

2026 United Nations Water Conference

Multi-stakeholder reflections on the themes of the interactive dialogues and accelerating SDG 6 – Convened by the Co-Hosts of the Conference, UAE and Senegal 9 July 2025, 3:00 – 6:00PM

Summary of Interventions and Recommendations

Background

On 9 July 2025, DESA co-organized, together with the Missions of Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, a multi-stakeholder interactive session, held in Conference Room 3 at the UN Headquarters in preparation ahead of the [2026 UN Water Conference](#), hosted in connection with the [one-day preparatory meeting](#) convened by the President of the General Assembly.

Further details of the meeting, including the webcast, can be found [here](#), and all statements submitted by Member States, UN Entities, IGOs, and stakeholders are available [here](#).

Summary

This document summarizes and reviews the meeting in accordance with its agenda. The session was structured as follows: (1) opening remarks, (2) panel discussion and (3) the reflections of stakeholders, UN entities, and Member States on the panel and the [six themes of the Interactive Dialogues](#), ending with a (4) closing fireside chat.

(1) Opening Remarks

Opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Mr. Mohamed Abushahab, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, by H.E. Mr. Diamane Diome, Deputy Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, and Ms. Retno Marsudi, Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water. It was highlighted that SDG 6 is seriously off track, but with the right tools and ambition, a chance to reverse course is possible. Building on the outcomes of the 2023 UN Water Conference will help ensure more meaningful and impactful results at the 2026 UN Water Conference. Inclusivity, partnerships, and commitments were underscored to be crucial for an effective Conference and to treat this period not just as preparation, but as time for concrete action.

(2) Panel Discussion

Following the opening remarks, **Ms. Kate Warren**, Executive Vice President and Executive Editor at Devex, moderated a **panel discussion** on '*Accelerating SDG 6 through Collective Action and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships*', featuring **seven panelists**.

Dr. Risimati Mathye, Deputy Director General of Water and Sanitation Services Management in Senegal, noted that the fiscal framework is constrained, making it difficult to invite the private sector to participate in the funding model. He therefore urged structural reforms in this regard to accelerate the provision of water.

Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, reminded Member States of their obligation to promote the fulfilment of the right to water. He emphasized the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach in preparation for the Conference, focusing on women as the primary right holders and acknowledging their vital role in achieving SDG 6.

Mr. Saroj Kumar Jha, Global Director of the World Bank's Global Water Practice, drew attention to the fact that the water sector is extremely poorly governed and underfunded. He added that it is not just a matter of financing, but also of addressing governance and policy gaps alongside financial inputs.

Ms. Tania Strauss, Head of Food and Water of the World Economic Forum, highlighted that "private sector only contributes 2% of total water finance" and proposed "multi-stakeholder communities of action" and "policy innovation" to de-risk investments and further stressed that solutions must be designed with resilience at core.

Mr. Dane McQueen, Special Advisor for Climate at the Gates Foundation, reiterated the importance of innovation and further highlighted the importance of investing in climate adaptation issues to drive economic growth, create jobs, financial returns, and macroeconomic stability.

Mr. Mark Smith, Director General of the International Water Management Institute, pointed out the opportunity to leverage new data technology and AI to make an action framework for better monitoring and accountability of water related issues.

Ms. Lesha Witmer, Founder of the Women for Water Partnership, stressed the need to make good use of new technology while also valuing traditional tools and approaches. She noted that Indigenous Peoples hold a broad spectrum of knowledge but often lack access to and familiarity with modern technologies.

(3) Reflections on the Panel Discussion and The Six Themes of the Interactive Dialogues

After the panel discussion, **Member States, UN Entities, IGOs, and stakeholders contributed reflections on the discussion and the six themes** for the Interactive Dialogues. The reflections are organized according to the [themes of the Interactive Dialogues](#) of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference to accelerate the implementation of sustainable development goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Stakeholder speakers were identified by UN DESA via an open call circulated to representatives of accredited organizations attending the [one-day preparatory meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly](#). Out of the 45 applications received, 20 speakers were selected, 17 of whom attended the meeting and spoke during the reflections part of the meeting.

(a) Water for people: the human rights to water and sanitation, including for those in vulnerable situations, for healthy societies and economies

Several speakers reiterated the urgency of prioritizing the human right to water and sanitation. The **French Water Partnership** echoed these concerns, declaring that “water is not optional but a human right”. The **Rural Nurture Initiative** together with the **African Rural Development Network (ARDN)** stressed the importance of “gender-inclusive water committees,” citing their success in amplifying women’s voices in rural water governance. The **International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)** called for full participation of right holders, specifically Indigenous peoples, accentuating that “water is not a resource but a living entity that must be protected.” The **Geneva Water Hub** encouraged a “stronger emphasis on the protection of water” within this dialogue.

(b) Water for prosperity: valuing water, water-energy-food nexus, advancing integrated and sustainable water resource management, wastewater and water-use efficiency across sectors, and economic and social development

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** made several contributions to the 'Water for Prosperity' dialogue, underscoring the importance of SDG 6.4.1 and 6.4.2¹ and cross-sectoral cooperation on water, to improve the integration of water policies and international strategies into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). **FAO** also amplified the importance of wastewater treatment to support a circular approach. The **Hissar Foundation** stressed the intensifying triple

¹ SDG Indicator 6.4.1: Change in water-use efficiency over time; SDG Indicator 6.4.2: Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources

planetary crisis and called for an integrated approach, bringing together “WASH services, nature-based solutions, climate resilience with gender equity and local knowledge. **Mexico’s National Association of Water and Sanitation (ANEAS)** shed light on the structural inequalities within water access and called for gender equality and integrated climate adaptation strategies. The **United Nations University (UNU)** supported the reuse of treated wastewater as part of a circular economy. Several speakers emphasized the link between water management and climate adaptation. The **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** underlined the importance of promoting “stewardship of traditional water management systems”. The **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** called for the deployment of “flexible water management strategies delivering adaptive water governance”.

(c) Water for planet: climate, biodiversity, desertification, environment, source to sea, resilience and disaster risk reduction

Climate and environmental concerns were pointed out by some speakers. The **International Water Resource Association** indicated that “cross-sectoral and multilevel governance of freshwater and biodiversity must be mainstreamed”. The **Green Climate Fund** underscored the need to strengthen regional cooperation and shared climate resilience strategies through collaborative transboundary partnerships. The **Stockholm International Water Institute** advocated for water to be recognized as a “common global good” and a “strategic tool for peace and resilience.”

(d) Water for cooperation: transboundary and international water cooperation, including scientific cooperation, and inclusive governance

The importance of regional and transboundary cooperation was mentioned by **Bangladesh**, which called on countries to join the Water Convention. **Russia** stressed the urgency of “developing transborder cooperations” and providing technical assistance to developing states. The **Geneva Water Hub** specifically referred to this dialogue, underscoring water’s potential “to build trust, promote dialogue, and inspire resilience”. Several speakers called for stronger linkages between SDG6 and SDG16 and the recognition of waters ‘role on peace building’. The **GCF** also recommended “strengthening regional cooperation and shared climate resilience strategies through collaborative transboundary partnerships”. **Children and Youth International** highlighted the underrepresentation of the Global South, proposing structural reforms, centralized water governance, strengthening regional hubs and creating equitable pathways for youth participation in water policy, particularly those from vulnerable regions. Similarly, the **Indigenous Peoples International Center for Policy Research and Education** expressed the need to formally recognize indigenous customary

governance systems. The **Rural Nurture Initiative** accentuated that gender-inclusive water committees have the power to amplify women's voices in resources governance. The **International Water Resources Association** promoted a systems approach to ensure water security, stating that cross-sectoral and multilevel governance of freshwater and biodiversity must be mainstreamed. Moreover, they advocated for the design and effective implementation of forward looking and flexible laws and governance models informed by science and data. The **French Water Partnership** urged the co-hosts to reinforce global governance by integrating WASH into the Conference agenda and the Interactive Dialogues.

(e) Water in multilateral processes: Sustainable Development Goal 6, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond, and global water initiatives

The **Dominican Republic** called for stronger commitment to multilateral efforts. The **French Water Partnership** highlighted the official launch of the 2025 Call to Action for Survival and Resilient WASH with Switzerland, France, Chad, and Slovenia having signed the Call. This demonstrates their commitment to increasing funding for humanitarian WASH and targeting their efforts more effectively. **IHE Delft** called for a “funding mechanism” to support long-term capacity development and coordination beyond the Conference. **Aquafed** launched its 4P's (Public-Private Partnership Process) Initiative to support member states and build robust regulatory frameworks and capacities to help develop and manage public-private-partnerships. The **United Nations University (UNU)** showcased initiatives, such as the Global Media Academy, which supports women in water diplomacy. **UNU** emphasized the importance of open learning platforms and their role in promoting coordinated, policy-relevant research and capacity development.

(f) Investments for water: financing, technology and innovation, and capacity-building

Investments and innovative financing were central in several calls for action. **Aquafed** stressed that “there are no solutions without the private sector,” and that investing in water is a matter of human rights. The **Green Climate Fund** suggested “scaling up deployment of blended finance structures” and elevating water as a “strategic and investable asset”. The **GCF** reiterated the bankability of project investments that have scalable revenue models grounded on clear objective and measurable impacts. The **Water Youth Network** demanded “at least 1% of water finance to [be allocated to] capacity building and youth-led solutions”. The **Hissar Foundation** expressed concerns about the “global water financing system not reaching the grassroots problem”, advocating for financing to be “localized, flexible, and accessible to those building resilience on ground”. **IHE Delft** presented its capacity-building tools and proposed a

coalition to develop a global competency matrix. The **Asia Water Council** called for project-based cooperation leveraging digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and smart technologies. However, the **Rural Nurture Initiative** and the **Asia Rural Development Network (ARDN)** cautioned against top-down technological approaches, instead advocating for community-led technology selection to ensure sustainability and local ownership. Innovation was seen as essential for modern water governance. **IHE Delft** proposed integrating water education into school curricula and professional development programmes and called for alliances to fund and implement this capacity-building effort.

General Comments

UNESCO highlighted the need to democratize science and enhance water education at all levels and warned that SDG 6 cannot be reached without adequate skill development.

Youth participation emerged as a cross-cutting priority. The **Water Youth Network** called for permanent, well-resourced youth seats to be established in national delegations for the Conference, for visa processes to be simplified, and for dedicated funding, such as micro-grants, to be provided for youth-led water solutions. The **Asia Water Council** advocated for institutionalized youth and community participation in global dialogues.

The importance of women's leadership was also highlighted. The **Hissar Foundation** called for gender equity to be embedded into all aspects of water policy and financing. This recommendation was also supported by **Mexico's National Association of Water and Sanitation (ANEAS)**, who shared their efforts to train women for technical roles, and reaffirmed that gender equality is a key pillar of sustainability.

(4) Closing Fireside Chat

The meeting concluded with a **Fireside Chat**, moderated by **Ms. Madhushree Chatterjee**, Chief, Natural Resources and Interlinkages Branch, UN DESA/DSDG, featuring **Ms. Shaima Gargash**, Director of Energy and Sustainability Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UAE and **Dr. Mohamed Diatta**, Senegal's Sherpa for the 2026 UN Water Conference. The conversation highlighted the co-hosts' vision including objective, guiding principles, envisioned outcomes, reflections on the Interactive Dialogues, expected role of the co-chairs, and the roadmap ahead, including more details about the high-level preparatory meeting to be held in Dakar in January 2026.

Ms. Shaima Gargash highlighted two core priorities for the Conference:

1. To accelerate implementation of SDG 6 and other water-related goals and targets, which includes demonstrating progress by building a clear state of play, and

2. To solidify water as a core issue on the global agenda and enhance global stakeholder coordination by strengthening cross-sectoral engagement and diverse voices.

Ms. Gargash accentuated that the Conference must not only focus on “goals and targets but the livelihoods of people”. She asserted that all aspects of the Conference must translate into tangible impacts on the ground, declaring that the 2026 UN Water Conference must be a moment to course correct. This can be achieved “by harnessing investments, innovation, and partnerships” and by identifying “gaps and opportunities that could shape the conference ambition.”

Reaffirming the UAE’s commitment, Ms. Gargash stated, “we are committed to foster a spirit of collective action” and called upon the co-chairs to “lead [an] active and inclusive process,” and to “work collectively and collaboratively with partners to advance flagship initiatives and drive forward impactful efforts” during the preparatory process of the Interactive Dialogues.

Dr. Mohamed Diatta outlined that [the themes of the Interactive Dialogues](#) were identified building on the 2023 Conference, to “preserve their spirit,” and reflect “diverse perspectives of the global community.” The next key milestones include the development of a vision statement and a stakeholder-driven preparatory meeting in Dakar in January 2026.

Dr. Diatta called upon all participants to consider that “water should unite us beyond politics, geography, and to inspire a new path for cooperation and human dignity.”

Meeting Overview

Overall, the meeting highlighted that achieving SDG 6 requires urgent, inclusive and systemic action, grounded in human rights, equity and local ownership. There was a strong call to prioritize the human right to water, particularly for women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized communities, alongside a stress on the need to democratize data, expand education, and recognize traditional and local knowledge. Financing was identified as a key challenge, with repeated calls to increase investment through innovative mechanisms, blended finance, and public-private partnerships. Speakers also emphasized the importance of coordinated governance, cross-sectoral cooperation and transparent regulatory frameworks. There was a strong plea to include young people, women, civil society and indigenous peoples in decision-making processes, and to ensure their meaningful participation. The overall message during the meeting was for the 2026 UN Water Conference to be a turning point, anchored in evidence, inclusivity and solidarity, and to accelerate transformative action on water.