**UNITED NATIONS 2023 WATER CONFERENCE**

*Rapporteur’s name: Sudipti Arora & Charles Shachinda*

*Rapporteur’s nationality: Indian (Sudipti) and Zambian (Charles)*

**Title of session**: The Economics of Water: transforming governance to secure a sustainable, just and prosperous future

**Number of attendees**: Although the actual number of attendees is currently unknown (Circa 150), the session audience was very inclusive and diverse in every sense.

**Time and Date:** Thursday 23 March 2023, 15:00 - 17:40 EDT

**Location:** Conference Room 2, UN HQ, New York

**1 - Objective(s) of session:**

To initiate a global consultative process that will contribute to the final GCEW report in 2024 and to bring commission together between UN and other stakeholders, revaluing the Economics of water as an important, transcendental element for SDGs.

**2 - Key point(s)**:

*Current problem.*

The problem being described here is the looming global water crisis. By 2030, there could be a 40% shortfall in water resources, which means that many people and communities around the world will not have access to enough water for their needs. This crisis is further exacerbated by climate change, which is causing changes in weather patterns and contributing to the depletion of water sources.

*Potential consequences and impacts.*

The cascading consequences or impacts of underpricing water and not properly capturing its value attract high subsidies (currently capped at about 7 Billion USD globally) which then leads to overconsumption and wastage of water resources, especially in agriculture which consumes about 75% of freshwater resources

*Importance of the topic.*

The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate report emphasizes the need to harness green water, which is the water that is embedded in the environment, such as soil moisture and groundwater recharge. This is important because it can help to reduce the pressure on blue water sources, which are the surface and groundwater resources that are traditionally used for human purposes. By managing green water effectively, we can improve the resilience of ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

*Synergies and trade-offs with other topics.*

The topic shares synergies with all thematic topics focused on ensuring the human right to water for all, its efficient management, affordability and accessibility especially for underprivileged and disadvantaged communities to achieve SDG6

1. **- Key Challenges:** 
   1. **- Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organisation**

* By 2030, we are likely to see a 40% short fall in water resources
* Subsidies (circa 7 billion) lead to overconsumption of water especially in agriculture
  1. **- Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, former mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone**
* About 1.4 Billion people are likely to suffer food insecurity due to water security
* The weakest link is all of our issues combined

**3.3 - Jessica Christiansen, Global Head for Sustainability, Bayer Crop Science**

* Rice cultivation covers about 160 million hectares across the world and accounts for an estimated 40% of water consumption
* 1kg of rice takes about 4-5K liters of water

**3.4 - Myrna Cunningham, Miskitu feminist, indigenous rights activist and medical surgeon from Nicaragua**

* Indigenous people have been recognized as people but lost their water and land

1. **- Key recommendations/solutions presented (key calls to actions to address the problem)**:

**4.1 - Moderated presentation of key messages by GCEW:**

* **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organisation**
* There is need to reshape water governance, expand investment and formulate a framework that will respond to the local challenges in the water sector to achieve SDG6
* Agriculture is a key sector offering the opportunity to efficiently manage water as it is the highest consumer of water
* Equity of access to water is as importance as ensuring efficiency in the water sector
* Trade can be an important enabler of good economics of water
* There is need for proper pricing of water to ensure accessibility especially to the underprivileged
* **Alicia Barcena, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean until 31 March 2022**
* The GCEW report emphasizes on the need to harness green water – that which is embedded in the environment
* We need to protect our watersheds
* The underpricing of water needs to be addressed (This needs to come the indigenous people so the value of water can be properly captured
* **Naoko Ishii, Professor and Executive Vice President, University of Tokyo & inaugural Director for the Center for Global Commons**
* We need to fundamentally understand how water means different things to different people by actively listening to all voices, especially indigenous people
* **Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados**
* There is need for behavioral change so that the value for water can be rightly captured
  1. **- Stakeholders engagement, Major Groups as lead discussants:**
* **Youth and agriculture representative:** Thomas Westhoff, president of the International Association of Students in Agricultural and Related Sciences (Question: What are your expectations post the event/conference?)
* Expectation 01: Commitment should lead to investment in farmers
* Expectation 02: Legal water frameworks should be formulated (To help manage our consumption habits)
* Expectation 03: A new water convention is needed to enable youth to hold leaders accountable
* Expectation 04: There is need for youth water envoys to represent youth voices
* **Governance representative:** Barbara Pompili, Chair of the OECD Water Governance Initiative, French Member of Parliament and former Minister of the Ecological Transition (2020-2022)
* There is need for a multistakeholder approach to succeed in water governance
* **Science representative:** Irina Bokova, Patron of the International Science Council and former Director-General of UNESCO
* There is need to harness all sciences as they are all cardinal to achieve SDG6
* Water needs to be understood in terms of the social value it offers to solve complex water challenges
* There is need of a joint understanding to build collaboration between policy makers and scientists
* There is need of easily actionable knowledge that is supported by science
* **Local authorities representative:** Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam
* Cities can do and achieve a lot if they share knowledge (E.g. Jarkata and Rotterdam)
* UN, WHO etc need to stop working the way they worked 50 years ago
* **Water operators and catchment organisations representative:** Engr. Taqsem A. Khan, CEO of Dhaka WASA (Question: What are your expectations and what do you envision for utilities?)
* There is need to strengthen bilateral and multilateral banks to finance water projects
* There is need for partnerships across the sectors
* There is need for bankable projects
* **Private sector representative:** Ms. Jessica Christiansen, Global Head for Sustainability in Bayer Crop Science (Question: What commitments can the private sector make?)
* Bayer Crop Science has committed to reduce consumption of water in rice farming by 25% by 2025
* Bayer Crop is pushing for a dry seeded rice farming system
* **Indigenous people representative:** Myrna Cunningham, Miskitu feminist, indigenous rights activist and medical surgeon from Nicaragua
* Water governance needs to take into account indigenous peoples’ customary law on water
* There is need to create a mechanism that brings indigenous people that were unjustly disadvantaged as result of colonization to share into the common good of water
* **Comment:** Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG
* There is need to have “CULTURE” as the 18th SDG as it is the interlink people’s relationship with water and all other sectors

**5 - Quotes from speakers**:

* *“Water is the number one victim of climate change”* ***– Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organisation***
* *“Addressing the water crisis is addressing all of the SDGs”* ***– Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, former mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone***
* *“We will succeed if everyone comes onboard”* ***– Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, former mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone***
* *“If water is a global good, then it cant be captured by a single interest”* ***- Alicia Barcena, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean until 31 March 2022***
* *“We cannot reach efficiency without equality”* ***- Alicia Barcena, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean until 31 March 2022***
* *“We need to think global and act local if we are to achieve SDG6”* ***-******Barbara Pompili, Chair of the OECD Water Governance Initiative, French Member of Parliament and former Minister of the Ecological Transition (2020-2022)***
* *“A crisis that is tied in budgets and frameworks doesn’t work with old thinking and approaches”* ***- Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam***
* *“There is need to share the problem and not blame it on others”* ***- Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam***
* *“We need to give science a greater voice”* ***- Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Senior Minister, Singapore***

1. **- Notes from the speakers’ talk**:

**6.1 - GCEW responses**

* **Setting the scene, the planetary boundaries and the global water crises:** Johan Rockström, Professor in Earth system science University of Potsdam
* Policy has only been focused on blue water which accounts for only 40% of the water cycle, leaving out green water which accounts for 60%
* The GCEW has suggested 1300m3 as the amount of water needed per capita per day
* **The new framework for the economics of water, shaping futures:** Mariana Mazzucato, Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at UCL
* There is need for all stakeholders to share the risks and rewards
* **Just water partnerships for financing**: Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Senior Minister, Singapore
* The entre global institutional system is not wired to include science in the policy making
* What is most worrying about the science is the uncertain part of the science – the tipping points which are already being experienced due to climate change
* We need to harness the energy of young people and use it for the better good
* We need to find a way of using global governance to drive local governance
* Finance is key to supporting the economics of water
* **Closing remark:** Csaba Kőrösi, President of the UN General Assembly
* To achieve SDG6, we need to fully understand the interlinkages of the economics of water and its different roles
* Reflections/contributions from the session will be taken into consideration to inform the final report and recommendations of the GCEW
  1. **- Q&A: Plenary session taking contributions from the floor**

**Moderator:** Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Former President of the UN General Assembly, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador

1. How can we control the price of water in order to increase access?

**Ans:** “The cultural value of water is just as important as the price of water if we are to increase accessibility”

1. How does the GCEW plan to influence policy makers to ensure that science is at the heart of policy making?

**Ans from Yvonne Aki-Sawyer:** The youth and civil society have more leverage to hold governments accountable and push back on policies that are not science-based

1. Question on the use of data to manage water

**Ans from Alicia Barcaria**: National governments need to leverage on the opportunity that data provides to efficiently manage water resources

**7 - Relevant stakeholders and organizations present or mentioned**:

The Global Commission on the Economics of Water (GCEW), UCLG, UN-Habitat, C40, WFF, OECD Water Governance Programme, IAAS, MetaMeta, Dutch Water Authorities, and WaterWorX

**8 - Innovative ideas and/or approaches from the session** *(What was new and novel from your perspective?)*

The session served as an initiation of a public consultation bringing all voices on board for UN Major Groups with the GCEW to gather recommendations and refine their thoughts and take this forward as contributions to the final GCEW report in 2024

**9- How do the session outcomes impact the Water Action Agenda? How to translate the discussion into commitments and actions?**

The session’s calls to action provided useful feedback and recommendations for the UN Major Groups with the GCEW to put forward as a roadmap to guide the implementation of aligned commits in the Water Action Agenda

**11 - How does this session relate water to other SDGs?**

The session’s discussion on the economics of water underpins SDG 2 (End hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 10 (Reduced inequalities) 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and 13 (Climate action)

**12 - Short personal analysis of the session.**

The session was powerful and enriching with meaningful interpretations of what is being said and what is un-said. The session emphasized the urgency or need to take water actions to define the economics of water for sustainable water management. The existing policies and frameworks may not be adequate, and a more urgent response is required especially to understand the price & value of water. There is a need for science-based policies and innovations, collaborations and radical actions to tackle the water crisis. The outcomes of the energizing session will thus pave a path forward to refine the final recommendations of the GCEW.