

HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON WATER (HLPW) VALUING WATER INITIATIVE

Final Report

November 2017

Introduction

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require governments, societies and the private sector to change the way they use and manage water. To accelerate this transformation, the UN Secretary General and World Bank Group President convened a [High Level Panel on Water \(HLPW\)](#) comprised of 11 Heads of State and one Special Adviser, which officially launched in April 2016. The HLPW provides the leadership required to champion a comprehensive, inclusive and collaborative way of developing and managing water resources, and improving water and sanitation related services.

The core focus of the HLPW is the commitment to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, as well as to contribute to the achievement of the other SDGs that rely on the development and management of water resources.

On 21 September 2016, the HLPW issued an Action Plan for a new approach to water management that will help the world to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. As part of the HLPW's Action Plan, 14 initiatives, championed by different members of the Panel, were developed to close the gap in achieving the SDGs and other water-related goals and targets. These range from "Financing Infrastructure" to "Transboundary Water Management" and "Water Data." To explore a new paradigm to help with decision-making around water allocation and management, the "Valuing Water" initiative was also established, with a focus on bringing together different viewpoints to develop principles on valuing water.

Valuing Water Initiative

The Valuing Water Initiative, spearheaded by the Government of the Netherlands on behalf of the HLPW, was launched on 2 February 2017. It aims to build "a global consensus and common language to guide better approaches to valuing water across three critical dimensions – (1) social and cultural, (2) environmental and (3) economic". The objective of this initiative is to promote and define valuing water and to understand how to allocate, share and value water.

One the key elements of the initiative is to develop a set of shared principles to motivate and

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encourage governments, business and civil society to consider water's multiple values and to guide the transparent incorporation of these values into decision-making by policymakers, communities and businesses.

A [first draft](#) of the Valuing Water Initiative's Preamble and Principles was developed through a dialogue process launched at The Hague in early February 2017 and followed up through an expert consultation on Bellagio in May 2017. The Preamble states the importance of valuing water in decision-making, providing a concise and compelling call to action and a bold vision for elevating water to the top of the agenda for local, national and global leaders. The Principles for valuing water refer to high-level statements that convey the intention of how water should be used and valued, which might imply a range of approaches suitable to a given context.

It may be difficult to put a price on water, but acknowledging the value of water from different perspectives can help balance economic, cultural, and ecological water needs. No matter what methods are used to manage and share water as a means for societies to reach the SDGs, or other goals, the HLPW's Valuing Water Initiative Principles offers an additional lens through which to explore trade-offs and arrive at a mutual consensus for action.

Regional/national consultations

As part of the Valuing Water Initiative, a series of regional and national consultations took place to receive feedback on the first draft of the Preamble and Principles and the initiative itself, as well as collecting a first round of ideas about how to operationalize the Principles. The consultations helped build awareness and examine the regional- and country-level relevance of global perspectives and provided inputs and recommendations on the Principles being developed by the HLPW's initiative.

From May to September 2017, six one-day regional and national consultations took place in Bangladesh, Jordan, Mexico, Peru, South Africa and Tajikistan. An effort was made to bring a diverse group of stakeholders to the consultations, from national governments, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector, including from sectors outside the water sector, to collect as many points of view on the Principles and their operationalization as possible.

The number of participants of the consultations ranged from 25 to 80 and engagement by the attendees was enthusiastic and very helpful for obtaining useful feedback on the first draft of the Preamble and Principles.

Methodology

To ensure that the outcomes of the consultations could be comparable and have results that were consistent with one another, a single methodology was designed to apply to each of the

regional- and national-level sessions. This methodology was developed to guarantee that both all voices would be heard within a given consultation yet at the same time a prioritization of issues would materialize, therefore providing quality feedback to inform the discussions on a second draft of the Valuing Water Initiative Preamble and Principles.

The basic framework that took place in the consultations included three interactive sessions. These varied slightly based on regional and national contexts. The first session involved examining the Valuing Water Initiative itself and what key messages the participants wanted to convey to the High Level Panel on Water. Whether valuing water itself is a useful exercise and what would such an initiative provide to better manage water resources.

The second session explored the content of the Valuing Water Initiative Preamble and Principles themselves. What were elements or aspects missing from the documents and what potentially should be taken away or modified.

The third session looked at what actions could be taken by the organizations and/or sectors of the participants in the consultations to operationalize the Valuing Water Principles.

The session methodology was applied similarly throughout the consultations. Participants were seated at tables of 6-10 participants. Each participant was first asked to individually write down one key message/suggestion for the session they were involved in. They were then invited to discuss these messages/suggestions at their table and choose one main message from the table. The consultation facilitator would then request each table for one main message to be shared with the larger group. After each table shared, the floor was opened by the consultation facilitator to allow other messages that were discussed at the tables to be voiced. These messages were written down on flipcharts in the room. To complete the session, each participant was allowed to rank the top three messages they thought most important in the given session through the utilization of stickers placed next to the messages on the flipcharts. All messages were preserved (and communicated in the consultation reports), but a cumulative ranking of the messages indicated the strongest collective beliefs of the group.

Summary outcomes

Overall, the consultations, and the feedback provided, were a success. The information that was garnered from the consultations provided a solid background from which to provide the drafters of the Preamble and Principles with enough material to incorporate changes and craft a **second draft** of the documents.

In addition to this, there were several noteworthy outcomes of the consultations that offer both information and lessons from the process that could be helpful in moving the dialogue on valuing water forward in the future:

- Interest and engagement in the subject of valuing water was robust. This was true

from all sectors that participated in the consultations as well as the different types of organizations (i.e., government, private sector, etc.);

- There was a sincere desire from participants to continue the dialogue on valuing water at the national and regional level after the consultations were over. The consultations were seen as a first stepping stone in taking the conversations further, while including a more diverse group of stakeholders in subsequent meetings. Part of this interest in continuation had to do with how to operationalize and implement the Principles after a final draft was developed;
- Almost 300 recorded comments and messages on the Valuing Water Initiative process and the Preamble and Principles and 80 actions on how to operationalize the Principles were gleaned from the six consultations;
- In some consultations, there was a lack of the desired, or required in some cases, diversity of stakeholders necessary to gather a true understanding of the various points of views that would be normally present in decisions made around valuing water (and allocation and management of water). More perspectives would make the process more comprehensive and thorough in the future;
- Key thematic areas that appeared in the consultations: governance and decision-making, alongside planning, dominated the conversations, which makes sense given the subject matter. In contexts where transboundary waters were a significant amount of the regional and/or national water resources, it played a critical role in discussions;
- Key thematic areas that did not emerge, but are very pertinent to the discussion around valuing water were data and capacity development;
- It was difficult at times, especially for certain stakeholder groups, to not think about valuing water in strictly economic terms. This will always be a challenge. Additionally, pricing was a sensitive issue;
- The exercise around valuing water legitimized yet again the rationale to bring together the various stakeholder groups to make decisions and take action around water resources management. The discourse on valuing water, and potential actions moving forward to implement the Principles, is not mutually exclusive from integrated water resources management (IWRM), but reinforce the concept; and
- While there was much engagement and interest during the consultations on the subject of valuing water, there still remains many questions on this initiative will move forward and how.

The specific messages to the HLPW on the Valuing Water Initiative and the participants' reactions to the process that was carried out, as well as the suggested additions and modifications to the Preamble and Principles, can all be found in the comprehensive **Annex I** spreadsheet that is sortable by theme, issue and country consultation. **Annex II** includes a list of actions proposed by the consultation participants (by theme). **Annexes III-VIII** include the final consultation reports from the Valuing Water Initiative.

Conclusion

The six consultations showed that there is a keen interest in the subject of valuing water, not only from those in the water community, but from other sectors as well. While individual consultations were sometimes limited in terms of their scope of sectoral participation, as a whole, the consultations together covered a wide range of thematic areas, organization types and geographic regions of the world where useful lessons and messages could be taken from the discussions to be applied to future actions and endeavours around the area of valuing water.

In addition to a large amount of material emerging from the consultations to contribute to the next draft of the Preamble and Principles, interest was sparked to continue, and expand, the initiative with the aspiration that future discussions, and application of the Principles, can better help decision-makers at all scales make more informed decisions about the management and governance of water resources.