Introduction
This paper has been written to inform the discussion on political WASH dialogue at the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership Meeting in November 2012.

Initiated in 2009, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) is a global partnership of developing countries, donors, multi-lateral agencies, civil society and other development partners working together to achieve universal and sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). One of the priority areas in the SWA ‘Framework for Action’ is to increase political prioritization of the WASH sector. Political prioritization is not an end in itself, but is needed to tackle the sector’s toughest challenges: increasing the resource base, clarifying institutional responsibilities, resolving bottlenecks, reaching the poorest.

SWA’s main instrument to increase political prioritization has been the High Level Meeting (HLM). So far two HLMs have been held, in April 2010 and April 2012.

In the post HLM 2012 Steering Committee (SC) review, two complementary concept papers were commissioned to reflect on the experience gained from the SWA political dialogue and to give guidance to future approaches. This first paper, the “HLM Options paper”, reviews what has been learnt regarding the design and hosting of HLMS and explores some alternative options for future HLMS. A second related paper, entitled “Sustaining the Political Dialogue”, was commissioned to consider what SWA partners might do to sustain the political dialogue between HLMS.

Purpose of Paper
Following the recent experience of the successful 2012 HLM, the SWA Steering Committee requested the Secretariat to draft a short paper: (i) capturing lessons learnt on the strategy and management of prior HLMS; and (ii) exploring alternative options for future HLMS. The paper is prepared as a contribution to the November SWA Partnership meeting and is designed to spark discussion and assist the SC make decisions about future HLM meetings.

The High Level Meeting Model
Both HLMS have been developed on a similar model. Both were convened by UNICEF, hosted by the World Bank and funded by SWA donors. Both were planned around the objective of bringing WASH issues and evidence to the attention of Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Development Cooperation – key figures responsible for resource allocation. Prior attempts to attract Ministers of Finance to attend global sector meetings have had little success, so the strategy has been to go where Ministers of Finance congregate. As a result, both HLMS were hosted the day before the World Bank Spring Meetings, and held on World Bank premises.

The HLMS were conceived as the culmination of in-country processes that would lead to specific and tangible actions. A two-tiered preparatory process at country level (technical level stakeholder dialogue and inter-ministerial dialogue) and a global sector donor preparatory process to align donor messaging, preceded each of the HLMS. These preparatory dialogues produced monitorable and country-owned Statements of Commitments that were tabled at the HLM to facilitate accountability. HLM outcome statements were encouraged to contain measurable commitments so that progress could be tracked.
Both HLMs consisted of a preparatory day at which sector ministers undertook a dialogue and agreed on a Sector Minister’s Statement that was presented at the HLM.

Growth of the High Level Meeting

Table 1 compares the scale of participation at the two HLMs. It indicates that both meetings were substantial affairs. SWA grew considerably between HLMs and the 2012 HLM reflected increased involvement of high-level decision-makers both from developing countries and donor agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2010 HLM</th>
<th>2012 HLM</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># SWA partners at the time</td>
<td>(~20)(^1)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Developing countries engaged in HLM process</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Country statements submitted</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Sector ministers confirmed to attend HLM prior to meeting</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Sector ministers actually attended</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Finance ministers confirmed to attend HLM prior to meeting</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Finance ministers actually attended</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># People attended HLM</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Ministers of development cooperation/foundation president/bank vice-president who actually attended</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Banks and donor agencies represented at HLM</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Senior global leaders (Royalty, UN Agency Head, former President, incoming UN Deputy Secretary General) who actually attended</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 gives an estimate of the costs of preparation, meeting delivery and follow-up tracking for the 2 HLMs. This table only incurs costs by the SWA secretariat (staff time, contracts and travel) not by self-paying participants. Global meetings are expensive, especially in the US (when most participants come from Africa and Europe) and where the SWA secretariat is supporting the participation of ministers of water and sanitation who would otherwise not be travelling to Washington DC. The cost has grown with the size of the meeting. Arguably, the scale of the 2012 HLM achievements and establishment of SWA justify the expenditure.

Table 2: HLM Costs for 2010 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cost in $1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLM 2010</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLM 2012</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Before formal establishment of the SWA partnership.
\(^2\) Includes full secretariat costs and required country travel.
\(^3\) Participant travel accounts for 73 and 75\% of meeting costs for 2010 and 2012.
\(^4\) Estimate of costs from May to Dec 2012
Factors for Success

The 2012 HLM was probably the largest gathering of senior political figures to specifically discuss WASH. Feedback from the 2012 HLM was gathered through conversations and calls with SWA partners, HLM participants and people involved in the national preparatory processes. This feedback has pointed to the following success factors:

1. **Targeting very senior decision-makers**: The judgment to target very senior political figures from both North and South, such as the USAID Administrator Shah, and Minister Okonjo-Iweala – along with credible high-level figures such as the Prince of Orange, UNICEF’s Executive Director Lake and the World Bank Vice-President Kyte – paid dividends, as it helped attract the attendance of high-level participants.

2. **Convening power**: The convening power of UNICEF’s Executive Director and UNICEF country offices was important in attracting high-level participation, as well as content. Hosting by the World Bank in Washington DC provides an efficient venue where high-level participants can accomplish several objectives.

3. **Strong preparatory process**: The in-country preparatory process was an important factor in the meeting’s success. It meant that countries came with something to say and with statements and commitments owned by several stakeholders. The country level dialogue itself had many benefits, not the least being the dialogue between ministers responsible for finance and WASH. Some countries set up a SWA Task Force that was successful in driving the preparatory process and will be an important resource to coordinate follow-up.

4. **High-level chair**: Securing a high-level chair – a former head of state, President John Kufuor who is highly respected for his achievements in Ghana, Africa and globally – as the chair of SWA was essential for its success.

5. **Highly-skilled and respected moderator**: Securing a highly respected moderator, Ambassador Jan Eliasson, now the UN Deputy Secretary General, himself a WASH sector leader built trust in the meeting process and added substance in its conclusions.

6. **Strong developing country engagement**: Strong participation by developing countries, both in the preparatory process and the HLM, emphasizes the fact that SWA is no longer donor-led. The diversity of attendance meant that WASH was perceived as global challenge deserving attention.

Lessons Learnt

The following lessons have been suggested from the experience of prior HLMs:

1. **Large rooms inside the World Bank are in short supply at the time of the Spring Meetings**: The Secretariat, the Water and Sanitation Programme and World Bank WASH colleagues had to pull out all the stops in 2012 to find a room big enough and available at the World Bank at the time of the Spring Meetings for the HLM. The early confirmation of participation by a couple of major donors was critical. It is doubtful if the WB could host a larger meeting on its premises at the time of the 2014 Spring Meetings.

2. **Ministers of Finance do not necessarily attend even if they are confirmed**: The 2012 HLM was successful in getting Ministers of Finance to engage in-country with sector ministers as part of the preparatory process, a fact that is a major part of the success of SWA. However, the actual number of Minister of Finance who attended and spoke at either of the HLMs was small. Reasons for this might include: the Spring Meetings are a very busy time for Ministers and, despite best intentions, few can actually spare the time amongst competing meetings; in 2012, Ministers of Finance might have felt they were adequately represented by their sector Ministers or other delegated staff; the
HLM is not a pledging meeting, so Ministers of Finance may not feel a real need to attend; Minister of Finance don’t like to be drawn into what they consider a sectoral dialogue.

3. **The meeting was neither long enough, nor sufficiently structured to allow true debate:** The moderator at the 2012 HLM made the point that given the number of people who wanted to talk, a longer meeting might be required. The moderator also would have preferred a more interactive meeting design to allow debate and consensus to be built on key issues. Time pressure would only increase with more participants. However, given their tight time-schedule, VIPs and Finance Ministers are unlikely to commit to attend a longer meeting unless a specific time of attendance can be specified. An alternative preparation and meeting structure is needed for a deeper dialogue.

4. **Global meetings are costly and the SWA Secretariat needs to be adequately resourced:** Delivering such a meeting with a small team is a significant burden on the secretariat and the convening organization. Travel costs are a large component for a meeting hosted in the US (when most participants are from Africa and Europe). Ministers responsible for water and sanitation would not normally travel to the Spring Meetings and therefore the Secretariat needs to be funded to support the travel of those Ministers to attend the HLM.

5. **Country preparations and tracking is also a substantial cost item:** A strong country preparatory and tracking process is also costly. As a greater number of countries engage in the preparatory process, more resources (staff, consultants, outreach and support to other events, etc.) are needed to provide the support needed to ensure a coherent preparatory process across countries. Also, adequately tracking the growing number of commitments (over 250 from 2010 and 400 from 2012) requires significant resources to ensure the SWA HLMs link to other initiatives and align with global, regional and national monitoring efforts.

6. **Donor preparatory process were less structured than other constituencies:** The preparatory processes amongst civil society networks and many developing countries were stronger processes involving more agencies and consultation than that for donors. Greater attention might be devoted to developing an appropriate process in future HLMs.

7. **Key inputs need to be delivered earlier:** The HLM is designed to reflect on the state of the WASH sector. In both 2010 and 2012 the GLAAS report and JMP updates were only produced a few weeks before the meetings, which did not give sufficient time for countries and donors to reflect on these findings when developing their Statements of Commitments. This global data needs to be available a minimum of 4 months ahead of an HLM in order to be a useful input to the preparatory process. Similarly more timely production of country-level and donor commitments would have enabled an analysis of commitments to be presented in the HLM.

8. **Improving the efficiency of HLM design and development:** A lesson from the 2012 HLM is that a Task Team of the Steering Committee, staffed with junior and mid-level staff, is probably not the most effective mechanism to lead the development of the HLM. The design and delivery of the meeting was in the end guided by a small group of Steering Committee Members and other senior level staff from Partner institutions. The SC should continue to provide overall direction and oversight. Delivering such large high profile meetings requires hands-on engagement by a small committee comprising senior-level team members; all of whom should have a stake in the success of the meeting.

9. **Limited media coverage:** Both HLMs yielded rather limited media coverage, though it is noted that coverage in developing countries was more extensive than in leading international outlets in 2012. A number of factors may lie behind the difficulty in gaining global coverage: the timing of the HLM with the Spring Meetings means that there is considerable competition for media attention, particularly in Washington; it was difficult to identify a compelling, newsworthy global message for release before the meeting; and arguably, insufficient attention was given to coordinating and defining rules of engagement to direct the efforts of global partners. Asking participating countries
and donors to submit their commitments further in advance would facilitate the development of an overarching message that could be released in advance of the meeting (along the lines of the 2012 statement that “commitments totaling $xx were made that would reach y million people by 201x”). Such an activity would benefit both SWA overall, and individual participants whose pledges would be given more profile through such coverage.

**Other Considerations For Future HLMs**

In addition to these lessons, the following issues and questions were identified which the design of future HLMs would need to consider:

1. **SWA growth and growth in HLM attendance**: If SWA continues to grow – say reaching 100 to 120 partners by 2014 – an even bigger venue will be needed if the same HLM model is followed. Possible areas of SWA partner growth are: more fragile/off-track countries; more Asian, African and Latin American Countries; more middle-income countries; more donors. SWA has good experience now in promoting country preparations and has learnt that these have a significant impact on attendance. Even if SWA did not grow substantially, it is likely that with more in-country preparation, the 2014 HLM would attract larger participation. Following the same model as 2010 and 2012, a possible planning figure for the 2014 HLM might be 60 Africa, Asia and Latin American countries engaged in the process and 200 participants. Given the high-level of engagement, by any standards, this is a large meeting.

2. **Is the World Bank the best venue?** The World Bank has been a successful host for both HLMs. The World Bank is the biggest sector financier, has convening power, has great technical meeting support and facilities and is a familiar venue for finance and donor participants. Being in a world decision-making centre adds to the prestige of the HLM. However, the week of the Spring Meetings is the busiest week in the World Bank calendar, and it is difficult to secure an appropriate meeting room – both in terms of confidently securing a room early (i.e. before one month in advance) and also in terms of having confidence in securing a room of the appropriate size. The SWA Secretariat, the World Bank sector staff and WSP made considerable efforts to ensure the HLMs receive sufficient priority. In 2010 Donor Ministers were asked to intervene to request World Bank management to give priority to the meeting. A meeting outside World Bank premises is possible, but security considerations (such as travelling to another site) and distance might make it difficult to attract the attendance of Ministers of Finance if the meeting is held the day before the Spring Meetings.

3. **Are Ministers of Finance the right target audience for the HLM?** Given the success in 2012 at engaging Ministers of Finance in country level dialogue, yet the continuing difficulties in getting finance ministers actually to spare the time to attend the meeting and engage in inter-ministerial dialogue, the question is raised whether Finance Ministers engagement should be the main target of the HLM. The Chair of SWA has commented that Ministers of Finance in developing countries are subject to the direction of Heads of State. Having a former President as Chair of SWA gives an opportunity for interaction with Presidents and Heads of State. Inviting Heads of State or other senior level politicians and parliamentarians will also entail significant protocol and likely even higher costs. So HLM options here are to:
   a. Continue with the main focus on Ministers of Finance;
   b. Redesign the preparatory process, meeting invitations and budget to include engagement with a broader blend of high level decision makers, including some Heads of State, high level decision makers such as parliamentarians, Ministers of planning or other senior Ministers and Ministers of Finance (but does not depend entirely on the attendance of Ministers of Finance).
4. **Regional dialogue is growing:** There is evidence that developing countries are strengthening regional sector representation in Africa, Latin America and Asia and that SWA would be well-served to better align with the regional level dialogue. Does this suggest a model that has global, regional and country level components?

5. **Changing the nature of the HLM dialogue:** The first 2 HLMs were designed around dialogue on global progress and actions to make progress in off-track countries. Future HLMs might consider recasting the essentially donor-poor country dialogue in broader terms. This could include:
   a. A truly global sector platform to assess global progress incorporating a broader range of countries, including richer countries with large unserved populations;
   b. Extending the focus beyond public sector policies and management to include high-level dialogue with the private sector; or
   c. Focusing the HLM on mobilizing and pledging resources.

6. **Quality country level evidence is critical:** Turning political commitments into large-scale achievements on the ground requires a strong country evidence base, both to identify achievable targets and in order to measure achievements. Effective country information systems are needed to build this necessary evidence base. So important building blocks of successful HLM outcomes are the establishment and upkeep of country information systems, an area where many SWA partners can contribute, as well as a high quality GLAAS report.

**Options for Future HLMs**

On the basis of the above lessons and other considerations, this section explores some broad options for future HLMs. These options are not mutually exclusive and the final decision is bound to be a hybrid of these options. They are presented to stimulate thought and discussion.

**Option 1 – Don’t fundamentally change a winning formula – hold a large HLM at the World Bank around the time of the Spring Meetings**

Both HLMs have been highly successful events, despite the challenges. There are good reasons for essentially maintaining the existing formula: participants seem well-satisfied; the challenges and risks are known; consistency helps to build confidence; extending a consistent approach to monitoring results will build sound evidence base from which to learn sectoral lessons; and knowing that the time and venue of the next HLM gives good planning time-frames for all.

Changes to be considered within the same fundamental formula, whilst promising to keep some key components, might include:

- Give greater clarity on the ambitions and objectives of the HLM. Identify issues of greatest concern to the SWA partnership and which lend themselves to resolution or being advanced by the HLM.
- Consider the option of having the HLM a day removed from the Spring meetings (i.e. a day after they end) when Ministers of Finance might be more available (many may need specifically to extend their stay to attend the meeting) and the WB’s only large meeting room (the Preston auditorium5) would have more chance of being available.
- Broaden the target audience to a blend of high-level decision-makers (including Presidents, leading Parliamentarians, Ministers of Planning as well as Ministers of Finance, Ministers of Development Cooperation and Sector Ministers). 

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5 In 2012, the Preston Auditorium was used for registration, not meetings.
• Look at prestigious meeting venues in Washington DC outside of the Bank which can accommodate larger numbers and can be directly controlled by the host (additional security would need to be arranged and budgeted for).

• Redesign the meeting process either by extending the meeting time and making it more interactive with fewer set speeches, or alternatively to retain the short meeting period but give even greater attention to preparation so that the HLM becomes a meeting a more formal (non-interactive) design with very specific time allocations for Ministers of Finance and other High Level dignitaries for previously prepared announcements.

• Vary the theme, so that other actors are brought in. The first two HLMs broadly addressed the issue of funding by governments or donors. For example, a future theme on increasing engagement of the private sector would fit with greater participation from business.

• SC, UNICEF and World Bank/WSP appoint a HLM oversight committee and a senior management team to deliver the meeting.

• Build into the preparation information that could lead to a step-change in sector performance, both on donor and Minister of Finance behaviour – e.g. evidence on how donors are supporting sector development strategies in comparison with other sectors, or analysis of the reasons behind poor targeting of finance or prioritization of service delivery.

Option 2 – Retain the same focus and locality, but reduce the meeting size to an interaction between a few very high-level participants.

This option implies continuing to host the HLM at the World Bank at the time of the Spring Meetings with a focus on Ministers of Finance, but significantly decreasing the meeting size. This option has the following benefits:

• The HLM becomes literally just the headline news from a longer preparatory sessions and focus is given to interaction between a few very high level decision-makers.

• With a reduced size the meeting would have several design options: it could be more or less interactive.

• High focus could be given to gaining media attention, showcasing prepared announcements.

• Reducing the numbers of participants would contain costs and minimize the risk of a backlash against ‘large global meetings’.

Option 3 – Find another global venue and target a broader blend of high-level decision makers.

Rather than continue the strategy of mainly trying to attract Ministers of Finance to attend (because they were going to the Spring Meetings anyway) this option does not have Ministers of Finance as the essential target audience, but rather the HLM would seek to attract a range of high-level decision makers (Heads of State, Ministers, a few key Finance Ministers, parliamentarians, business leaders, agency heads) to a SWA HLM. This might cost more (for instance, it would be necessary to pay for Ministers’ travel) but it would lessen the risk of Ministers of Finance not showing up at the last minute. The meeting could also target selected global leaders: for example, Heads of State who have made a significant contribution to the sector, business leaders in industries that have made/or will announce significant contributions to the sector. The meeting could be held at a world capital that has the connectivity and facilities for such a meeting, and be co-hosted by partners whose headquarters are in those locations. The HLM would continue to encourage dialogue with Ministers of Finance in country-level preparations, but would only invite a selection of Ministers of Finance, from countries where there is a specific story to tell or message to give. Option 3 could be at a standalone event or alongside another global event.
Option 3A – Host the HLM as a standalone event

A standalone event gives the message that the HLM has the prestige to merit its own specific attendance. It has a lower risk in that participation is more secure and it gives SWA HLM management more control over the event. But a large HLM standalone event would also cost more and risk criticism of wasting resources. These costs and risks could be off-set by hosting a smaller standalone event as the culmination of a strong preparatory process.

Means of selecting a standalone global venue include:

- Asking if there are SWA partners who want to host this.
- Standalone meeting venues could be selected on the basis of suitability and cost.
- There would need to be a testing of the feasibility of the attendance by Ministers of finance to a standalone sector meeting in the absence of any perceived crisis or Presidential order.

If option 3A is preferred, a longer lead time would be required to accommodate a strong preparatory process, find a venue, raise the meeting finance, secure dates for the attendance of high level decision makers.

Option 3B – Link the HLM to another global meeting

The next HLM could be linked to another large global event where leading decision-makers would be congregating. This could reduce costs and increase participation from world leaders. The meeting would, however, continue to have to contend with schedules of busy people for whom the HLM would be secondary to the main meeting. Finding a suitable meeting room and fitting in with security concerns are also likely to be challenges.

Options of linking to other existing meetings could be: New York – linked to a major UN meeting; the venue of a G8 or G20 meeting; venue of a global MDG review meeting; venue of a meeting of the Post-MDG panel; Davos – World Economic Forum, or even other global events such as the World Cup or Olympics.

Option 4 – Host the next HLM in a region

An alternative way of looking at the next HLM would be for a region to host the next HLM. The main options for regions to host the next HLM include:

- Africa – which has the most SWA developing country partners and identified co-hosts in the African Union and AMCOW. The AU is already planning a 2013 sector meeting with Finance Minister participation – this might help or hinder a 2014 meeting.
- Asia – is the region with the largest number of unserved and an Asian 2014 HLM would enable SWA to launch a drive on Asian country membership and participation. The selection of host would need to be made in dialogue with Asian SWA members.

Advantages of a regional meeting include:

- Reinforcing developing country leadership of SWA.
- Enabling the consolidation of SWA partner activity and membership in a region, increases country-level dialogue in the selected region and facilitates intra-regional dialogue and lesson learning.
- A regional meeting likely to be substantially lower cost than a global meeting.

Challenges of a regional meeting include:

- Combining global and regional elements in a common agenda.
• Attracting high-level attendance from countries in other regions.
• Retaining continuity in creating and monitoring global commitments.

The regional option suggests a further set of sub-options:

**Option 4A: Host a global HLM in a region**

In this option the meeting would remain a global agenda but the meeting structured to give prominence to the host region.

**Option 4B: The next HLM focuses on one region**

In this option the HLM would focus on one region, possibly linked to an AU or SAARC meeting. The idea being to alternate between regional and global dialogue with say a regional meeting in 2014 meetings with global meeting in 2011).

The agenda would need to be structured to enable a regional dialogue, giving greater attention to and sharing lessons from the selected region, whilst also including a global discussion and resulting in global commitments.

**Option 4C – Sequential regional and global meetings**

Another (more expensive) option might be to structure the next HLM into large regional and a crescendo smaller global meeting. The larger dialogue would be at the regional level (or, ambitiously in two regions?) seeking to attract Ministers of Finance or Heads of State (such as at an AU or Asian Summit meeting). This would give high country-level participation, more opportunities to share, and be easier to arrange and each individual meeting would be lower cost to deliver – though overall the process would entail a higher cost). The regional HLMs could in the same year lead to a smaller, well-structured showcase global event of top-level regional and global representatives. This option would in effect be an ambitious 3 level process: country, regional and global and might take a longer time interval than 2 years between global HLMs to deliver.

**Next steps**

The purpose of this paper was to discuss options for consideration by the steering committee, not recommend solutions. Proposed actions going forward are:

1. The SWA secretariat undertakes a survey of SWA partners to get further feedback on the 2012 HLM and responses to options for the next HLM.
2. The final HLM options paper is shared with SWA partners ahead of the partnership meeting, in particular comment is sought from donors/host management expected to contribute finance/be accountable for the HLM
3. The conclusions of the meeting and paper are presented to the SC to make a decision on what action to take. SC decisions on HLM 2014 (if that's the right time frame) needed by latest by early 2013.

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6 Note that a full year's lead-time if likely needed to plan and deliver the next HLM.