

Interactive Dialogue E: Water in Multilateral Processes

SDG 6, the 2030 Agenda and Beyond and Global Water Initiatives

This paper synthesises inputs from Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental stakeholders, reflecting areas of convergence to frame a focused and forward-looking dialogue on water in multilateral processes, recognising linkages with other thematic dialogues.

I. Headlines on progress to date

- Water challenges are inherently cross-sectoral and extend beyond national boundaries, requiring collective approaches and coordinated action. As the foremost institution for multilateral policy, the United Nations is widely recognised as a key platform to elevate the water agenda and strengthen linkages across climate, biodiversity, food and development frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda and SDG 6. Against this backdrop, inputs highlight the need to assess how existing multilateral processes and water initiatives are delivering in practice, where coherence, coordination and ambition can be strengthened and how collective action on water can be accelerated in the lead up to 2030 and beyond.
- Multilateral engagement on water has gained renewed visibility since the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, held in the context of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” (2018–2028). The Conference, the second in UN history following the 1977 Mar del Plata Conference, and its follow-up, helped reinvigorate political attention to water, including through the compilation of the Water Action Agenda (2023), the adoption of the UN System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation (2024) and the appointment of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Water (2024). Water is increasingly referenced across multilateral frameworks, including the Pact for the Future (2024) and the Sevilla Commitment (2025).
- Despite this increased visibility, inputs consistently emphasise that water continues to be addressed in fragmented and siloed ways across multilateral processes, resulting in limited coherence and coordination, inadequate financing and weak follow-up and accountability, which has constrained collective progress on SDG 6 and related goals, including SDG 17 on partnerships.
- Inputs further highlight that expanded political initiatives and voluntary commitments have not yet been matched by commensurate progress on the ground, with implementation constrained by financing gaps, limited institutional and human capacity, data and monitoring challenges, and weak linkages between multilateral processes and national and local action, particularly in developing countries and vulnerable contexts.

II. Emerging Issues/Areas of Action

Global water governance continues to be characterised by fragmentation across multiple multilateral processes, institutions and agreements. For example, responsibilities related to water are dispersed across sustainable development, climate change, food systems, biodiversity, desertification, disaster risk reduction, peace and development cooperation agendas, with limited coordination among them. This fragmentation is compounded by overlapping mandates, weak system-wide accountability, misalignment between policy commitments and financing, gaps in data and monitoring and persistent capacity constraints at the national level, all of which continue to undermine coherent and effective action on water.

Closely linked to this challenge, inputs underscore uneven integration of water across global policy frameworks and multilateral negotiations. While water is widely recognised as foundational to

climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity protection, food and energy security and health, it is often addressed as a sectoral or technical issue rather than as a systemic enabler, constraining the ability of multilateral processes to address risks and maximise co-benefits.

A further recurring issue concerns the structural and institutional constraints on implementation. Since the UN 2023 Water Conference, political initiatives and voluntary commitments on water have expanded, many of which are compiled in the [Water Action Agenda](#). However, several inputs emphasize the need for multilateral processes to better support implementation and integration, particularly in developing countries and other vulnerable contexts, while recognizing efforts on water under existing multilateral frameworks, including the Rio Conventions. For instance, some called for a dedicated process to monitor and advance progress in water and sanitation. Inputs further note opportunities to strengthen multilateral water governance through more systematic engagement of civil society and other non-State actors, including women, youth and Indigenous groups, in decision-making, implementation and follow-up, contributing to accountability and locally grounded outcomes.

Regional and transboundary water governance offers significant opportunities to support the implementation of multilateral commitments. As more than 60 per cent of global freshwater flows cross national boundaries, cooperation on shared rivers, lakes and aquifers can contribute to resilience, sustainable development and peace, and offers examples of legal and institutional frameworks for intergovernmental water governance.

As the 2030 Agenda enters its final years and the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development” (2018–2028), approaches its conclusion, inputs raise questions regarding continuity, political momentum and accountability for water beyond existing mandates. While Member States express differing perspectives on future arrangements, there is broad recognition of the importance of sustaining visibility for water and ensuring that progress under SDG 6 informs future global development and governance frameworks.

III. Guiding questions

1. **Positioning & integration:** Water currently is positioned across major multilateral agreements and mechanisms - but is often addressed in parallel. How might coherence and integration across these processes be further strengthened to enhance collective impact?
2. **Learning & good practice:** What insights can be drawn from existing multilateral agreements, frameworks and initiatives, including the Water Action Agenda, to inform efforts to further strengthen integrated and cross-sectoral water governance?
3. **Governance, accountability & follow-up:** What approaches could strengthen more coherent coordination, accountability and follow-up across multilateral water-related initiatives, building on existing roles and platforms, such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, UN-Water, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Water, the Dushanbe Water Process, existing reporting mechanisms and the outcomes of UN Water Conferences, including through inclusive engagement of relevant stakeholders and non-State actors?
4. **Support to MOI:** How can multilateral processes better mobilise, align and strengthen means of implementation, including through financing, data, capacity development and knowledge-sharing, to support water-related action at national, basin and local levels, particularly for developing countries and for vulnerable communities?
5. **Post-2030 future of water in multilateralism:** How should water be positioned beyond 2030, within evolving global development and governance frameworks, including considerations related to

mandate coherence, new institutional arrangements and approaches to long-term monitoring and review?