

# High Level Symposium on the SDG 6 and Targets : Ensuring that no one is left behind in Water and Sanitation

9-11 of August 2016, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

## Background paper for Session 1: Multi-stakeholder Partnerships initiatives for the SDGs and the International Decade for Water and Sustainable Development

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### 1 Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) in global processes

#### The role of Partnerships in the SDG process

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are already part of the sustainable development discourse since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Agenda 21 identified nine Major Groups<sup>1</sup> in society with distinct and complementary roles in achieving sustainable and equitable development. Over the past 24 years, they have become an accepted form of global governance that goes beyond traditional multilateral cooperation.

As described by DESA's USG in his opening address to the Partnership eXchange<sup>2</sup> the United Nations has a long history of initiating, fostering and promoting the work of partnerships in advancing sustainable development.

- At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg, type-2 partnerships were promoted as voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives that complement intergovernmental commitments (type-1).
- At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, over 700 voluntary commitments and partnerships were launched as a complement to the formal outcome of the Conference, also known as the Future We Want.
- The Future We Want is recognized as a landmark agreement that launched the idea of SDGs and the creation of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.
- The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Samoa in 2014, further spurred the announcement of partnerships devoted to the sustainable development of SIDS. In the outcome document, called the SAMOA Pathway, member States lay the foundation for a strong follow-up process of these partnerships, now enshrined in the unique SIDS Partnership Framework.

In the post-2015 development era, multi-stakeholder partnerships are expected to play an increasingly important role in the implementation of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General assembly in September 2015, calls for an all-of-society engagement and partnership, clearly articulating the importance of involving non-State actors including civil society, in the implementation of this this ambitious agenda. Sustainable Development Goal 17, which reads "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development", recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries.

In the water domain, the partnership approach is a key element of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as agreed in the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development of 1992 in which two of the four guiding principles are dedicated to stakeholder engagement:

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<sup>1</sup> Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous People and their Communities, NGOs, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, the Scientific and Technological Community and Farmers

<sup>2</sup> The Partnership eXchange took place in New York on the July 18 2016

**Dublin Principle 2: Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels.** *The participatory approach involves raising awareness of the importance of water among policy-makers and the general public. It means that decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level, with full public consultation and involvement of users in the planning and implementation of water projects.*

**Dublin Principle 3: Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.** *This pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.*

Following the UNCED call for effective implementation and coordination mechanisms to promote IWRM based on public participation, the Global Water Partnership was founded in 1996 and has since grown to more than 3000 partner organizations, both state and non-state actors, organized in multi-stakeholder platforms at regional, national and sub-national levels. Other global partnerships followed such as the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS, 2008), Sanitation and Water for All (SWA, 2010) and the OECD Water Governance Initiative (GWI, 2013).

## The lessons from the Water for Life Decade

Achieving water and sanitation for all is the foundation and the glue for sustainable development; and multi-stakeholder partnerships are considered a key entry point to achieve the SDGs in an integrated and coordinated way. The International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005 – 2015 that was initiated by the Government of Tajikistan and supported by all UN Member States, addressed the sustainable development potential of water and provides important insights for realizing the *all-of-society engagement and partnership* envisaged in the 2030 Development Agenda.

The evaluation of the 2005-2015 Water for Life Decade indicated that a systematic approach and an intergovernmental accountability framework had been lacking, which would have advanced the implementation of water-related development goals more effectively, helping greater integration of the initiatives of different actors and making interventions more sustainable, reaching the intended beneficiaries better. The way forward lies in combining the Water Goal – SDG#6 with SDG#17 – means of implementation, promoting water and sustainable development MSPs as a core feature of implementation at all levels. The Water for Life Decade review and stock taking events<sup>3</sup> revealed many successes of integrated and participatory approaches. It also showed that participatory water governance is a process of social transformation that requires trust, ownership, leadership and perseverance and can only be achieved over time.

Building on the achievements of the past Water Decade and through a mechanism of peer reviewing and peer learning, a network of MSPs for implementation of the SDGs can progressively be expanded during the coming ten years into the 'all-of-society engagement and partnership' that the 2030 Development Agenda envisages, including in the context of a new Decade for Water and Sustainable Development.

## Tools for supporting Partnerships by the UN Secretariat

The United Nations High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) has the central role of follow-

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<sup>3</sup> Notably the annual Zaragoza Conference and the Water for Life Decade Awards

up and review, tracking the progress in the implementation of goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries, in a manner which respects their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development. The review processes will be voluntary and country-led, support the identification of solutions and best practices, help to mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, as well as be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people.

The resolution on the High Level Political Forum stipulates that the HLPF reviews “shall provide a platform for partnerships” (A/RES/67/290, para 8c). The 2030 Agenda calls upon non-governmental actors to engage in reporting (A/RES/70/1, paras. 84, 89). The recent General Assembly resolution under the agenda item entitled “Towards global partnerships” requested to discuss “the best practices and ways to improve, inter alia, transparency, accountability and the sharing of experiences of multi-stakeholder partnerships and on the review and monitoring of those partnerships” (A/RES/70/224, para. 15).

The UN Secretariat has several tools for tracking and supporting partnerships, notably:

**The on-line platform on Partnerships for SDGs** created to encourage global engagement around multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments in support of the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Initially developed in response to the mandate set out by the Rio+20 Conference (paragraph 283, Future We Want), this platform, which is being further enhanced to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, functions as a tool to inform stakeholders on initiatives carried out by multi-stakeholder partnerships around the world in support of the sustainable development goals, track progress, and share innovative ideas. The platform is free and open to the public.

**The Registry of commitments** entered by all stakeholders and their networks to implement concrete policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions to promote sustainable development and poverty eradication. The Secretary-General was invited to compile these commitments and facilitate access to other registries that have compiled commitments, in an Internet-based registry. The registry makes information about the commitments fully transparent and accessible to the public, and it is periodically updated.

**The progress reports on Partnerships for SDGs.** The reports will be used by the Secretariat to inform stakeholders, partners and the High-level Political Forum, of how partnership initiatives are advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Results of submissions will be used by the Secretariat to conduct a mapping of multi-stakeholder partnerships that will be presented at the Partnership Exchange.

**The Partnerships Exchange which is** a new initiative of the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) aiming at providing a platform for dialogue. The first 2016 Partnership Exchange has been organized in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) on the occasion of the 2016 HLPF. It has provided a space for dialogue among multi-stakeholder partnerships and government officials, policy makers, United Nations entities and major groups and other stakeholders, for showcasing the work of multi-stakeholder partnerships in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that no one is left behind in implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The review and promotion of partnerships related to the HLPF follow up processes relies on structured inputs from different channels. It is fueled in particular, through the regular reviews of country-level implementation, “including developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector”; and by the Thematic reviews of progress, including cross-cutting issues. The annual Global Sustainable Development Report can also be an instrument for highlighting the value of partnerships in the implementation of the SDGs.

With respect to MSPs for water and sustainable development a peer learning and peer review mechanism is under development by the Global Water Partnership building on the knowledge gathered and lessons learnt during 20

years of promoting South-South cooperation and local ownership.

## The new decade on Water and Sustainable Development supporting partnerships

At the 7th World Water Forum (Republic of Korea, April 2015) the President of the Republic of Tajikistan proposed a new initiative to proclaim an International Decade for Action under the motto "Water for Sustainable Development" as a pragmatic step to help build support and momentum for rapid start-up on implementation of the water related SDGs and targets. It will strengthen and enhance the progress achieved during the "Water for Life" Decade and will create a solid platform for consolidation of our efforts aimed at further management of water issues for the post 2015 period.

The new Decade would ensure a continued focus on water and sanitation for all as the key prerequisite for leaving no one behind and the foundation and glue for sustainable development in general. It would support partnerships among global actors and processes in water management and would promote greater cooperation and inclusiveness of actors in water management. It can help support country-level implementation mechanisms and partnerships through multi-stakeholder platforms at different levels (private, NGOs, governments and society). Flexibility, adaptation to local circumstances, and pro-actively working with all relevant stakeholders are crucial, if we want interventions to be sustainable and effectively reach the intended beneficiaries.

## 2 The benefits of partnerships: Why Partnerships?

The logic behind the critical need to build effective water and sustainable development partnerships lies in the multiple interlinkages between SDG6 and the other SDGs and the need for integrated solutions coordinated at different levels in the nexus. Coping with the challenges posed by water in the long term within the range of the resources, technologies and knowledge available is feasible, but not if we continue to act in isolation..

According to the conclusions of the 2014 Zaragoza Conference on Water and Energy Partnerships, the challenges in the search of a sustainable future for water are out of the scope of any public, private, academia or civil society organization. The perceptions and the information of individual actors are limited and this might lead to wrong decisions in the short term and to unsustainable decisions in the middle and long term. Due to information gaps and the complex nature of the long term vision required, in water management, decisions continue to be taken with limited information. In fact, the uncoordinated decisions of a competitive market might be one of the driving factors of water scarcity. A certain level of coordination is a necessary requirement to guarantee that all water used in the economy fits in the range of the obtainable supplies of these resources, produced and used in a way that doesn't compromise its continuous provision.

Different actors have different roles in complementing the role of governments that ensure regulation and compliance as well as provide incentives and the right environment for implementation. The main conclusion is that managing all the interdependencies involved in any Nexus requires a coordination that cannot be guaranteed only by the market environment or individual actors. Successful public actions are inconceivable without the active involvement of businesses, civil society and other partners.

Governments have at their disposal the means to develop and maintain a level playing field but the important decisions on how, by how much and for whom to produce the water services mostly belong to

other actors rather than governments. The government can do its best to promote innovation and to speed the diffusion of the best technology available, but in the end these processes are triggered by decisions made by other actors. Governments may raise awareness, standardize norms and develop incentives to promote an efficient and sustainable use of water, but the final outcome will be the effect of a plethora of individual decisions taken by many that use water for consumption or for producing goods and services.

Legitimacy and social acceptability is an essential ingredient of partnerships. It reduces enforcement and other implementation costs and makes the empowerment of civil society actors, including business and households easier.

Cooperation is important to agree on a shared vision of the challenges ahead and to design policies that will ensure continuous advances in the objectives,

As far as integrated responses are required, partnerships might serve to foster interdisciplinary collaboration in the nexus between water and other sectors and to provide the fora for the knowledge exchange necessary to develop and implement integrated management responses.

Partnerships are a means to many different ends. They may allow for:

- Integrating policies, broadening the scope and enhancing the effectiveness of both water planning.
- Improved water governance by helping to provide better regulations and enabling institutional frameworks.
- Developing transparent assessment criteria to evaluate the outcomes of both water policies in terms of sustainability rather than by the particular objectives of each area.
- Broadening the water policy assessment so as to make them consistent with the need to protect and preserve the water related ecosystems and the variety of services provided by them which are critical for resilience and long-term environmental sustainability.
- Learning from each other's successes and failures within the water communities.
- Identifying opportunities to improve water access, efficiency and sustainability
- Identifying and implementing mutually beneficial solutions that are more sustainable.

### 3 Analyzing Partnerships

#### Effectiveness of Partnerships

Recent assessments of MSPs<sup>4</sup> for sustainable development reveal a plethora of definitions that reflect the different purposes for which partnerships are developed, but also show common characteristics and building blocks for success across implementation contexts and specific functions. A multi-stakeholder partnership for sustainable development typically:

- Is an institutionalized voluntary interaction between State and non-State actors;
- addresses public policy objectives;
- often has a network structure;

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<sup>4</sup> Pattberg & Widerberg (2014), Beisheim & Simon (2016)

- is coordinated by the participating actors rather than a central hierarchy;
- relies on trust and reciprocity;
- and shares responsibilities, resources and benefits.

While MSPs are coalitions of the willing that pool complementary resources, this in itself is not a guarantee for effectiveness and success. Building blocks for healthy and effective MSPs are:

- sufficient pre-investment of time and resources in formulating goals and ambitions, and identifying key partners
- building an adequate management structure;
- and creating a sound oversight mechanism and accountability framework.

According to the conclusions of the Partnerships Exchange initiative on 16 July 2016, the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the SDGs, while dependent on many factors, will increasingly be tied to their ability to manage and share knowledge and expertise about the issues, processes, and solutions that they are promoting. The Sustainable Development Goals are truly universal in nature – they apply to all countries, and all sectors. This universality will require, inter alia, that the knowledge and expertise managed and possessed by multi-stakeholder partnerships is shared as widely as possible in order for it to reach beyond immediate constituencies and communities and to have an impact on a global scale.

A framework for self assessment of partnerships is necessary because of the important role they have in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are some important elements that need to be present for an assessment of partnerships, certain qualities of these elements and links among them. Special attention is given to the role of leadership, representativeness, legitimacy, and comprehensiveness, which we take to be critical elements characterizing partnerships.

According to Pahl-Wostl et al (2013), good processes should also lead to tangible outcomes. Effectiveness refers to the achievement of measurable products which might have been explicitly stated as goals. Effectiveness is an essential performance measure of a policy process as a whole but it is an equally important attribute for individual governance functions. Tangible outcomes are required for continuity and a step-wise achievement of an overarching goal.

In the Partnerships eXchange initiative preference has been given to multi-stakeholder partnerships that demonstrate innovative, sustainable and scalable approaches for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated manner (addressing inter-linkages among multiple goals and targets) while also reaching vulnerable groups.

### Framework for Self Assessment in Session 1

The Partnership concept acknowledges increasing societal interdependencies and complexity of interactions in policy processes (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Global governance adds yet another dimension of complexity: policy processes are complex and multi-level, involving a multitude of actors across many different kinds of settings, from formal UN mechanisms to informal global forums and networks (Rosenau and Cziempiel, 1992).

Adopting a pragmatic approach Pahl-Wostl et al (2013) propose a series of factors essential to understanding success and failure of governance processes. Here we propose an adaptation of this framework for the analysis of partnerships. The framework considers important to emphasize broader fields of action, marked by particular characteristics that requires forming partnerships:

- the knowledge base is incomplete and often contested,

- perceptions on the nature of the problem and potential solutions diverge,
- an institutional setting with well-defined procedures is absent,
- resources to implement policy responses (financial, human, institutional) are lacking,
- potential conflicts of interest among different stakeholder groups are abundant.

Partnerships can support some of this key functions:

*Knowledge Generation and Knowledge Stabilization*

Knowledge generation may encompass the collection of new information and/or the integration of available, fragmented evidence from different sources. A key process here is the translation of that information into validated and legitimized ‘knowledge’ that is sufficiently stable to have shared meaning for various actors involved in the process (albeit in different ways and to varying extents) (Jasanoff, 2004).

*Policy Framing (Problem, Agenda, Solutions)*

Particularly in the initial stages of a policy process, the framing of the problem is of key importance. This involves identifying the nature of a problem, potential causes, and solutions. Problem frames that take a pluralistic approach, allowing for different world views, are important to deal with complex issues in conflictual settings (Conca, 2006).

*Rule Making*

Rule making occurs at many stages, but in particular as actors move from deliberation and learning towards more formal commitments (Young, 1998). Rules may be prescriptive (what actors should do) or proscriptive (defining unacceptable actions). In addition to these regulative attributes, rules may also be ‘constitutive’ in the sense that they give foundational shape to processes or assign roles within those processes (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004).

*Resource Mobilization*

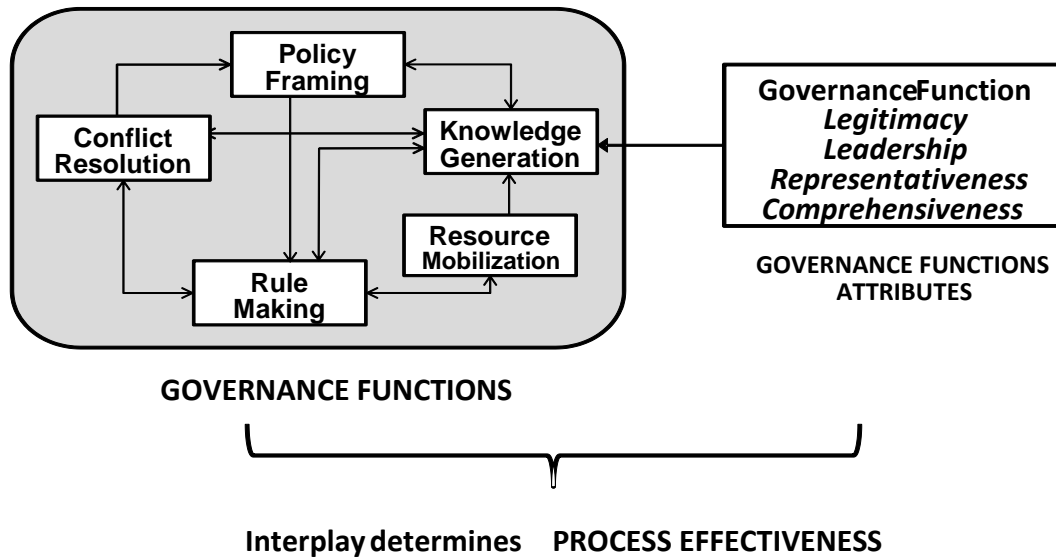
Dealing with a problem requires resources, including funding, expertise, and the political resources that generate policy support at different levels. Difficulties in mobilizing resources may come from an inability of actors to agree or prioritize actions, but also from classic barriers to collective action (Ostrom 1990) such as uncertainty and mistrust, or from a lack of leadership or stewardship (see below).

*Conflict Resolution*

Conflicts are endemic to governance processes and to water governance in particular, given the resource’s multiple uses, irreplaceability, and strategic value as a productive resource, a constituent of critical ecosystems, and an anchor of local livelihoods and cultures (Conca, 2006). Unsolved conflicts may jeopardize the continuation of a policy process or marginalize certain actors who may in turn seek to block action through extra-institutional or even conflictual means.

This approach is indicated in Figure 1, which illustrates possible linkages that may be complex and recursive. Policy failure may occur if some functions are missing when they are needed (e.g., conflict resolution) or if functions are not linked (e.g., knowledge is generated but not used to frame policy responses or in rule making).

## POLICY PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS



Interdependent core governance functions during a policy process. The quality of a governance function is determined by the set of attributes listed in the box on the right.

The performance of these core governance functions is assumed to depend on a few key attributes that are central to ensuring any high-quality process:

### Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to the validity and broadly-based acceptance of the authority of an actor or event, making it possible for those actors and events to play an influential role in the overall process (Risse, 2006). Legitimacy may derive from the way authority was conferred on an event or group (for example, through a democratic, open and inclusive process). Legitimacy may also be gained by generating outcomes that are endorsed by many participants of the overall process (so-called 'performance legitimacy'). A lack of legitimacy may lead to opposition and resistance and loss of commitment to an overall, shared goal.

### Representativeness

Active involvement of powerful and/or affected stakeholder groups has proven to be crucial for ensuring that a policy process is perceived as legitimate and to reduce the likelihood that the process is jeopardized by narrow interests (Scholte, 2004). Broader participation may also enhance effectiveness through learning mechanisms (Brown and Timmer, 2006). The water arena has been at the leading edge of experimenting with various 'stakeholder' models of participation in governance processes (Conca, 2006), in which traditional representative systems are complemented by, or replaced with, more direct forms of engagement among parties with a stake in the outcome. Ideally, stakeholder involvement takes place in a transparent and open process that differs from lobbying behind the scenes.

### Leadership and Stewardship

Complex governance processes are characterized by self-organization and emergence. However, self-organization without leadership may fail to produce tangible outcomes. This may be formal leadership of a governmental body but it can also be emergent leadership that develops from an actor's influential role in a network (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). We also pay attention to the key role of



stewardship, defined in terms of facilitation and the forging of inclusive linkages as processes unfold (Chapin et al, 2009).

### Comprehensiveness

As highlighted previously, the issues of interest in water governance must be addressed from an integrated perspective. Often, problems arise from the interaction of different policy fields and a lack of coordination across them. Again, the water arena has (at least in theory) been at the forefront of developing concepts of integrated resource management, although such approaches have been criticized as abstractions (Biswas, 2004) or for lacking in adaptive capacity (IWMI, 2007).

## Addressing the challenges for partnerships

In this context, as pointed out by Pahl-Wostl et al (2013), there seems to be a clear role for global flexible multi-actor networks for issue integration and agenda setting and open framing processes. But:

- a) For rulemaking in governance settings it is important to move from mobilizing action to binding commitments.
- b) Multi-level interactions need to be strengthened. Such strengthening can be achieved by improving representativeness and legitimacy of governance functions throughout the whole policy process in particular during policy framing, rule making and knowledge generation.
- c) Another important aspect is the missing or non-effective link between knowledge generation and policy formulation. Knowledge generation mainly happens in epistemic communities that have traditionally been linked to established policy fields. Comprehensive and integrative approaches required to address complex environmental problems go increasingly beyond these traditional boundaries. Such knowledge production takes increasingly place in open, polycentric networks which foster emergent leadership but may at times suffer from transparency regarding the legitimacy and representativeness of the knowledge production process.
- d) The major challenge seems to be an improvement of network governance. The coupling of informal, polycentric and open networks which have a major role in knowledge production and policy framing and foster emergent leadership with formal, multi-level policy processes which are required for rule making and in particular rule implementation. Resource mobilization requires both kinds of governance structures.

In spite of the important gains that can be reaped from a better integrated water response, building enabling and effective partnerships is a challenge on its own. Drawing from the 2014 Zaragoza Conference on the water and energy nexus we can highlight the following:

Existing institutions and legal frameworks are established to implement specific actions/solutions- 'Institutional lock-in' may be preventing the necessary change to move towards integration. This can be the result of many factors including tradition, vested interest, poor regulations and many others that can trap businesses and societies into well established, and difficult to change decision frameworks.

Building partnerships might be an integral part of the institutional transformations required to break existing institutional lock-ins. In other words, a comprehensive response to the water challenges implies overcoming the current institutional set-up where both policies have been traditionally taken.

Investment decisions being made today or in the past years may be locking us into water intensive energy options and vice versa. It is important to overcome the technological lock-ins because once the opportunities available to develop water infrastructures have been developed the only alternatives to reconcile water demand and supply with the objectives of a sustainable economy consists of managing water demand, enhancing the efficiency with which is produced and used. The lessons from the past become obsolete or unfeasible and innovation ceases to be optional.

The way water are financed is an important part of current and future institutional set ups. Traditionally the bulk of water infrastructures have been provided by the public sector and the costs have only partially transferred to the multiple beneficiaries. Making available abundant and cheap water, when available, have always been considered

a priority for economic development. One of the most important challenges in responding to the water challenge consists of changing current water incentives such as realigning those individual decisions to the collective targets of sustainability.

Dealing with asymmetries and building fair and reciprocal alliances is an important challenge for partnerships. . Differences between the different communities involved need to be recognized in order to understand the importance of building up an open dialogue, enabling trustful relations and enabling mutually beneficial agreements.

## Annex 1 Template for self-assessment Template for the cases

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### Part1

What objectives for the partnership?	
Who is involved? Main partners	
Main task/activities undertaken by the partnerships (refer to the functions in the framework for assessment)	
key attributes of the process (refer to the attributes above: legitimacy, leadership, representativeness and comprehensiveness)	
Main challenges for the partnerships (refer to those in the section on challenges)	
Main outcomes and Impacts of the partnership?	

### Part 2

Lessons learn on working together.	
Triggers of the partnership?	
Drivers of the partnership	
What has worked well?	
What can it be improved?	
The Way forward for the partnership (including how to address the challenges)	