The second Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership Meeting took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 11-13 November 2013, hosted by SWA partner the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.

The meeting brought together a diverse group of over 100 SWA partners and potential partners (developing country governments, donors, development banks, civil society, multilaterals, sector partners and research and learning institutions).

The Partnership Meeting is part of SWA’s governance and is the regular meeting, open to all partners, to update partners on progress and give strategic direction to move the Partnership forward. The meeting is also an opportunity for cross-learning and for increasing familiarity and dialogue within and between the different SWA constituencies. Following the success of the second High Level Meeting (HLM) in 2012 and the growth in membership to 93 partners, this meeting was situated at a critical point in the development of the Partnership. In addition, with less than five months to go before the third SWA High Level Meeting in April 2014, participants were able to chart out the preparatory process to build momentum towards this key WASH sector event.

The three-day Partnership Meeting was a resounding success. It brought together a diverse range of sector players in a positive, inclusive and participatory dialogue. The first day looked back and took stock of the added value that SWA provides to the sector. A series of discussions and interventions from partners confirmed that SWA is serving a unique global function, which provides a political platform for high-level sector dialogue; improves accountability; supports the development of realistic national plans in off-track countries; improves sector coordination; helps to make the case for increased budget allocations to WASH; increases visibility of sanitation and hygiene; and helps to build a strong evidence base for action and advocacy. As one participant put it, “no other platform is building, strengthening and creating political will for universal access to WASH”.

The second day looked forward. It verified partners’ joint vision and, through a highly interactive process, identified areas for emphasis and adjustment to turn the vision into reality. The vision articulated at the meeting puts country-leadership, driving momentum for universal access, squarely at the centre of what SWA does. Partners’ recommendations included promoting closer collaboration among global stakeholders at country level; strengthening sector monitoring; and remaining open to engaging with new partners, including new country partners (for instance additional Asian and Latin American Countries), the private sector (including local small scale private sector), non traditional donors (including Arab countries) and local government.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss three key strategic issues: improving aid-effectiveness and its role in strengthening national processes; influencing the post-2015 agenda; and learning from other global partnerships about how to
increase SWA’s impact and appreciation of WASH by other sectors. The meeting featured inspiring speeches by Ms Catarina de Albuquerque, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, and Dr David Nabarro, Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement.

The final day focused on preparations for the next High Level Meeting. All partners had earlier reported back on progress made against the 2012 HLM commitments, and the 2014 commitments are expected to build on this. The meeting provided a framework and crucial tools for partners to develop strategic and “game-changing” commitments with measureable indicators. Time was spent on analysing the preparatory process, learning about successful advocacy activities, gaining insight into the design of good commitments and understanding how to engage finance ministries.

SWA has, in a short space of time, become the leading global political platform for addressing sanitation and water issues. As the Partnership matures, partners are building mutual trust and becoming more comfortable with how to work together. A key message coming from the meeting is that the Partnership now needs to develop more clarity on purpose and sharpen its mechanisms for working together. Partners need to make best use of the political space that has been carved out, embed WASH in the political agenda at national level, and ensure on-going high-level engagement at global and national levels.

A challenge for the future is how to strengthen the linkages between the global and national aspects of the Partnership; ensuring that the priorities of partners at global level are compatible with strengthening government-led processes at national level. As more partners become keen to engage, maintaining a core common agenda will be key.

The formal meeting summary and results will be shared in December 2013 along with the minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting (which took place the following day). These documents will serve as guidance for the Partnership to go forward and will feed in to the planned review of SWA.

Visit the SWA Partnership Meeting 2013 web page to see photographs and watch video clips of the meeting, hear about the meeting from the perspective of some of the participants through Partner Perspectives and read all the tweets posted during the meeting, which capture the essence of the discussion as it unfolded.

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