI and UCLG. A full participants list can be found at gwopa.org

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Strategic Recommendations for Waters in the New Urban Agenda



1 Recognize the influence of water on the urban form

Water should inform the shape of the city. It is preferable to anticipate water issues when planning urban development than to adjust to the built environment. Factoring in water early on at different spatial scales saves huge economic, social and environmental costs. Active participation of multiple sectors and communities is required, all of which are dependent on sustainable water management.



2 Foster rural-urban linkages for mutual benefits

Cities exist within bio-geographical territories, from catchments to deltas, and share water with a range of settlements, from peri-urban neighborhoods to rural communities. This context requires a pro-active, holistic water planning approach to manage urban-rural linkages, to minimize conflicts and ecological disasters as well as to maximize positive synergies and mutual benefits, at local and regional scales.



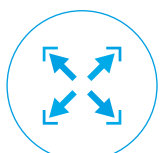
3 Make the best use of waters with a holistic water cycle approach

In cities of the future, resource movement and extraction must be limited. Hence, it is important to minimize the movement of water and maximize its reuse by drawing it from diverse local sources, optimizing its productive use (e.g. by using water at qualities that are fit for purpose) and managing it with prudence. In this vision, pollution is prevented and “waste” water is treated as a resource (for energy and materials) and by fostering synergies at the water-food-energy nexus.



4 Empower the public sector at all levels

It is important to reaffirm the critical role of the local public sector in ensuring that urban waters are managed sustainably and that water services are delivered equitably to all city residents. To achieve universal access and safeguard public health, governments, at their appropriate levels, must take responsibility for mobilizing and securing investments that lead to better urban services and sustainable water management, in particular to underserved and vulnerable populations.



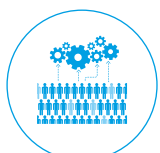
5 Plan adaptive water systems for improved security in an uncertain future

Urban water systems should be provided with the necessary resources to build greater adaptive capacity to respond to the inherent uncertainties associated with global change issues. In particular, infrastructure design, finance and operation should value flexibility to adjust to different futures. Adaptive urban water systems also require planning and retrofitting urban space with greater cognizance and respect for waters’ natural movement, to enhance infiltration and groundwater recharge, as appropriate.



6 Equip water utilities for the cities of the future

Equip water utilities to realize the human right to water and sanitation and promote sustainable water development through not-for-profit capacity development, including knowledge sharing and peer-learning partnerships. Global, regional, national and local mechanisms should be strengthened financially and operationally to fill the capacity gap and meet ambitious development objectives.



7 Strengthen enabling environments

Regulatory, institutional and financing frameworks conducive to an integrated, equitable and sustainable approach to water management must be strengthened. Urban water planning and oversight must be characterized by clear and accountable governance procedures that enhance public participation and transparency.



8 End the neglect of sanitation to assure public health

Public health cannot be guaranteed without strong local leadership and adequate investments in sanitation infrastructure, services that have been long neglected. Innovative, context-specific and culturally-sensitive solutions exist and must be considered in the planning of a city-wide universal sanitation access strategy.



9 Operationalize equity principles in urban water services

All city residents from all socio-economic backgrounds are entitled to adequate water and sanitation. No one should be denied access to these basic services. Affordable access must be guaranteed for all and the required equity and integrity in the use of taxes, transfers and tariffs upheld. Inclusive planning and oversight mechanisms are paramount in ensuring equity.