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SPECIAL EDITION 2026

DAKAR HIGH LEVEL PREPARATORY MEETING

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR THE 2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE



United Nations Water Conference
United Arab Emirates, 2026





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GLOBAL MOMENTUM BUILDS TOWARD THE 2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE

Dakar Ignites a Global Process for Dialogue on Water



In April 2025, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution reaffirming the fundamental importance of water and sanitation to peace, prosperity and sustainable development. In that resolution, Member States provided a clear mandate to the co-hosts of the upcoming 2026 United Nations Water Conference — the Republic of Senegal and the United Arab Emirates — to facilitate a transparent, inclusive and action-oriented global dialogue that would culminate in the Conference in Abu Dhabi in December 2026.

The resolution articulated the necessity of a process that is both consultative and implementation-focused — engaging not only governments, but the full spectrum of stakeholders: the UN system, regional and sub-regional organisations, civil society, academia, the private sector, financing institutions and youth constituencies. It called for a preparatory framework

capable of translating political will into measurable outcomes, anchored in the imperatives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the centrality of Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation.

Against this authoritative backdrop, the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, on 26–27 January 2026, marked the formal launch of the mandated global dialogue. Dakar did more than inaugurate a calendar of consultations — it **provided the political and institutional ignition point for a global process designed to elevate water cooperation and action at the highest levels of international governance**. The High-Level Preparatory Meeting (HLPM) marked the moment at which years of mounting concern over the world's water crisis crystallised into renewed, coordinated political resolve.

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H.E. BASSIROU DIOMAYE FAYE
President of the Republic of Senegal

Co-hosted by the Republic of Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, the gathering brought together heads of state, ministers, senior UN officials, development partners, civil society leaders and international organisations. The breadth of participation alone signalled that water had re-emerged as a defining global issue.

In opening the preparatory meeting his opening speech, Senegal's President, H.E. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, captured the urgency in a simple but powerful phrase : *L'urgence, c'est maintenant — The urgency is now.* Senegal's Minister of Water and Sanitation Dr. Cheikh Tidiane Dieye used the phrase *déboucher sur un processus continu d'action collective — opening onto a sustained and structured pathway for collective action.*

These statements reflected the shared understanding among stakeholders in relation to the global water crisis. Climate change is intensifying droughts and floods, urban populations are increasing at a rate higher than the rate of infrastructure expansion, water related ecosystems are under strain, and billions still lack safely managed water and sanitation. The HLPE

framed these realities not as distant risks, but as immediate political responsibilities.

With the full engagement of the UN system under the banner of UN-Water and the involvement of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water, Dakar demonstrated an unprecedented degree of institutional alignment.

With twelve Member States serving as Co-Chairs of the Interactive Dialogues, the coalition formally engaged in driving action on water has now expanded to a team of fourteen. In this sense, Dakar was not just a launch event — it was the moment the international community collectively departed on the road to Abu Dhabi.

The Moral and Political Urgency of an Ambitious Water Agenda

H.E. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, President of the Republic of Senegal, anchored the discussions during the HLPE in human experience. He brought the global water crisis back to its human core: dignity, health, stability and opportunity:

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‘L’eau n’est pas seulement un enjeu sectoriel mais un fondement essentiel de la dignité humaine, de la santé publique, de la stabilité sociale et de la prospérité des nations’. Water is not merely a sectoral issue but an essential foundation of human dignity, public health, social stability, and the prosperity of nations.



This framing transformed water from a technical domain into a political and moral imperative. On the African continent, the urgency is especially tangible. Rapid urbanisation, climate variability and infrastructure deficits create daily pressures that cannot wait for distant solutions.

President Faye warned that the cost of inaction could be immense. Investments in water systems, he argued, help stabilise communities, reduce conflict risks, and strengthen the capacity of societies to withstand climate shocks. In this narrative, water is not only a development issue — it is a ***cornerstone of national and regional stability.***

Dakar’s moral framing ensured that the Conference process would be grounded not just in policy, but in purpose. The ambition is not abstract progress; it is ***measurable improvement in people’s lives.***

A Conference of Implementation

A defining thread of the opening session was the call to ensure that the 2026 Conference becomes a ***Conference of Implementation.*** This message, articulated by H.E. Minister Abdulla

Ahmed Balalaa, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability of the United Arab Emirates, set the operational tone for the road ahead. Minister Balalaa underscored that the long gap since the first UN water conference in 1977 could not be followed by another cycle of declarations without delivery. The world, he suggested, has entered a period where credibility depends on outcomes: ***the time is no longer for reflection or recommendations, but for action.*** He positioned this not as a break with multilateralism, but as its evolution — diplomacy that leads to measurable progress. Water, he reminded participants, has shaped the UAE’s own trajectory: ***‘for the UAE, water shapes our history, our present, and our future, fostering deep resilience, resourcefulness, and ingenuity.’*** This national story became a metaphor for the global journey: water scarcity can be a driver of innovation, cooperation and resilience when matched by political will.



H.E. MINISTER ABDULLA AHMED BALALAA,
Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability of the United Arab Emirates

Minister Balalaa’s intervention resonated widely. Delegates and stakeholders repeatedly returned to the idea that 2026 must mark a shift from ***agenda-setting to the scaling up of action.*** The Conference is not intended to renegotiate priorities already embedded in SDG 6 — it is designed to mobilise finance, technology, partnerships and accountability mechanisms that accelerate delivery. As such, at the HLP, the upcoming conference - along with its preparatory process - began to be labelled as the ***“Conference of Implementation”.***

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From Vision to Architecture: Minister Dièye's Three Levers

While leaders defined the political ambition, Senegal's Minister of Water and Sanitation H.E. Cheikh Tidiane Dièye focused on how to structure the journey ahead. His intervention provided one of Dakar's most practical and enduring contributions: a **framework of three strategic levers** to guide the preparatory process.

Lever One: Coherence Over Fragmentation

The global water landscape, Dièye noted, is rich with initiatives — but often lacks coordination. Fragmentation weakens impact. The Conference must therefore foster alignment across institutions, financing streams and partnerships:



H.E. CHEIKH TIDIANE DIÈYE

Senegalese Minister of Water and Sanitation



'Nous devons dépasser la fragmentation pour obtenir des résultats mesurables'. We need to move beyond fragmentation to achieve measurable results.

This first lever calls for integration — not replacing existing efforts, but connecting them into a more powerful collective force.

Lever Two : A Stronger Global Water Governance Rhythm

Minister Dièye argued that water must no longer appear episodically on global agendas. Instead, the world needs a predictable rhythm of engagement — regular high-level meetings that sustain attention and accountability beyond 2030. This lever addresses one of the core lessons of past decades: progress falters when political focus fades. By embedding water more firmly into global governance cycles, the international community can ensure continuity between conferences and real-world implementation.

Lever Three: Partnerships as Delivery Engines

The third lever focused on partnerships — not as optional add-ons, but as the engines of delivery. Governments, development banks, research institutions, civil society and the private sector must work together in an integrated framework:



'En quittant Dakar, emportons avec nous l'esprit de solidarité, d'unité et d'action'. As we leave Dakar, let us take with us the spirit of solidarity, unity, and action.

This call for solidarity encapsulated Dakar's collaborative spirit. The road to Abu Dhabi will be defined by how effectively diverse actors align behind shared goals.

The Voice of UN-Water: System-Wide Coherence

The institutional dimension of Dakar's momentum was reinforced by Dr. Alvaro Lario, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the current Chair of UN-Water. His message highlighted the fact that water sits at the intersection of food, health, energy, ecosystems and climate — and that the UN system must act in an integrated way. He brought a reminder of the global acceleration mechanism for SDG 6, anchored in finance, data, capacity, innovation and governance — and on converting political momentum into measurable outcomes.

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H.E. DR ALVARO LARIO
Chair of UN-Water

Dr. Lario's intervention reassured Member States that the UN system stands ready to accompany them throughout the preparatory year, strengthening coherence between global frameworks and national action: **'the question is no longer to reflect, but to transform our commitments into action'**. His remarks reinforced the message that Dakar was not just about planning and discussion, but about catalysing concrete progress across financing, governance, data and partnerships.

Diplomacy for Cooperation : The Perspective of Retno Marsudi



H.E. RETNO MARSUDI
United Nations Special Envoy on Water

In her intervention, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water, H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi reinforced the multilateral spirit underpinning Dakar. She emphasised that water diplomacy is inseparable from peace, stability and shared prosperity, and highlighted the need to turn political momentum into sustained cooperation and measurable progress. Her remarks underscored that the water agenda is inherently cooperative: rivers, aquifers and climate impacts cross borders, requiring trust-building and partnership. Therefore, she emphasised, water must unite rather than divide: **'water must never be a source of division, but a common good we protect together'**. In presenting water in this way, Ms Marsudi underscored the inherently cooperative nature of the water agenda, tying diplomatic engagement to the broader goals of peace and multilateral partnership.

A Critical Opportunity



H.E. MR LI JUNHUA
UN Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs

In his contribution to the High-Level Opening Segment, the United Nations Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Li Junhua, noted that with less than five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the world remains far off track. In this context, he stated, the UN 2026 Water Conference represents **a critical opportunity to renew commitment**, galvanize ambition, accelerate

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implementation and mobilise transformative action across sectors and stakeholders. The 2026 UN Water Conference, he said, is not an end in itself, but a platform to drive tangible impact and sustained progress.

Inclusive and Rights Based Governance



H.E. ALUKI KOTERK

chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

H.E. Aluki Koterk, chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, stated that the global water crisis we are confronting today is not merely a technical or financial challenge. Rather, it is **fundamentally a crisis of governance and of human rights**. Indigenous Peoples, she stated, are disproportionately affected by water scarcity, pollution, climate impacts and exclusion from decision making – despite being among the most effective stewards of freshwater systems worldwide. Therefore, she stated, sustainable water solutions are not possible without inclusive and rights-based governance.

Water as an Enabler and Protector of Jobs

Mr. Kumar stated that water is the foundation of life and prosperity. It is an enabler and protector of jobs, but water security is also under threat, as more than 60% of global GDP and close to 1.7 billion jobs are in water sensitive



H.E. MR SAROJ KUMAR JHA

World Bank Group Director for Water

sectors. **If water is managed well**, however, it can become a growth and opportunity multiplier. As a result, water is a key priority of the ten Multilateral Development Banks, which have committed more than USD 70 billion in lending to the water sector over the past five years, complemented by technical assistance.

The Road Ahead : From Dakar to Abu Dhabi

In summary, the HLPM in Dakar was not a conclusion – it has ignited a process of global decision making on water, setting in motion a year of consultations, dialogues and high-level events that will shape the agenda for the 2026 UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi. Through the Interactive Dialogues, thematic inputs will be channelled. UN-Water and partners will sustain institutional momentum. Member States will carry forward political engagement. Stakeholders at different institutional levels will take the movement forward. The outlines are now clear: implementation-focused, partnership-driven, politically anchored. The HLPM in Senegal has set the ball rolling. The world has taken notice. The path to Abu Dhabi has begun with energy, clarity and shared resolve.

Dakar lit the fuse — the global community now carries the flame forward.

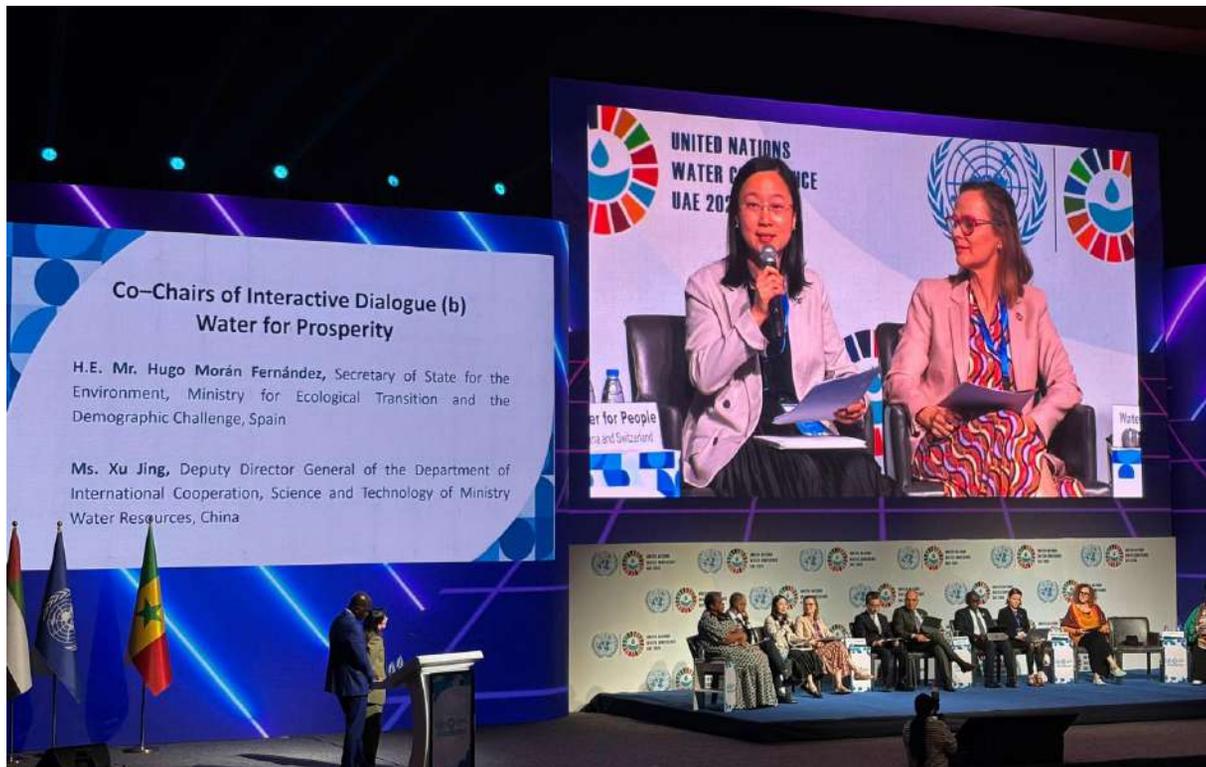


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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES FOR THE 2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE

Co-chairs of six interactive dialogues express their collective ambition



Introduction : Setting ambition and coalition building for the 2026 UN Water Conference

Shaping the Collective Ambition for the 2026 UN Water Conference

On the 27th of January, during the last day of the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference which took place in Diamniado, Senegal, the twelve member states that had been selected to co-chair the six Interactive Dialogues expressed their ambitions for the upcoming conference. The session brought together reports from all six pairs of Dialogue Co-Chairs - each representing one of the six themes (Water for People; Water for Prosperity; Water for Pla-

net; Water for Cooperation; Water in Multilateral Processes; Investments for Water) with the aim of highlighting commonalities, cross-cutting insights and emerging priorities across them. It served to consolidate early understandings of key challenges and opportunities related to SDG 6, as explored in the round-table kick-offs held earlier in the meeting.

A Committed, Diverse and Capable Coalition

Earlier, his Excellency Dr Cheikh Tidiane Dieye, the Minister of Water and Sanitation of the Republic of Senegal, co-host of the 2026 UN Water Conference, explained that together with the United Arab Emirates, the two co-hosts had developed a series of arguments and criteria which facilitated the selection of the a list of twelve co-chairs of the six Interactive Dialogues

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for the conference. The focus of this session was on identifying key messages and ambitious pathways which could help shape the preparatory roadmap from Dakar to Abu Dhabi and beyond. Because each Interactive Dialogue had taken place within its own framework in the previous 24 hours, this session also provided a first opportunity to generate a coherent and politically relevant narrative for the 2026 UN Water Conference.

The countries were judged to have a combination of the best capacities, disposition, technical abilities, ambition and leadership in the sector to carry the process forward towards the 2026 UN Water Conference. During the two days of the meeting in Dakar, he stated, all the discussions that took place had enabled the outlines of a collective ambition to emerge. In order for the 2026 UN Water Conference to be fully supported by the stakeholders – member states, international institutions, the range of organisations in civil society, the private sector and all other actors who wish to contribute to the process need to seize the moment during the two-day meeting in Dakar. The co-hosts will ensure that a series of further meetings which will take place during the year will be used as a lever to strengthen the collective dynamics and to arrive at the conference



During the High-Level Preparatory Meeting, His Excellency Abdulla Balalaa, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability of the United Arab Emirates referred to the 2026 UN Water Conference as a Conference of Implementation, urging collective, inclusive action toward SDG 6 and beyond

in Abu Dhabi in order to ensure that this conference impacts the water sector throughout the world. This should result in strong messages in relation to commitments, resulting in concrete actions with measurable progress across all six of the Interactive Dialogues.

During the High-Level Preparatory Meeting, His Excellency Abdulla Balalaa, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability of the United Arab Emirates referred to the 2026 UN Water Conference as a Conference of Implementation, urging collective, inclusive action toward SDG 6 and beyond. He emphasised the importance of high-level political representation, engaging all member states and stakeholders, with a focus on capacity to lead implementation-oriented dialogues.

Feedback from the Interactive Dialogues

On day two of the preparatory high level preparatory meetings, an interactive session was held dedicated to the shaping of ambition for the 2026 UN Water Conference. This session was opened by Henk Ovink, the former water envoy of the Netherlands and co-host of the UN 2023 Water Conference, as well as by Ms. Shaima Gargash and Dr. Mohamed Diatta, Sherpas for the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Senegal respectively.

Mr. Henk Ovink opened the session by pointing out that the preparatory meeting in Senegal was the beginning of an intense ten-month process of working on water, a critical year for the sector, as well as its institutions and its coalitions, in the interests of water management for the planet. Mr. Ovink passed a message of support and commitment from Mr. Sultan Rahimzoda, Sherpa of the 2023 UN Water Conference for Tajikistan. At this point Ms. Gargash and Dr. Diatta invited the twelve co-chairs of the Interactive Dialogues to express their ambitions for the conference. Dr. Diatta and Ms. Gargash asked the co-chairs to reflect on their key takeaways from the Interactive Dialogues. They were asked what priority actions and areas of focus had emerged from the dialogues in Dakar.

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WATER FOR PEOPLE

LED BY GHANA AND SWITZERLAND



INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (A)

The human rights to water and sanitation, including for those in vulnerable situations, for healthy societies and economies

While the first Interactive Dialogue of the UN 2023 water conference focused on Water for Health, this theme has been significantly broadened beyond health for the 2026 UN Water Conference. While it is broadly accepted that access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services is vital for the prevention of disease, the new Water for People title for the first Interactive Dialogue shifts the focus towards the need to accelerate progress on access to safely managed and affordable drinking water, access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials wastewater and water quality management. Therefore, this dialogue embraces the themes contained in SDG 6 targets 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3.

Also, in its subtitle, the Interactive Dialogue makes a connection to the human rights to water and sanitation, in which water and

sanitation are seen as an essential element of the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to the highest attainable standard of health. This approach provides normative criteria - availability, quality, accessibility and affordability - through which policy, regulation and accountability in the water and sanitation sector can be assessed. This includes a focus on vulnerable groups such as women and girls who still bear the burden of fetching water, or people - and especially children - suffering service breakdown and population displacement due to conflicts. It includes a focus on deteriorating water quality as a result of agricultural runoff, industrial effluent and plastic pollution, and the need to ensure resilience of WASH services to climate change. Many opportunities are seen to lie in the improved integration of WASH across government health, climate and emergency preparedness policies as well as to ensure improved regulation and investment in water and wastewater infrastructure.

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (a) on Water for People was presented by Ms. Gizella Tetteh-Agbotui, the Deputy Minister of Water Resources of Ghana, and Mr. Christian Frutiger, Assistant Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.

Ms. Tetteh-Agbotui opened the feedback session on the Interactive Dialogues, highlighting the **first** takeaway for Interactive Dialogue (a), which was that according to the latest data provided by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation, the goal of achieving SDG 6 has shifted from its previous status of being simply 'off track' to its currently being described as 'unattainable'. This solemn assessment, she stated, highlights the urgency of addressing the barriers that bring that progress towards universal access to water and sanitation.

The **second** takeaway is the importance of political will and local governments: a fundamental lesson from the dialogue is that political will, from national leadership down to local government level, is essential. While strategic direction, policy choices and resource allocation are set at the highest levels, the actual realisation of water security depends heavily on the local government level. It is at the local level where high level policies must be effectively translated into technical actions that benefit communities, with a particular focus on the vulnerable women and children.

The **third** takeaway is that people who are affected by protracted crisis and armed conflicts water and sanitation systems are often damaged or deliberately targeted. Respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilian infrastructure and better links between humanitarian responses and longer-term service delivery are essential to save lives, protect public health, and produce long term results.

The **fourth** key takeaway is that confronting the complexities of water management and supply in the modern era requires moving beyond outdated financial models. It is therefore necessary to

actively promote the involvement of private capital and private sector efficiency, while at the same time nurturing strong public engagement by harnessing both private investment and community participation. Sustainable solutions for water security can be developed and maintained.

The **fifth** takeaway is building climate resilient infrastructure; provision of infrastructure that is resilient to climate impacts is essential and non-negotiable. At the heart of our strategies and actions, she said, must be the goal of strengthening resilience. Resources should be targeted towards the areas of greatest need in order to protect populations and support sustainable development.

Key takeaway number **six** relates to the value of reliable data and water information systems. Reliable and credible water information systems are indispensable for science-based effective decision making. Investing in these systems empowers both leaders and communities to anticipate and respond effectively to water related challenges, make efficient use of resources and monitor progress towards shared objectives.

The **seventh** takeaway relates to integrating human rights into financial mechanisms, it is crucial to fully incorporate the human rights to water and sanitation within all financial mechanisms, including subsidies and incentives. This ensures that underserved populations are not neglected, thereby promoting equity and upholding human dignity. Every policy and financial decision should be anchored in the recognition of novation that access to water and sanitation are inalienable human rights.

And **last** but not least, the outlook and plans towards the UN Water Conference in the UAE in December: looking ahead to the end of 2026 our priority as co-chairs is clear. Together, Ghana and Switzerland intend to listen in a spirit of partnership, we will engage widely through inclusive and practical consultations to shape an agenda that is realistic, focused and capable of delivering concrete outcomes. Our ambition is not dialogue for its own sake, but results of joint initiatives, policy inputs and partnerships that improve access to water and sanitation for people in development contexts, fragile settings and times of crisis alike.

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WATER FOR PROSPERITY



LED BY CHINA AND SPAIN

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (B)

Valuing water, the Water-Energy-Food nexus, advancing integrated and sustainable water resource management, wastewater and water-use efficiency across sectors, and economic and social development

The title of the second Interactive Dialogue is Water for Prosperity. This title replaces the title of the second Interactive Dialogue in 2023 which was Water for Sustainable Development. Here, there is a change of emphasis towards Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), focusing on a 'systemic vision' in which a balance is sought between water uses across different sectors, recognising also the synergies or 'nexus' that exists between water, energy and food. In this perspective, water is seen as the foundation for prosperity, embracing topics such as economic and social development as well as job creation. To ensure sustainable development, countries need to produce more with less water – a reference to SDG 6 target 6.4 – while increasing the safe treatment of wastewater (SDG 6.3). Untreated wastewater undermines livelihoods and ecosystems, while if water were to be valued better in national accounting, there would be an incentive to

move towards circular water management approaches and ensure the climate resilience of infrastructure. This issue of valuing water was covered amongst others in the 2024 report of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, and the Water-Food-Energy nexus, for which the UNECE amongst others has developed a methodology. Therefore, emphasis in the second dialogue is on Integrated Water Resources Management as a systemic approach to create a long-term vision which considers the balance between different water needs but also pays attention to the urgency of increasing the treatment of wastewater and increasing water use efficiency, with particular attention for the agricultural sector. Here, there is a notable role for the upscaling of new technologies which help to boost the water resilience of food systems and to reduce water losses in distribution networks.

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (b) on Water for Prosperity was presented by Ms Xu Jing, Deputy Director-General, Department of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, Ministry of Water Resources of China, as well as the representative from Spain, Monica Corrales, speaking on behalf of Mr. Hugo Fernández, Secretary of State for the Environment at the Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge of Spain.

Ms Xu Jing reminded stakeholders that the theme of Interactive Dialogue (b), water for prosperity builds on water for sustainable development which featured in the 2023 UN Water Conference. This change in nuance is seen by China and Spain as a big leap forward, because it moves from a vision of growth and development to a vision of resilience and prosperity. Prosperity is an aspirational pursuit, implying high quality life, dynamic innovation, broad opportunities and people's optimism and confidence in the future. In this perspective, water is the lifeblood of prosperity: it supports not only the basic aspects of life, but also serves as the engine for the economy, the foundation for society, and the core to ecology. Therefore, a prosperous society is one that should be capable of managing water, sustainably, distributing it, actively and utilising it intelligently.

The representative from Spain reviewed the Interactive Dialogue that they had led and summarised it by stressing that so many ideas had been shared, that they summarised them through a series of individual words.

The **first** of these was **multilateralism**: participants were reminded that currently multilateralism is being faced by significant challenges. Nevertheless, from the water sector, the ambition is to show the world that it can be done together, also because the challenge itself is global. The response, therefore, has to be global, and through this conference, the aspiration is to contribute to the strengthening of global water governance and raising water on the international agenda.

The **second** word selected by the two countries was **financing**. Amongst others, this requires attention for the mobilisation of the private sector in financial instruments, as well as mobilising finance for the people, especially those in vulnerable situations.

The **third** word is **integration**: integrated water resources management is essential to enable equitable allocation among the traditional sectors such as energy, agriculture and tourism – and this also requires breaking through silos and thinking in a cross sectoral manner.

The **next** word is a **circular economy** approach to water management – which is also related with climate change, resilience and disaster risk reduction.

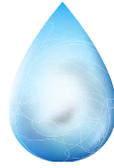
Furthermore, scaling up of good practices – for instance innovations that result in greater water efficiency - is essential.

Value was the next key word the team identified: water has many different values, all of which need to be properly included in water management frameworks.

And finally, **collective action** is needed to ensure that no-one is left behind in water and sanitation management.

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WATER FOR PLANET



LED BY EGYPT AND JAPAN

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (C)

Climate, Biodiversity, Desertification, Environment, Source to Sea, Resilience, Disaster Risk Reduction

The third Interactive Dialogue will be devoted to the topic of Water for Planet. This replaces the topic of the third Interactive Dialogue in 2023 which was dedicated to Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment. Water is the primary medium through which people experience climate, and it is key to both climate adaptation and mitigation and the reduction of risks from floods, droughts, glacier melt and sea level rise. Nevertheless, the focus on climate change alone does not capture the broader importance of healthy freshwater ecosystems for biodiversity preservation, the breakdown of pollutants, the provision of nutrients, and the support for carbon sinks. The Interactive Dialogue Water for Planet is therefore an effective broadening of the dialogue from a focus on climate change, resilience and disaster risk reduction to include attention for biodiversity, desertification, and a holistic 'source-to-sea' approach in water management. This narrative places water management at the heart of discussions on

climate adaptation and mitigation, recognises the role of water in recharging groundwater and underlines the importance of sufficient water of good quality for the maintenance of ecosystems. Within SDG 6, this points to a dialogue on SDG target 6.3 on water quality and SDG target 6.6 on water quality and ecosystems. It is based on the observation that the majority of countries are witnessing decline in the health of water related ecosystems (especially wetlands) both in terms of reduced river flows and groundwater levels and in terms of water quality. In addition, over the past decade 90% of natural disasters have been water related: changing precipitation and increased prevalence of droughts and floods point to the need for climate resilient water management that advances adaptation, mitigation and disaster by turning to nature-based infrastructure within a source to sea, whole of basin approach, in tandem with sustainable land use management.

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (c) on Water for Planet was presented both by H.E. Prof Hani Sewilam, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt, and by Mr. Kojima Masaru, the Assistant Vice Minister at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan.

Professor Sewilam opened the reflection with the observation that water can be seen as the blood of the planet: the issues for water, for the planet, climate, biodiversity, desertification, environment, from source to sea, resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) are all crucial for human survival and the maintenance of society and they are deeply interconnected. In terms of the important messages emerging from the Interactive Dialogue (c), it was noted that these need coordination and coherence with the other dialogues.

The **first** point noted by the co-chairs is that water issues must be addressed holistically across social, economic and environmental systems, and integrate - inclusive and cross-sectoral approaches are essential. Furthermore, effective facilitators are needed to bridge the domains of science, policy and decision making. To consider both normal water conditions and the extreme events in an integrated manner, too much water (floods), and too little water (droughts) shape vulnerabilities across all countries. For example, glacier melts, desertification and climate disruptions pose existential risk for societies.

The **second** point noted was that human activities have severely degraded global freshwater systems: water has long been exploited without regard for planetary limits. Therefore, the interactive themes Water for People and Water for Planet must be managed as complementary rather than competing goals. Protecting water related ecosystems is foundational because societal resilience depends on water system resilience. The current focus on sanitation is crucial, but insufficient on its own:

environmental degradation has cascading social impacts. Poor water management has damaged ecosystems, which increasingly affects all sectors. Attention is needed for the challenge of migration due to ecosystem collapse and the opportunity of rehabilitation driven return migration. In this context, nature positive, water positive investments must be scaled up. Water's value must be internalised in financial and policy decisions – proper bankable pipelines for nature-based solutions and water positive initiatives are needed.

The **third** point is that strengthening global water governance is urgent. Regional cooperation is essential for resilience; UN- Water could evolve beyond coordination to fulfill a system-wide mandate to deliver comprehensively and systematically. Water must feature central across the Rio processes and climate negotiations. All in all, the 2026 conference must move beyond past discussions in order to ensure scaled up solutions.

Mr. Kojima Masaru took the floor on behalf of Japan, stating that in the 2026 UN Water Conference and its preparatory process, it is important that the issues of Water for Planet are discussed in a balanced manner to create a joint understanding, including the views of youth, women and other major groups, and consider the actions needed to promote sustainability. SDG 6 will not be achieved by continuing silos within water sectors – this achievement will be made possible through collaboration, not only within the water sector but also between water and areas outside the water box actions and ideas injected from outside the water box. Then we create the conditions for synergies and mutual strengths, providing increased space to achieve the required acceleration to achieve the targets. The hosts of the 2023 UN Water Conference highlighted various opportunities such as the Dushanbe process, the High-Level Political Forum, the UNCCD, UN CBD, and COP 31 to organise and increase actions, sessions and workshops, thereby encouraging actions. In October 2026, Cairo Water Week, which comes shortly before the meeting in Abu Dhabi, will be a critical approach week to combine discussions and identify key actions for the 2026 UN Water Conference.

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WATER FOR COOPERATION



LED BY ZAMBIA AND FINLAND

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (D)

Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Inclusive Governance

The fourth theme for the Interactive Dialogues is Water for Cooperation, a topic that is unchanged since the 2023 UN Water Conference. This theme emphasises the importance of international cooperation for water, particularly (but not exclusively) at the transboundary level, guided by principles of international water law as well as by an emphasis on the systematic sharing of data and knowledge – closing gaps in hydrological data for evidence-based decision making towards benefit sharing across river basins. Effective cooperation requires the reinforcing of legal and institutional arrangements to manage growing competition over water resources and prevent conflict. It also requires capacity building and a broad range of partnerships, to support integrated water resources management across countries and sectors. Cooperation is deemed to be inevitable and necessary, as transboundary waters account for more than 60% of freshwater flows, and yet currently only 28% of countries report having more than 90% of shared rivers, lakes and aquifers covered by

operational arrangements. The alignment of donor funding to national water sector plans needs to be improved, and although most countries have procedures in place for inclusive and participatory water management, this only results in high participation rates in one third of countries. The dialogue on water for cooperation reaches across SDG target 6.5 on integrated water resources management and transboundary cooperation, SDG target 6.a on international cooperation, and SDG target 6b on stakeholder participation. The opportunities in this domain are seen to lie in cooperation that is linked to both public and blended financing and embedded in cooperation agreements and arrangements which enhance participation and partnership and are focused on closing data gaps. Global and regional partnerships are increasingly serving to align policies, finance, open data, and technology, advancing peaceful cooperation and joint action on climate adaptation and mitigation as well as development.

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (d) on Water for Cooperation was presented by H.E. Romas Kamanga, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation of Zambia as well as by Dr. Annukka Lipponen, Chief Water Resources Specialist of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland.

Mr. Kamanga was the first to report back on the takeaways from Interactive Dialogue (d) on Water for Cooperation. He noted that the Interactive Dialogue had established a clear consensus that water cooperation is not merely a technical choice but rather a political and institutional necessity for peace, climate resilience and global stability. In the dialogue a sobering reality was addressed regarding the existing gap in implementing cooperation, namely that at present, only one third of transboundary river basins globally have operational mechanisms for cooperation. In order to close this gap, participants more or less identified four strategic pillars for action.

The **first** of these is the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks, moving from reactive responses to crises to proactive, rules-based cooperation. This requires acceding to the UN Water Convention and empowering River Basin Organisations as artisans of peace which need stable and predictable financing to move beyond short term project cycles and towards durable water governance.

The **second** pillar is innovation as a bridge trust. Data should be a global public good, and participants highlighted the potential to reduce costs and improve hydrological models, reducing the potential for conflict. By launching initiatives such as academic partnerships, it is possible to better integrate science into cooperation processes.

The **third** pillar is radical inclusivity in leadership : cooperation is only sustainable when it is inclusive.

We must move indigenous people, people, youth and women from the sidelines of consultation into roles of co-leadership and joint evaluation. Their local and traditional knowledge together with robust science should inform decision making.

Fourth, integration across policies: it is necessary to break silos by linking water directly to other sectors such as energy, agriculture and other areas. As we build the road map from Senegal to the UAE, our collective ambition is to transform water from a potential conflict risk into a powerful lever for prosperity.

Dr. Lipponen took the floor to report, stating that the 2026 UN Water Conference must focus on implementing commitments and ensure that efforts translate into tangible improvements on the ground. As co-chairs, she stated, the two countries are ambitious in terms of what can be achieved: this depends on collective efforts, political will, decisive action in international cooperation and also sustained momentum up until the conference in Abu Dhabi, ensuring that results are adequately followed up in a manner that is focused on achieving impact. The co-chairs aim for an inclusive preparatory process, engaging involving stakeholders – making use of relevant processes and events during the year.

Dr. Lipponen stressed that the process provides a crucial opportunity to promote the global Water Conventions, to showcase the benefits of cooperation and encourage new countries to accede. New accessions to the Conventions could be celebrated as a treaty event accompanied by statements of intent. As inclusive governance is among the objectives of the whole conference, there is an opportunity to strengthen the synergies between SDG 6 on water and sanitation and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Inclusive governance also means fostering cooperation across sectors and embracing the water-food-energy nexus. The private sector is part of the solution through water stewardship which extends impacts throughout value chains. Across governments and international organisations including financiers and civil society, more exchange of good practices is needed to inspire and upscale actions.

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WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES



LED BY GERMANY AND MEXICO

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (E)

SDG 6, the 2030 Agenda and beyond, and global water initiatives

The fifth Interactive Dialogue will be dedicated to Water in Multilateral Processes. This builds on the Interactive Dialogue of the 2023 UN water conference, which was entitled Water Action Decade: Accelerating the Implementation of the Objectives of the Decade, including through the Secretary-General's Action Plan. The focus of this dialogue will be on the implementation of SDG 6 as well as the positioning and integration of water across the sustainable development agenda: climate, biodiversity, Disaster Risk Reduction, peace and financing. This is an important dialogue for several reasons: firstly, it serves to further raise the profile of water on the international agenda after the 2023 UN water conference brought water back onto the agenda and resulted amongst others in the appointment of a UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water and the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. Although it is recognised that the implementation of SDG 6 is off track, the 2024 integrated monitoring initiative has shown that significant gains have been made across

eight indicators since the last reporting cycle, and water is increasingly being embedded in other intergovernmental processes such as the Conferences of Parties (COPs) for the Rio Conventions. The fifth Interactive Dialogue is also important for a second reason, namely for the identification of the contours of the post-2030 agenda. Through this dialogue the question can be addressed how water currently features in different political and global processes, and how it could feature in global processes beyond 2030. An important aspect of this dialogue is that it is explorative in nature: it is related to SDG 17 which focuses on the 'Means of Implementation' for the Sustainable Development Goals, and it seeks to explore the platforms, frameworks, and spaces available for international dialogue on water issues. It is important to evaluate how water is currently being addressed in the broader global, multilateral and intergovernmental processes and to draw conclusions from this discussion on how the role of water can be strengthened in multilateral processes.

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (e) on Water in Multilateral Processes was presented by Dr. Miriam Haritz, German Water Director at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment. She also spoke on behalf of the representative from Mexico Giovany Melgar Hernández - Deputy Manager of Coordination and Monitoring at the National Water Commission of Mexico (who was not able to join the dialogues in person).

Dr. Haritz underlined both the size and the level of engagement in the participatory process in dialogue. She also stressed that this dialogue was just the kick-off, and therefore it was just a snapshot of many voices which could not all be heard in this initial session but which Germany and Mexico would do their best to include in the process leading up to the conference.

The **first** takeaway on which she reported was that there seems to be general agreement that we need to discuss how we can improve joint work at the global level to overcome the water crisis.

Secondly, it was also highlighted that there is a need not only for dialogue, we need to talk with each other, but also to talk beyond the water community, engaging with other sectors in order to learn from their experiences.

Third, it became clear that all Interactive Dialogues need to be working closely together, a process which has had an excellent starting point in Senegal. The co-chairs would like to build on this joint action – and it is particularly important for Interactive Dialogue (e) which at its essence is about multilateralism at work.

The **fourth** and final takeaway was that there are already many ideas, and it is necessary to build on the experiences of the 2023 conference and the period thereafter. Both Germany and Mexico understand their roles as facilitating the dialogues around them and provide forums for discussion, including virtual formats such as webinars. The co-chairs have seen very active and lively contributions and commitments from a wide variety of actors and stakeholders, state and non-state, and it is their goal to keep this level of engagement going throughout the year, from Dushanbe to New York and to Stockholm, with all respective water fora in mind.



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INVESTMENTS FOR WATER



LED BY FRANCE AND SOUTH AFRICA

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (F)

Financing, technology & innovation, and capacity building

The 2026 Un Water Conference will include a sixth Interactive Dialogue, which is devoted to Investments for Water. It is recognised that financing and investments for water represent a significant challenge – the World Bank amongst others puts the global water investment gap at USD 6.7 trillion, UN-Water’s GLAAS 2024 report found that only 25% of countries reported having sufficient financial resources in place to implement their Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) plans, and only a minority of commitments made under the Water Action Agenda included a defined financial framework. However, in the context of Interactive Dialogue 6, the concept of ‘investments’ goes beyond the financial domain. Within this Interactive Dialogue, investments for water are seen as being broader than just finance and refer to the speeding up of a broader set of enabling conditions to achieve tangible outcomes across the water agenda – these include tools, technologies, institutional capacity,

policy instruments, and partnerships. This touches on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration framework, launched in 2020, which listed financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance as mutually reinforcing factors which help to increase the speed of SDG 6 implementation. There are opportunities in the financial domain which include blended finance, outcome-based funding, and water bonds. But beyond finance, building on advances in digital technologies, strengthening inclusive governance frameworks, scaling up capacity development and framing long term investments for economic development and climate resilience also provide instruments through which progress on SDG 6 can be accelerated. This Interactive Dialogue is related to all targets and indicators within SDG 6, it has a particularly strong relationship with targets 6.a (international cooperation and capacity building) and 6.b (participation of local communities).

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■ Conclusions presented by the Co-Chairs

The reflection on Interactive Dialogue (f) on Investments for Water was presented by H.E. Pemmy Majodina, Minister of the Department of Water and Sanitation of South Africa, as well as by H.E. Eleonore Caroit, the Minister delegate to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France.

Ms Majodina made the first intervention by noting the extent to which investments and funding had featured in all dialogues and exchanges that took place during the high-level preparatory meeting.

Her **first** takeaway therefore was the need for funding to find expression and alignment with political action. When South Africa held the G20 Presidency, a declaration was adopted by consensus among all G20 countries which created a powerful point of departure for the 2026 UN Water Conference. Water was placed at the heart of this declaration.

A **second** takeaway is that Interactive Dialogue (f) cuts across all other themes: none of the outcomes of the other Interactive Dialogues can be planned without reference to funding and investments.

Thirdly, government alone does not have the pulling power to deliver on water goals and targets. South Africa and France pledged to support the host countries Senegal and the United Arab Emirates in their efforts to deliver results – there is a need for collective ownership of the final declaration of the 2026 UN Water Conference, but there is also a need to go beyond 2026: water security should be a cross-cutting theme across other sectors.

Fourth, a fiscal framework should at least be framed around water as an economic and social enabler. Institutional alignment is needed to enable private sector investment, where bankability and affordability are not the only driving factors for the rural areas. Therefore, a rural water investment programme should be developed by the two countries in Interactive Dialogue (f).

Ms. Caroit agreed with her colleague that finance is a cross-cutting issue across all the Interactive Dialogues, because for each topic identified in the course of the dialogues, it will be necessary to find finance and leverage investments. This will amongst others require looking beyond obtaining investments from purely public sources, even if these public sources are fundamental to guarantee universal access to water and sanitation services. This goes beyond water itself: there are no 'dry activities', and therefore water will be needed for the implementation of all other policies. In order to attract investments, it will be necessary to create an atmosphere of confidence, de-risking investments. This in turn requires the development of coherent plans by countries in collaboration with all their partners to demonstrate that water needs have been evaluated, and all the problems created by amongst others climate change have been anticipated and that all these elements have been integrated into an encompassing framework. The actions which emerge from this plan can be monitored and evaluated. 'If we succeed in putting together a board across a range of initiatives which exist already such as that of the World Bank, then we can say that the 2026 UN Water Conference will have been truly useful for ensuring universal access to water as well as for ensuring that all policies integrate water at national and subnational levels'.

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Key messages from the stakeholder discussions on the themes of the Interactive Dialogues

On 25 January 2026 in Dakar, Senegal, a dedicated One-Day Stakeholder Meeting was convened in connection with the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. It was co-hosted by the United Arab Emirates and Senegal, organised by UN DESA, and supported by partner networks including the African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation (ANEW) and the German WASH Network. The event provided an inclusive platform for civil society, major groups, Indigenous Peoples, women's and youth organisations, persons with disabilities, academia, the private sector and

other stakeholders to provide input into the Conference preparation process. During the Stakeholder Day on 25 January in Diamniadio, participants moved beyond plenary discussions and broke out into six parallel working sessions, each aligned with one of the six Interactive Dialogues that will shape the 2026 UN Water Conference. This structure ensured that stakeholder inputs were not general statements, but targeted contributions designed to inform the thematic discussions during the preparations for the conference in Abu Dhabi. The text below is an advance compilation of inputs.



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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (A) : WATER FOR PEOPLE

During this stakeholder dialogue there was a strong agreement as well as a vision on a **road map** for the anchoring of the theme of water for people. This roadmap is based on the implementation of the **human right to water** which is inseparable from the rights to health, dignity, and well-being and is founded on principles of **accountability, transparency and participation**. This right is not aspirational. It is legally recognised and morally binding. Yet for millions of people, access to water still depends on income, location, or legal status. The consequences are immediate and severe – preventable diseases, lost productivity, increased care burdens for women, and avoidable loss of life. Governments, as primary duty-bearers, must ensure that water allocation and services prioritise people—particularly the poor, rural communities, informal settlements, displaced populations, and those living in climate- and conflict-affected contexts. Access to water must be guaranteed based on need, equity, and dignity and not the ability

to pay. More specifically, **firstly**, it is necessary to **prioritise vulnerable populations** by directing efforts and resources towards vulnerable and marginalised population groups - which require adequate funding mechanisms.

The **second** step is **to reinforce the political will and capacity to strengthen water governance and management**. In this respect, governments must demonstrate stronger commitment by developing coherent water sector strategies including institutional and human capacity development. Legal and institutional frameworks must also be enforced to prevent the weaponisation, contamination, corporate capture or deliberate denial of water in times of crisis and conflict.

Finally, we should **empower people in civil society regarding water assets for people** – these people should be strengthened to ensure inclusive decision making.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (B) : WATER FOR PROSPERITY

In the stakeholder dialogue on Water for Prosperity, six key messages emerged.

The **first** of these was the adoption of a **human rights-based approach** : the implementation of tools, mechanisms, and commitments under Interactive Dialogue (b) need to be based on the human rights principles.

Secondly, existing principles of **good water governance** and **Integrated Water Resources Management** should guide action in this area, whereby there is a need to expand to a more comprehensive set of indicators of prosperity which capture diverse values and meanings of water that emerge from diverse knowledge systems.

The third takeaway is that there is a need **to address the capacity and the gender gap** in water and wastewater in such a way as to elevate youth, women and indigenous women to be change makers in water governance, water management, water and wastewater service delivery.

Fourth, there is a need to **shift wastewater narratives** by adopting regulations and policies that recognise wastewater as a valuable resource, enabling

better use- and reuse of water resources, involving circular approaches and resource recovery, while shifting investment towards nature-based solutions.

Number **five**, there is a need **to recognise and advance indigenous knowledge, indigenous science and indigenous Earth Observations** to ensure early, full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and governance, scientific inquiry, environmental management, decision making, cultural protection and climate action.

Sixth, the group touched on the topic of conflict, underlining the fact that **good water management provides the foundation for peace and prosperity**: in this sense, all six of the topics in the Interactive Dialogues are puzzle pieces which contribute to the achievement of water prosperity. At a procedural level, stakeholders call on the co-host and co-chairs to provide enough time to provide input and engage: short timelines undermine meaningful engagement as there is a need to coordinate with constituencies. Stakeholders need enough time to arrange travel, while timely and transparent logistics and online consultation that is accessible to as many as possible is key to a robust participation mechanism.

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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (C) : WATER FOR PLANET

In the stakeholder dialogue on Water for Planet, discussions revolved around Nature Based Solutions, climate resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Human Right to Water as an important framework. The **first** observation that was reported back was on **the all-encompassing nature of water** : water is a lifeline within freshwater ecosystems, water-related ecosystems provide water across the planet and this in turn is the engine for prosperity. This means that there is a need to work together, and water is not just about visible ecosystems, but also about groundwater and soil moisture. This has several consequences, not only at the technical level, but also at the level of governance and considerations related to the stability of the global hydrological cycle, transboundary cooperation, improving source-to-sea approaches,

implementing Integrated Water Resources Management, etc. A **second** observation is that the water for planet actions should also be based on a **human rights framework**. Conversely, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and the Water Food Energy Nexus need to be considered within the Water for Planet framework. **Thirdly**, for member states, the **intergovernmental mechanism** at national level is very important, where the authorities responsible for water should be reporting above the ministerial level to the head of state. **Fourth**, we are currently still far from a **global framework for water** or an intergovernmental mechanism which integrates water across the Rio Trio – the CBD, CCD and UNFCCC - but also other conventions, including SDG 6 targets and indicators.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (D) : WATER FOR COOPERATION

In Interactive Dialogue (d), many contributions were received, and many high-quality contributions were made. The **first key** message emerged clearly, which is that cooperation on water is no longer optional. Rather, it is a **prerequisite for peace, resilience, and sustainable development**. Water knows no borders, but our governance frameworks remain too often fragmented, compartmentalised, and insufficiently connected to local realities. In the context of climate change and increasing water stress, this fragmentation exacerbates the risks of tension, inequality, and instability. The **second key** lesson for Interactive Dialogue (d) is that water cooperation can no longer be conceived solely as an intergovernmental matter. It must be **multi-level, multi-stakeholder, and rooted in local communities**. Local and regional governments, as public authorities responsible for water and sanitation services, play a crucial role in translating international commitments into concrete actions.

The discussions led to a convergence on three clear priorities. **First**, to institutionalise multi-level, decentralised, and cross-border cooperation frameworks, explicitly including the joint management of surface water and groundwater, and fully integrating local

and regional authorities into governance mechanisms, alongside states and river basin organisations. **Second**, to strengthen scientific and technical cooperation and the sharing of reliable, accessible, and shared data to improve crisis prevention, anticipation, and resilience, particularly through early warning systems accessible at all levels. Here, facilitating data interconnections, data translation and multi-level exchange between different communities, including women and indigenous communities, is critical. We know we have data gaps, but it's not just the gaps, it's the lack of relationships and partnerships between different sectors. And **third**, to promote inclusive and peace-oriented cooperation, involving communities, civil society, women, and youth, and protecting water services and infrastructure in fragile and tense contexts. In conclusion, the message is clear: water cooperation must evolve from fragmented approaches to integrated frameworks, from ad hoc projects to sustainable partnerships, and from top-down governance to territorially based and shared governance. Only then will water cooperation fully contribute to peace, resilience, and the effective implementation of the right to water for all.

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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (E) : WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES

In Interactive Dialogue (e), a key theme discussed was the fact that water is the component that connects climate, food systems, energy, health, biodiversity, poverty, equality and peace – as such it underpins almost every multilateral agenda. Therefore, **firstly, water connects across systems** : it is important to recognise the need to break the silos between conventions, frameworks, and initiatives. Therefore, our actions need to be both multi-level and cross sectoral, within climate, biodiversity, energy and other systems at different levels of governance, including local, national and international. There is therefore a need to institutionalise multi-level, decentralised and transboundary water cooperation frameworks. This **multi-level engagement framework** requires both actionable outcomes and political will.

Secondly, it is important to celebrate success and **reiterate the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals** to the member states, so they are not overlooked. The reasoning behind the development

of these goals remains strong, and we do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Third, we need to develop a method to **monitor the progress of multilateralism**, allowing for insights on whether multilateral action initiatives are being enhanced or constrained. Multilateralism is complex, and important considerations are required regarding which aspects of multilateralism we need to keep, to change or to remove. These include systems, structures, policies, leadership and accountability mechanisms. Various methods should be considered to strengthen local and regional multilateralism beyond the UN systems, including local government, indigenous peoples, youth, women and other groups which are not yet adequately integrated.

Fourth, we must **continue to build on the progress**. Watato a mokaudi for us and our children after us, we are advancing peace and prosperity for people and for Planet, for ourselves, for the people who need our support, for our children and for future generations.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE (F) : INVESTMENTS FOR WATER

In Interactive Dialogue (f), the first observation was that by its nature, **water is multidimensional** : it is a human right, it is an input to economic processes, and it has economic, social and environmental benefits. Therefore, it has to be recognised as such and **valued** when it comes to financial management and investment decisions. This is currently not the case, and this needs to be recognised in order to move forward and make good investment decisions in the sector. **Secondly**, in the field of water and sanitation, it is important to ensure sustainable services. This requires investments in **capital infrastructure**, in **operations and maintenance**, but also **investments in governance** to ensure that the foundations are there for a sustainable system and a sustainable financial structure. Investments are needed in infrastructure, services, natural capital and nature-based solutions. We also need to ensure that these investments are equitable and that they're reaching both the most vulnerable countries and the most vulnerable people in those countries. **Third**, there is a strong preference for **public sector financing and management**.

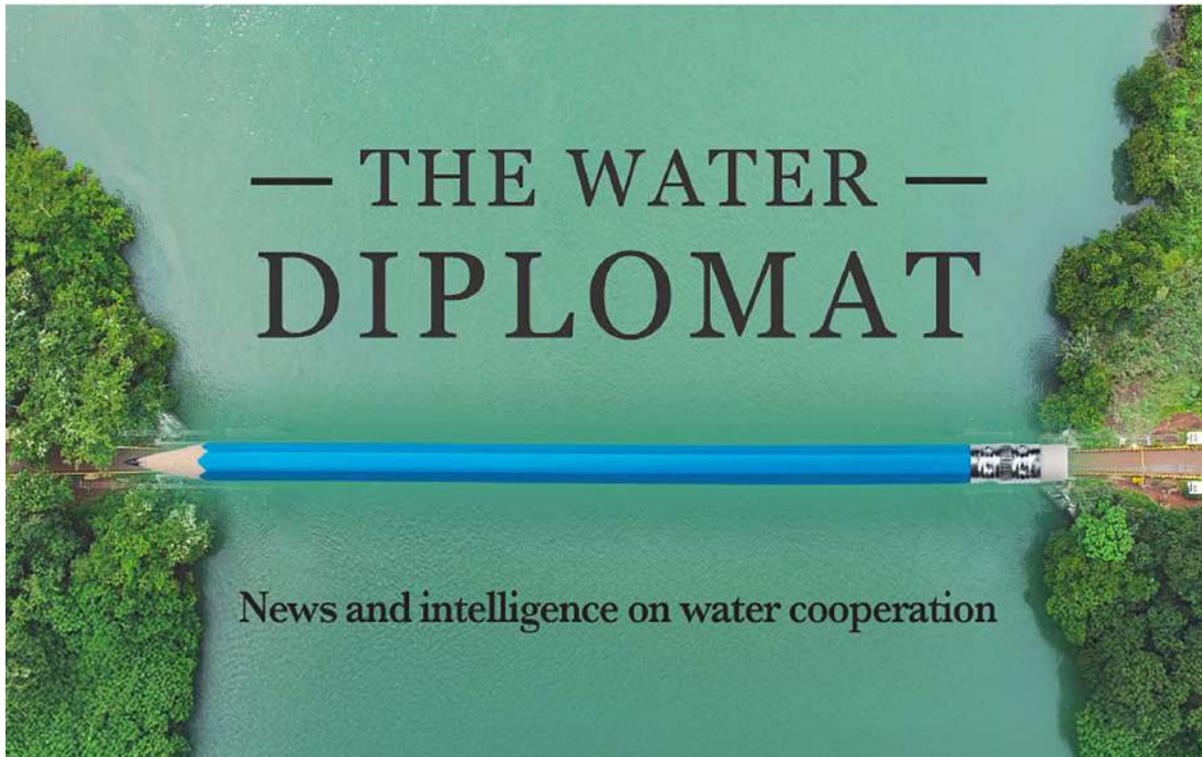
This requires ways to reform the **tax structure**, innovations such as **trust funds**, and affordable **tariff structures**, also ensuring **appropriate pricing** for water. Domestic resource mobilisation through local development banks is important, as they are key sources of local capital. Also, broader discussions are needed on debt relief and ensuring that users, especially large-scale users, are paying the cost of withdrawing or polluting water. Member States are encouraged to think about **locally managed, locally adopted financial mechanisms** to do all this. We need to continue governance reforms and promote government governance capacity, ensuring that we are increasing public spending, avoiding budget rollovers and ensuring that money is spent efficiently. **Fourth**, we need to focus on **financial monitoring** and **financial transparency**. This requires access to data on allocations and spending. We need to ensure that we are **funding emergency needs** and **humanitarian needs**, tying some of those investments to climate resilience of interconnections between water and climate.

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ACCELERATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 6

A letter from the editor on the central theme of the 2026 UN Water Conference



What exactly is the scope of Sustainable Development Goal 6, and how can it be accelerated? These questions are at the centre of the 2026 UN Water Conference, whose central goal is to facilitate the accelerated implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6: ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. It is through resolution [A/RES/77/344](#) that the United Nations General Assembly provided the mandate for a second conference, following the first UN water conference in 46 years since the Mar del Plata conference in 1977, which was held in New York in March 2023. In September 2024, it was decided through resolution [A/RES/78/327](#) that this follow up conference was to be co-hosted by Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, and would be held in the United Arab Emirates from 2 to 4 December 2026. In this context, it is important to provide a reminder of the many different elements that

make up Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), as well as a reminder of the discussion that has already taken place on ways in which the implementation of SDG 6 can be accelerated.

A reminder: what is the scope and content of SDG 6?

SDG 6 can be seen as an evolution in thinking on global water and sanitation goals: it represented a considerable change relative to the global water and sanitation target during the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period from 2000 to 2015. At the time, the target on water and sanitation was contained within Millennium Development Goal 7 (MDG 7) - ensure environmental sustainability. In this period, water and sanitation were treated as part of a broader poverty and health agenda rather than as a standalone sector. MDG target 7c was to

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halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Progress towards this single target was measured using two indicators: the proportion of population using an 'improved' drinking-water source, and the proportion of population using an 'improved' sanitation facility. This approach focused on access as measured by infrastructure and coverage, and it did not aim for universal access but rather on halving the proportion of the population without access. Furthermore, the target did not explain much about the quality of the service: it paid little attention to the services beyond the existence of basic facilities.

By contrast, SDG 6, ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all — marks a fundamental shift from the MDG era by recognising water not merely as a social service to be delivered, but as a finite, interconnected natural resource which requires both integrated and sustainable management. Furthermore, whereas MDG 7c located water and sanitation targets within a broader environmental sustainability goal, SDG 6 elevated water to a self-standing global goal, sending an important message about the centrality of water and sanitation to human development, environmental integrity, and economic activity. SDG 6 comprises eight substantive targets and two means-of-implementation targets (6.a and 6.b), which together expand the scope well beyond domestic water supply and basic sanitation. These targets represent a way to capture the water cycle in its entirety, including not only water for domestic uses but for food, energy, industrial production and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. This represents a way to move away from a sectoral approach to water management in favour of a more integrated approach that can balance different needs. SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 retain a focus on service delivery but raise the level of ambition relative to the MDG target to the achievement of universal access to safely managed water and sanitation.

SDG targets 6.3 through to 6.6 placed new demands on national and global monitoring: under target 6.3 it became necessary for governments to collect data and report on water quality, including measures to reduce the proportion of untreated wastewater water pollution. SDG 6.4 set targets for water use efficiency across all sectors, with the implication that water withdrawals should not lead to the de-

pletion of water bodies and that the number of people suffering from water scarcity should be reduced. SDG 6.5 called for the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at all levels, including through trans-boundary cooperation. Through IWRM, the aim is to achieve coordination in the development and management of water resources in such a way as to maximise economic and social welfare in an equitable manner, without compromising the sustainability of ecosystems. SDG 6.6 set a target not only to protect water related ecosystems such as mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers and lakes - but also to restore them by assisting their recovery.

Beyond the substantive targets in SDG 6, there are also two means-of-implementation targets (6.a and 6.b). Target 6.a refers to the expansion of international cooperation and capacity-building to support developing countries in achieving their water and sanitation related activities and programmes. Target 6.b refers to the aim to increase the participation of local communities in water and sanitation planning and management, which is essential for ensuring that the needs of all people are being met.

SDG 6 is [monitored](#) through 11 global indicators, many of which represent a significant methodological innovation in the field of monitoring. These indicators capture the quality of the service being provided, and they capture environmental quality, resource sustainability, institutional and governance aspects, as well as ecosystem extent and change.

An ambitious goal with significant but insufficient progress

Accelerating the implementation of SDG 6 is an urgent and important task: in July 2025, the United Nations published its [Sustainable Development Goals 2025](#) report, which showed that despite impressive progress, the current pace of change is insufficient to fully achieve all the Goals by 2030. Unfortunately, this assessment was not new: five years earlier, the [Sustainable Development Goals 2020](#) report had already shown that the world was off track on key goals. On SDG 6, the [statistics](#) compiled by UN-Water demonstrated for instance that between 2015 and 2020, global coverage of safely managed sanitation rose from about 47 % to 54 %, and that this rate of implementation

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would not result in the target for sanitation being achieved unless the rate of progress was quadrupled. In the area of safely managed water, coverage rose from 70% to 74%, implying that roughly half a billion people worldwide gained access to safely managed water supplies in a period of five years. Nevertheless, despite these impressive advances, some 2 billion people still lacked safely managed drinking water. Furthermore, at this [rate](#) of progress, by 2030, only 81% of the world's population would have obtained access to safely managed drinking water.

Similarly, despite important advances, progress towards the achievement of other targets within the framework of SDG 6 remained off track, raising concern about the achievement of the goal as a whole. Nevertheless, as mentioned, SDG 6 is an achievement in itself, being the most comprehensive global attempt so far to monitor the water cycle from a sustainable-development perspective.



For instance, income is a good predictor of access to water and sanitation, as there are clear differences in access to drinking water between countries with a low gross national income and those with a high gross national income

The Sustainable Development Goals 2020- and 2025 reports therefore made it clear, on the basis of the data collected, that the existing rate of progress was insufficient to achieve the 2030 targets. And the lack of progress in implementing SDG 6 has impacts far beyond the water sector: many documents make reference to the fact that water is foundational to the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Progress on SDG 6 underpins outcomes on nearly all Sustainable Development Goals, including food security, health, gender equality, energy, sustainable cities and communities, climate action, and life below water. Therefore, it was clear relatively early on that rapid and more integrated action was needed. In fact, the first synthesis report on SDG 6, the [SDG 6 Synthesis Report](#)

[2018](#), already identified some of the key areas in which acceleration could be achieved.

Early ideas on SDG 6 acceleration

The first potential area identified for SDG 6 acceleration in the 2018 SDG 6 synthesis report was integrating water resources management. In this perspective, recognising the interconnected nature of water and sanitation as well as the recurrence of 'silos' - or fragmentation in approaches to water management - leads to the conclusion that more cooperation across the water sector is needed. The foundation for the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) was laid down at the 1992 [International Conference on Water and the Environment](#) - leading to the so-called Dublin principles.

A second area in which progress on SDG 6 was proposed was in the elimination of inequalities. In the opening paragraphs of the 2030 Agenda document, nations pledged that 'no-one will be left behind', and this has become a central moral and political commitment of the 2030 Agenda. Leaving no-one behind requires understanding inequality in access to water resources and water services, which is a multi-faceted problem. It is influenced by factors such as income levels, the stability of government, by differences between service provision in urban and rural areas, differences in service provision within urban areas, and between different ethnic groups in society. For instance, income is a good predictor of access to water and sanitation, as there are clear differences in access to drinking water between countries with a low gross national income and those with a high gross national income. Similarly, the proportion of the population using basic drinking water and sanitation facilities can be between 10% and 30% lower in fragile states than it is in more stable countries. Between urban and rural areas, the differences can be even larger: in a significant number of countries, the proportion of the rural population with access to basic services can be 40-50% lower than it is in urban areas. In order to pursue the SDG ideal of 'leaving no-one behind', it is necessary for countries to have policies and plans in place to target service provision for poor and vulnerable groups. In practice, it turns out that while most countries do have policies and plans to target poor populations with water and sanitation services, only about

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half of the countries monitor their progress in this area, and only a minority of countries have financial measures in place to target these populations.

The third area in which the report argued that progress could be achieved was in the so-called Means of Implementation (Moi). The Moi are captured in SDG 17, and they refer to the resources, capacities, and partnerships required to effectively implement the SDGs. For instance, one area in which improvement can be achieved is in the area of water governance, which includes enhanced government leadership of sector planning processes, formulating policy and developing legal frameworks, ensuring effective coordination, funding and financing, capacity development in the sector, and data collection and monitoring. Governments need to formulate clear sectoral policies and engage with stakeholders to express priorities, which may be translated into national legislation, institutional arrangements and sector regulation. Participatory forms of planning around key priorities is also key, as are the setting of standards through regulation, the licensing

of water abstraction and wastewater, and the monitoring of service providers. This sets in motion a process towards effective, responsible, transparent and accountable sector institutions. Another area for improvement is the realm of finance: the financial resources available to meet the SDG 6 target are insufficient, and therefore more needs to be done to leverage additional funding, through innovations in the tariffs, taxes and transfers that make up the overwhelming portion of financial resources in the sector. But it is not just in the amounts of funding that the solution lies: it is also in the efficiency with which these resources are put to work that determines SDG 6 outcomes.

The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Mechanism

In 2020, a SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework (GAF) was developed, which grew out of a recognition that progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 6 (water and sanitation for all by 2030) was alarmingly off track and that “business-as-usual” approaches were insufficient to meet the targets. In early 2020,



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SDG 6 target 6.3 focuses on water quality: by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

UN-Water — the inter-agency coordination mechanism for water and sanitation within the UN system — initiated consultations aimed at the development of [an acceleration approach](#) for SDG 6. The consultation meetings included online stakeholder discussions and planning meetings among UN agencies, Member States, civil society and other partners, aimed at shaping a collaborative mechanism focused on speed and scale. A key impetus for this effort was the UN Secretary-General's [call](#) to accelerate progress across all SDGs, including water and sanitation.

The [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#) (GAF) was [launched](#) during the High Level Political Forum in New York in July 2020. The aim was to catalyse broad stakeholder action, leading to a dramatic improvement in support to countries to achieve SDG 6 through actions on four fronts: engagement (swift response to country requests), alignment (coordinated action across sectors and actors), acceleration (unlocking progress through five accelerators), and accountability (strengthened joint review and learning). As mentioned, the GAF itself was guided by five accelerators: financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance. Financing related to closing the funding gap, increased efficiency of spending, domestic and international resource mobilisation and financial tracking. Data and information related to trust building through data generation and validation as well as improvements in data generation and assessment at all levels. Capacity building emphasised the fact that output-based approaches to targets such as the SDGs pay insufficient attention to the education, training and retention of the

skilled workforce needed to achieve the targets. Innovation related to the need to find new ways forward through the scaling up of innovative practices and technologies such as ICT and smart systems. And governance emphasised the need for clear roles and strong institutions to encourage ownership, recognise linkages and foster partnerships for progress.

Country Acceleration Case Studies

In certain cases, observers have noted that significant advances have been made on one or more SDG 6 targets. Studying these examples is extremely useful, as it sheds light precisely on how acceleration can be achieved. In support of global learning, since 2022, UN-Water has commissioned a series of case studies to understand how countries are advancing towards SDG 6. These studies highlight achievements and describe processes, enabling conditions and key lessons learned with the aim to create an opportunity for replication of good practices.

For instance, on SDG target 6.1, by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all, Ghana has made [remarkable progress](#). Since 2000, the country has seen the fastest improvement in coverage of safely managed drinking water services in Sub-Saharan Africa. The percentage of the population with access to at least a basic water supply has increased from 64% in 2000 to 86% in 2020, and the percentage of the population with access to safely managed drinking water increased from 13% in 2000 to 41% in 2020. Amongst other things, this has been achieved because water was placed high on the political agenda, while there is a strong legal and policy framework in place for the sector, utilities are well managed around key performance indicators and cross-subsidies from wealthier to poorer areas, there is strong sector coordination, and the country is mobilising domestic resources in a drive to move 'beyond aid'.

Similarly, on SDG target 6.2 by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations, Nepal has also made noteworthy [progress](#). In the relatively short period from 2015 to 2024, access to sanitation increased by 32 percentage points from 55% to 87%. In the same period, basic sanitation coverage in urban areas increased by 21

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percentage points from 62% to 83%. Analysts of this progress point to the existence of strong national policies and frameworks providing direction and accountability, the existence of high-level political commitment that frames sanitation as a development priority, community mobilisation and behaviour change campaigns that go beyond infrastructure provision, and improved data systems enabling targeted action and resource allocation.

SDG 6 target 6.3 focuses on water quality: by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally. On this target, Brazil has achieved remarkable levels of progress. From the year 2000 onwards, large scale federal in-

vestments were put in place with contributions from states and other sources. Amongst others through the PRODES (Programa Despoluição de Bacias Hidrográficas) programme – a results-based financing programme – more than USD 290 million was leveraged for the construction of 41 wastewater treatment facilities in 32 cities, serving about 2 million people. By 2019, More than USD 10 billion had been mobilised for the construction of 900 wastewater treatment plants. A key factor in this success was the federal investment programme which contained a variety of different tools – providing loans to utilities in larger, wealthier cities and public investment in less wealthy areas. Here, too, water was high on the political agenda and there was a solid legal and policy framework in place. Furthermore, funding was made dependent on the quality of municipal planning.



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Conclusions

With this brief review of SDG 6, a number of things become clear with regard to the 2026 UN Water Conference. The *first* is that SDG 6 represents a decisive evolution from the Millennium Development Goals by moving beyond a narrow focus on domestic water supply and sanitation toward a comprehensive and integrated vision of sustainable water management. It recognises water as a cross-cutting resource underpinning health, ecosystems, economic development, and resilience, and addresses the full water cycle, from access and quality to efficiency, governance, and ecosystems. For the first time, this expanded ambition is matched by a globally agreed framework of indicators, enabling consistent monitoring, accountability, and accelerated collective action across countries. SDG 6 needs to be recognised for what it is: an ambitious and comprehensive framework for sustainable and equitable water management.

Although SDG 6 is not embedded in binding international water law—much like the Dublin Principles before it—it nonetheless functions as a form of normative entrepreneurship. By articulating shared goals, principles, and metrics, SDG 6 shapes expectations, frames policy discourse, and influences state and non-state behaviour, gradually consolidating a common understanding of what constitutes sustainable and equitable water governance.

A *second* important conclusion is that precisely the collection of data on sustainable and equitable water management practices at the global level has enabled a very clear – but sometimes also sobering – picture of how much has been achieved, and how much remains to be done. The world has made great progress in evidence-based decision making in the water sector, even if that evidence has repeatedly served to remind us that there is a clear need to increase our efforts and to accelerate the implementation of SDG 6.

A *third* conclusion is that a lot of thinking has already gone into the question of accelerating SDG 6: since 2018, the elements of a framework for acceleration have been emerging and have been consolidated five years ago in the Global Acceleration Framework. This framework, achieved through a multistakeholder consultation process, provides a strong template for collective action in support of acceleration. It is to be hoped that during the 2026 UN Water Conference we build on these foundations, as a lot of work has already been done to prepare the ground.

And *lastly*, the country acceleration cases serve as a source of inspiration, showing that impressive progress can be made if the right conditions are in place. It is very important to look carefully at these cases, as they shed light on the elements that need to be brought into play in order to achieve results. No doubt more such examples exist, and they need to be documented and shared as widely as possible, both as beacons to guide action and hopefully as a trigger for innovation, providing clarity and drive to help accelerate action on SDG 6.



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The road from Dakar to Abu Dhabi



The High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference was a critical step, creating the joint momentum towards the Conference in the United Arab Emirates from 2-4 December this year. As mentioned earlier, the co-hosts of the Interactive Dialogues will have joint meetings and will help to ensure that a series of key events that are taking place throughout the year will be used as a lever to strengthen the collective dynamics and to arrive at the conference in Abu Dhabi well prepared to ensure that this conference impacts the water sector throughout the world.

Key Milestones Ahead

A series of important events are taking place throughout the year. These events are milestones in themselves, but they will also provide an opportunity for the co-chairs and stakeholders to come together and take the dialogues forward. Without pretending to be exhaustive, the following critical events have been flagged:

Already initiated in November 2025, the European Union has launched a water resilience dialogue series to run through until 2027. On 14 and 15 February 2026, during the African Union Summit, it is expected that the Africa

Water Vision 2063 will be endorsed. From 1-3 April 2026, the triennial international conference dedicated to improving access to high-quality, sustainable sanitation services across Latin America and the Caribbean (LatinoSan) will be taking place in the Dominican Republic. From 18-22 May, the flagship international water-sector event, the Global Water Summit, will take place to share insights, forge partnerships, and drive strategic action on delivering the global water transition - in Madrid, Spain. In parallel, the 13th meeting of the OECD Roundtable on Financing Water will take place at the Bank of Spain headquarters. From 19-112 May, the Abu Dhabi Water and Power Week will take place in the United Arab Emirates. From 25-28 May, the 4th High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development (2018–2028)” will be hosted in Dushanbe by the government of Tajikistan in partnership with the United Nations. From 6-15 July, the High-Level Political Forum will take place in New York, in which there will be a review of the 2030 Agenda, including an in-depth review of SDG 6 implementation. From 17-28 August, UNCCD COP 17 will take place in Mongolia, where it can be expected that decisions and actions will be

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advanced on desertification, land degradation and drought. From 23-27 August, World Water Week will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, providing a moment for reflection and resetting of agendas within the international water sector. Also in August, the 6th International Seminar on Water Culture is expected to take place in Xinjiang, China: The China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR) and UNESCO will bring together scholars, practitioners and officials to explore water culture. From 19 to 30 October, CBD COP 17 will take place in Yerevan, Armenia. From 25-29 October, Cairo Water Week will take place in Egypt under the theme “Water as a Catalyst for Peace, Shared Prosperity, and a Sustainable Planet”. Also expected in October is the XXVIIIth Conference of Ibero-American Water Directors and Authorities (CODIA), although no dates have been set yet for this event. Also, the FAO World Food Forum will take place from 10-17 October in Rome, Italy, where water sessions can be expected to be an integral part of the programme. From 21-23 October, the International Conference on Water Security and Sustainability will take place in Nanjing, China, and from 9-20 November, UNFCCC COP 31 will take place in Antalya, Türkiye, at which the integration of water into climate discussions can be expected to advance further.

The Underlying Vision of the Road Map :

During the High-Level Preparatory Meeting, His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Balalaa, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability of the United Arab Emirates emphasised that the 2026 UN Water Conference is a **make-or-break moment**. It is, he stated, also an **unparalleled opportunity** to show how water can be an accelerator of progress across all sectors. Together, he said, we are moving forward to deliver a game changing conference that will **put the world back on track in addressing global water issues**.

Editorial Note on Sources

The Water Diplomat is an independent media and intelligence source on water. It strives to be a common platform for the sharing of news and initiatives in international water cooperation in support of informed decision making.

This Special Edition was prepared for publication shortly after the High-Level Preparatory Meeting in Dakar, at a time when many official statements and records had not yet been formally released. As a result, several quotations and summaries are drawn from audio recordings, interpretation, and reporter notes taken during the sessions.

We have taken great care to represent speakers' intentions accurately. Should any official texts or corrections become available, we will gladly update future versions. Our aim is to provide timely, good-faith reporting in support of informed global dialogue on water.

Earlier, during Stockholm Water Week 2025, Dr Mohamed Diatta, Senegal's Sherpa for the 2026 UN Conference, stressed that no country or continent can turn the tide of climate change alone, but if we joint forces, water can once again become what it has always been: **a common good, a catalyst for cooperation and a bridge between peoples, nations and a shared future**.

Firstly, we need to break away from fragmented responses and build integrated and sustainable water governance.

Secondly, we need to break with inaction, which costs more every day in terms of human lives, lost development opportunities and compromised peace. And **thirdly**, we need to break with a short-term approach and thinking and make water a central part of our climate, energy, food and health policy strategies in a more lasting way.

In his closing address, Senegal's Minister of Water and Sanitation H.E. Cheikh Tidiane Dièye proposed three strategic pillars as the foundations for future action. **Firstly**, the progressive development of a coherent, integrated framework for water, where the six themes of the interactive dialogues could help build a bridge between political commitments and their concrete implementation. The **second** pillar is the frequency of United Nations water conferences, to permanently anchor water at the heart of the international agenda beyond 2030 and to strengthen coherence between multilateral processes. And finally, the **third** pillar is the strengthening of coordination, partnerships and cooperation mechanisms to fully mobilise the five global accelerators of SDG 6 : financing, data, capacity development, science and innovation, and governance, while ensuring the effective inclusion of women, youth, and all other stakeholders.

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