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United Nations 2023 Water Conference
**Global Online Stakeholder Consultation:
Themes for Interactive Dialogues**

**SUMMARY
REPORT**

April 2022

This summary report was prepared based on inputs collected from stakeholders from several sectors by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

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Background

The United Nations General Assembly, in its [resolution 73/226](#), decided to convene, in New York, from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the [“Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Sustainable Development’, 2018–2028”](#) (United Nations 2023 Water Conference). It will focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives, the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects, as well as on the furtherance of cooperation and partnerships at all levels. The outcome of the Conference will be a summary that will feed into the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) held in July 2023. The Governments of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands will co-host the Conference.

The UN General Assembly, in its [resolution 75/212](#), further decided that the Conference shall comprise an opening and a closing ceremony, six plenary meetings and five interactive dialogues. The interactive dialogues shall be collaborative and multi-stakeholder in nature, with due regard for gender and geographical balance. Proposals for themes of the interactive dialogues will be prepared in a background note by the Secretary-General of the Conference, in consultation with Member States, with the support of UN-Water and relevant United Nations entities and stakeholders. The themes of the interactive dialogues will be finalized at a one-day preparatory meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly by November 2022 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

According to A/RES/75/212, 4 (f) the Conference should “involve all relevant stakeholders”, bringing together Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, other interested international bodies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors to assess challenges and opportunities relating to, as well as support further action to implement the objectives of the Decade and the water-related goals and targets of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

This report presents the main outcomes of the [Global Online Stakeholder Consultation for the Themes for Interactive Dialogues](#) of the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, which was open for inputs from all interested stakeholders. This summary report intends to reflect the main contributions presented throughout multiple submissions, by outlining views and suggestions from stakeholders.



Global Online Stakeholder Consultation

UNDESA, through its Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), organized an online consultation to compile views, experiences and proposals from all stakeholders with regards to the potential themes for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference interactive dialogues.

The [online consultation](#) was open between **10 February and 10 March 2022**. Information about the global online stakeholder consultation was broadly disseminated through mailing lists, UN official websites and social media channels.

The consultation was held through an open, online form. The form intended to collect inputs from non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, major groups and other stakeholders as contributions to the preparatory process for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

All inputs are made publicly available [here](#).



Source: Daniel Sinoca on Unsplash

Questions

Participants were asked to propose **up to five potential themes** to be discussed during the UN 2023 Water Conference, including the rationale for the proposals. In addition, participants were encouraged to indicate how the proposed themes jointly contribute to the main objectives of the Conference, which are:

"a greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives, the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects, as well as on the furtherance of

cooperation and partnerships at all levels, in order to help to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". (A/RES/73/226, OP4)

Outcomes

A total of **146 inputs** were received from interested stakeholders. All submissions contained substantive elements analyzed in this report.

All inputs are made publicly available [here](#).

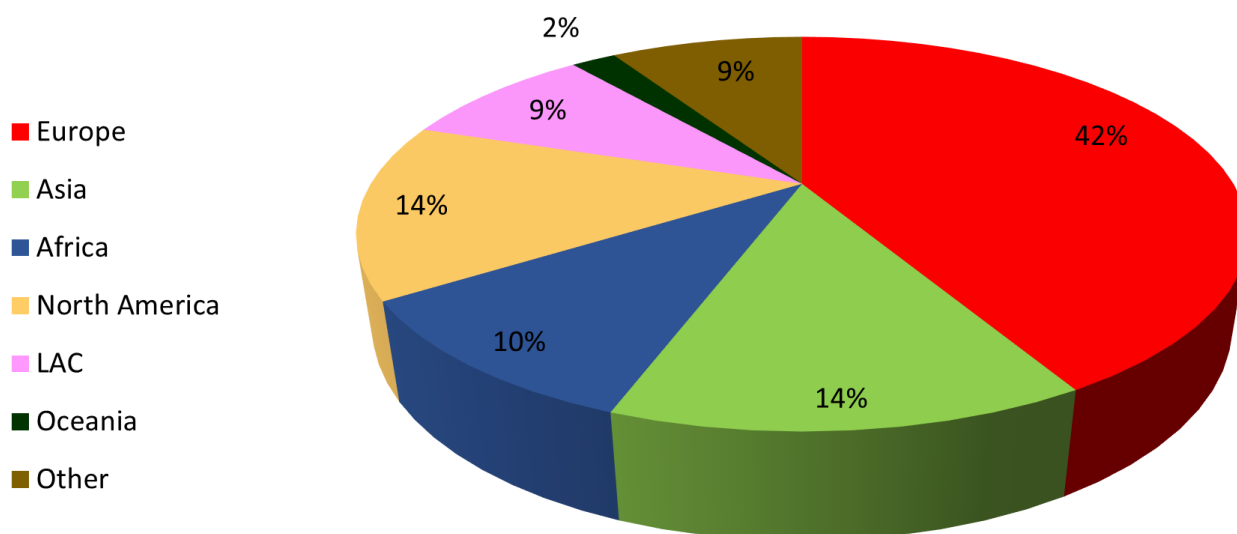


Figure 1: Distribution of submissions per region. Source: UN DESA

Contributions originated from all regions of the world, with the following distribution (Figure 1): Europe – 42%, North America – 14%, Asia – 14%, Africa – 10%, Latin America and the Caribbean – 9%, Oceania – 2% and Other – 9%.

Stakeholders from **46 countries** submitted contributions (Figure 2): Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada,

Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uruguay.

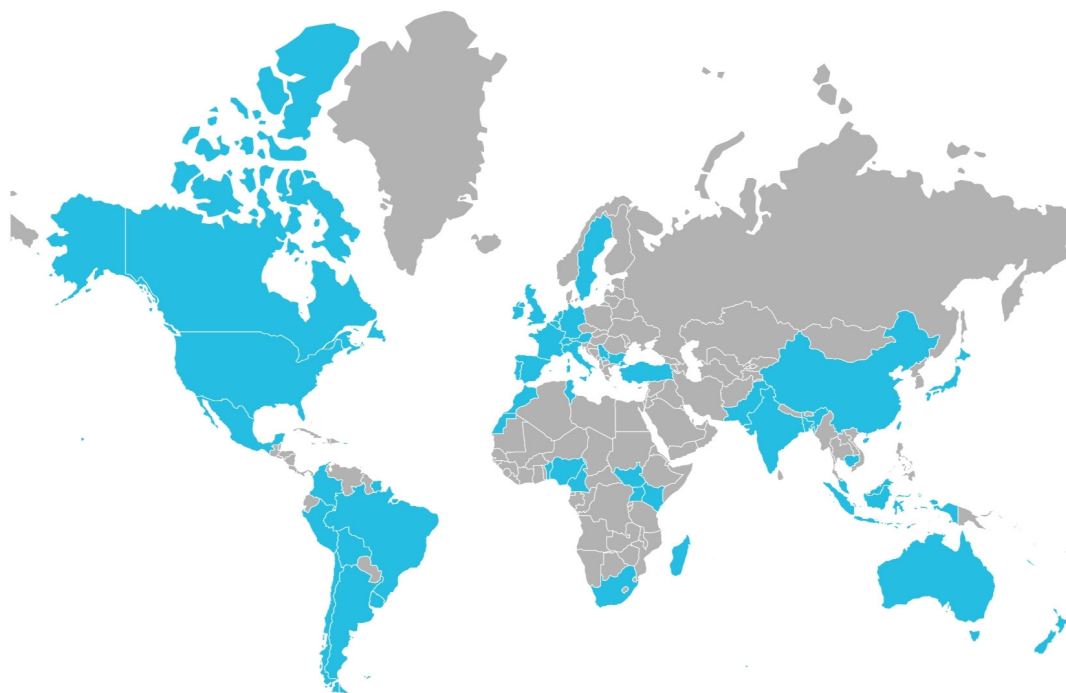


Figure 2: Geographic distribution of submissions. Source: UN DESA

The majority of stakeholders contributing to the online consultation self-identified as representing Non-Governmental Organizations (41,1%), followed by Education & Academic Entities (12,3%); Business & Industry (9,6%);

Science & Technological Community (8,2%); Children & Youth (2,1%); Women Organizations (0,7%); Indigenous Peoples (0,7%) and other stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development (25,3%).

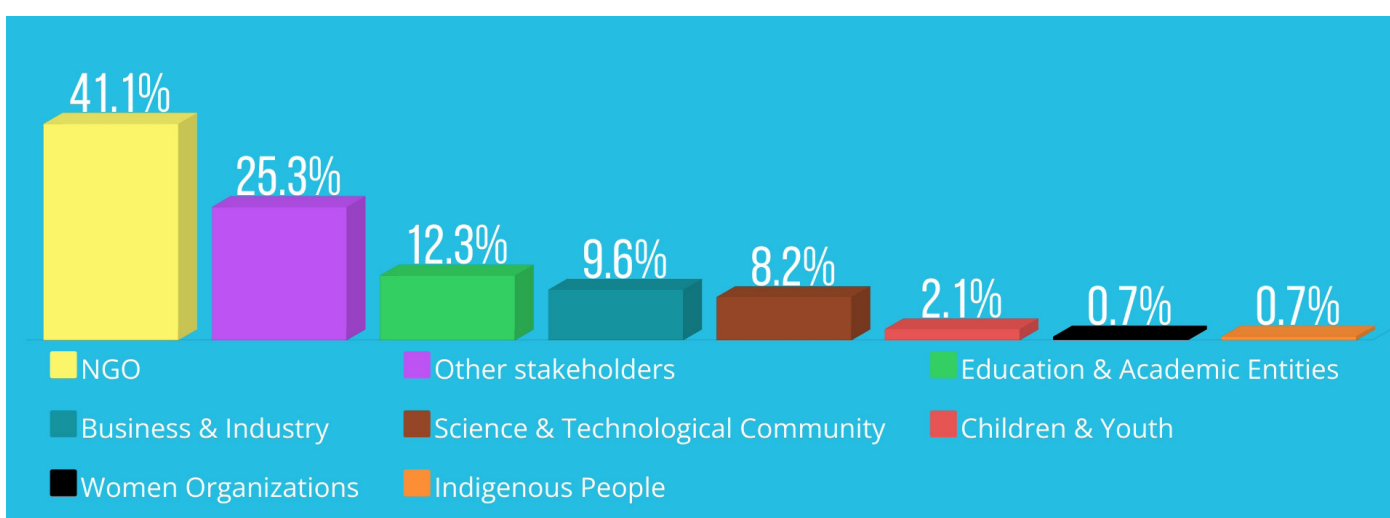


Figure 3: Distribution of submissions per sector. Source: UN DESA

With regards to gender, 51% of the contributors self-identified as male, followed by 46% female and 3% preferred not to say.

With regards to age, 25% of submissions were provided by youth (between 18 and 34 years old).

Online Consultation Summary

The following sections will bring a summary of the main themes proposed by stakeholders to be discussed during the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Inputs have been organized into three sections – **social, economic and environmental** –

reflecting the three dimensions of sustainable development, as referred to in [A/RES/73/226](#). Quotations are used to illustrate key messages.

All inputs submitted by stakeholders are publicly available and can be consulted on [this website](#).

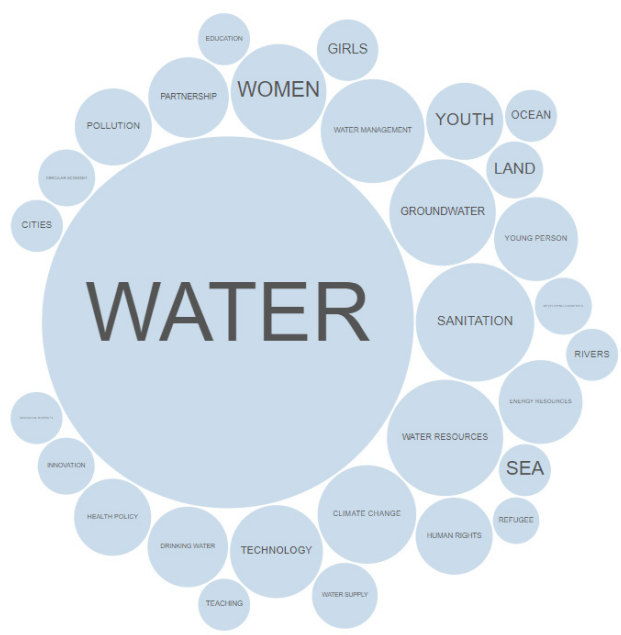
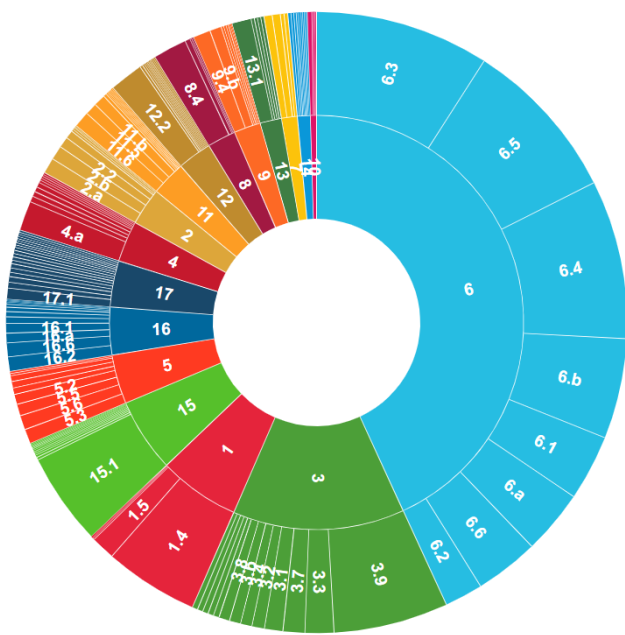


Figure 4: Reflection of linkage to most relevant SDGs and targets based on inputs (created by [LinkedSDGs](#))

Figure 5: World cloud based on inputs (created by [LinkedSDGs](#))



Social Dimension

Source: UN Photo/Sebastian Villar

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Multiple stakeholders stressed that the universal coverage of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all should be prominent in the UN 2023 Water Conference. According to many inputs, there should be a focus on **finding solutions** and on how to best reach the most marginalized communities. Stakeholders suggested emphasizing access to technical training, assistance and the exchange of best practices within this field during the Conference's discussions. Stakeholders also called for **multi-stakeholder partnerships**, including **public-private partnerships** to be a topic of discussions during the Conference.

Inclusion, equity and education

Stakeholders noted the importance of the interactive dialogues to address inclusion and equity with regards to water resources. Additionally, the challenges faced by indigenous peoples, women and girls to access water should be featured in the Conference's debates. Stakeholders emphasized that indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted by water scarcity due to climate change and the deterioration of the environment, and that these aspects should be included as part of the Conference's discussions. Stakeholders widely agreed that indigenous knowledge must be integrated into decision and policymaking on water.

"Sustainable solutions require a more inclusive role for nature when creating long-term strategies as well as short-term actions. Enhancing natural ecosystems requires participation of a wider range of stakeholders, including indigenous groups who are at the forefront of environmental protection and sustainability." (The Hague Academy for Local Governance, The Netherlands)

Stakeholders also called for the interactive dialogues to reflect on **strengthening inclusive, equitable water policies** as well as **education and awareness** to conserve water resources. Several stakeholders called for the **training of youth**, through educational materials and courses. In this regard,

stronger cooperation with schools and universities was mentioned as a theme to be promoted during the Conference. In multiple submissions it was stressed that the common idea of water as an endless resource must be shifted to viewing **water as a finite resource** and that the UN 2023 Water Conference could consider approaching this topic. Furthermore, stakeholders also stressed the importance of **youth engagement** for water as another important topic for discussions during the Conference.

"Awareness and education of water as a limited resource which needs to be protected under the common international policy and regulations." (Imperial College London, United Kingdom)

Water and gender

Many stakeholders flagged that water and gender are inextricably linked and should be featured at the UN 2023 Water Conference. According to stakeholders, closing the **gender gap in water, sanitation and hygiene** is critical. Throughout the consultation it was emphasized that the lack of water, sanitation and hygiene leaves women and girls further behind.

"Women face a lot of challenges with unclean water resources." (Local Sustainable Communities Organization (LOSCO), Uganda)

Not having access to clean water impacts all aspects of life, including **professional, political and social impacts**. According to stakeholders, the lack of water, sanitation and hygiene disproportionately affects women's lives. The interactive dialogues could also consider how, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase of domestic work and household duties, which lead to an even further burden on women and vulnerable groups.

"As is generally the case with socio-environmental injustices, the impacts of droughts, pollution or floods affect peasant, indigenous and marginalized urban women to a greater extent. This is because of their central role in obtaining, managing and distributing safe water. Within rural and urban

communities, women are in charge of care and domestic work, including carrying and caring for access to water." (National Engagement Strategies for LAND RIGHTS, Argentina)

"Today over 1 billion people are unable to have access to clean water. It affects all aspects of their lives, it forces women and children to make the long treacherous journeys for a bucket of fresh water." (Organized Centre for Empowerment and Advocacy in Nigeria OCEAN, Nigeria)

Stakeholders expressed their concerns on the lack of clean water available to menstruating women and girls. In addition, stakeholders emphasized that the lack of water and sanitation causes women and girls to miss school and work opportunities. The need to stay home from school or work due to an inability to access water and sanitation services leaves women and girls even further behind. Stakeholders reflected that this **clear interlinkage between Sustainable Development Goals 4** (quality education), **SDG 5** (gender equality) and **SDG 6** (clean water and sanitation) should be addressed during the Interactive Dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated that **clean water is a basic resource for women's development** and should be further emphasized during the Conference's discussions.

"[...] it is estimated that each year, a south Sudanese girl will miss 85 days of school due to their cycle" (Community Empowerment Action Organization, South Sudan)

As women are often responsible for managing the household water supply, stakeholders emphasized that **women's voices and leadership** could enhance effective solutions and sustainable adaptation methods and hence, it would be important for the Conference to create spaces **to learn from women's knowledge, experiences, challenges and concrete solutions**. Multiple stakeholders suggested to uplift feminist leadership and action.

"Let's move from 'water managing women' to 'women managing water'." (Accelerate Global LLC, United States)

Clean water as a basic development component

Stakeholders made a strong call for treaties to legally declare **water and sanitation as human rights** that must be available to all. Furthermore, stakeholders called for increased access to water for all. Many stakeholders proposed for corruption and mismanagement connected to water supplies and sanitation services to be featured during the Conference.

"Corruption in the water and sanitation sector affects the fulfillment of human rights and generates serious environmental impacts such as contamination and overexploitation of water sources." (Parlamento Mexicano Juvenil pr el Agua, Mexico)

Additionally, stakeholders flagged issues like "water grabbing" as additional topics for the Conference. Consequently, **water and local action** was referred to as an important topic to be addressed during the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Water and conflict

Several submissions by stakeholders emphasized the need to address **how to resolve and prevent conflicts arising from water scarcity**. Stakeholders highlighted the increase in conflicts surrounding water, as well as the lack of access to water for refugees and those in conflict and fragile states as important topics to be addressed during the Conference. In this sense, priority must be given to the **humanitarian issues arising from water scarcity**, inequitable water distribution and using water for peace and security.

Water and mental health

Stakeholders called for Member States to consider the connections between **water and mental health** during the UN 2023 Water Conference. Stakeholders emphasized how floods are causing more deaths, damage and impacting mental health.



Economic Dimension

Source: Albert Gonzalez Farran/UNMIL

Water resource management

Throughout the consultation, stakeholders called for the UN 2023 Water Conference to consider the necessity to improve the **holistic and sustainable management of water**. Many stakeholders underscored the need for instruments, policies and laws for water resource management. Multiple stakeholders warned that poor water management can create scarcity in areas where water is abundant. A few respondents called for the Conference to review different experiences for water management, including privatized and decentralized systems. Furthermore, stakeholders emphasized the importance for the Conference to consider **water reuse and how to achieve a net-zero water industry**, as potential topics for discussion.

"It is worth noting that there has been quite an improvement in the integration of technologies in the management of water resources over the years but there is an urgency to increase the access at community level." (Technical Water Managers, Kenya)

Finance, investment and infrastructure

Predominant among the submissions was the call for the UN 2023 Water Conference to highlight the topics related to **financing, investment and infrastructure** including the need to incentivize **holistic and inclusive action** at all government levels.

Multiple stakeholders called for the Conference to discuss a **systematic change in finance for a water-secure world** and a rethinking of finance in terms of gender equality. Many stakeholders stressed the need for the UN 2023 Water Conference to bring **strong and transparent financial commitments, innovative and diverse sources of financing** for the implementation of SDG 6, sustainable development and climate action. Furthermore, the Conference could also consider how to develop financing strategies for rural water supply and to **leverage financing**

for access and management of water. Many stakeholders proposed for the Conference to consider how to invest in a **self-perpetuating financial infrastructure** with, for example, water kiosks and water ATMs.

"Water infrastructure is essential, and substantial additional financial resources must be mobilized on a global scale." (International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), France)

Stakeholders called for the Conference to consider strategies for embracing new economic models in the global water sector, including approaches such as water credits, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies, the Citywide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS), the Fair Water Footprint, the 80/20 rule, as well as to the need for a **Corporate Water Strategy to guide companies**.

In addition, stakeholders were concerned about the heavy reliance on large infrastructures such as transfers and dams.

Circular economy

Stakeholders flagged the need for the UN 2023 Water Conference to consider a **circular economy for water**, including its regulations and financing. According to stakeholders, transitioning to circularity helps to reduce waste and stop the tide of pollution affecting waterways and the ocean. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of **water resource recovery** to fuel and grow a circular economy.

Stakeholders highlighted the **role of cities and local governments** for an effective circular economy and their efforts for water recycling and resilient urban water systems. Small-town water supply and the inclusion of local communities in water management and more transparent planning practices were mentioned by stakeholders as well.

“The world can maximize chances of avoiding dangerous climate change by moving to a circular economy, thereby allowing societies to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Action. The idea of circular economy is aptly in line with Sustainable Development Goal 12 which talks about ‘Responsible Production and Consumption’. Being Responsible is the need of the hour and to realize efficient Water Management system, Circular Water Economy should be the incorporated norm.” (India Water Foundation, India)

Affordable water

According to many stakeholders, access to water remains a challenge in various parts of the world and several stakeholders recommended for the UN 2023 Water Conference to pay special attention to issues related to **making water more affordable for everyone**, including, for instance, through city-owned water, water tariffs and multi-sectoral financing.

In addition, stakeholders flagged that the Conference could discuss water access challenges faced by people in rural communities. More specifically, stakeholders mentioned the interconnection between water availability and the need for appropriate electricity or connection to a power grid, including solar, to operate electric water pumps and treatment equipment, a clear link with SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). Some stakeholders recommended addressing the relationship between **solar energy and access to water**, for example through supplying solar-powered water pumps and treatment equipment as a way for rural communities to access water.

Partnerships

Several stakeholders called for the Conference to promote positive experiences achieved through **public-private partnerships** supporting SDG 6 implementation. **Sharing good practices and experiences**, for example in water resources

planning, would help to accelerate efforts towards water sustainability. In addition, the Conference interactive dialogues could feature **collaborations within the global water industry** and integrated management of water resources.

“Local governments, indeed all levels of governance, particularly in developing regions are battling with O&M [Operations & Maintenance] of existing infrastructure and in addition have to meet the demands of rising populations, urbanisation and climate change. We need innovative mechanisms of financing that can accelerate service delivery to our communities and ensure that all citizens have access to safe water and basic sanitation.” (ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, South Africa)

Transboundary water cooperation

Stakeholders called for the Conference to consider the need for increased **balance and equity regarding the distribution of water resources** upstream, midstream and downstream. Many stakeholders emphasized how the interactive dialogues could feature good cross-border practices.

Information gaps in water-related decision making

Stakeholders called attention to the **information gaps prevalent in water-related decision-making** and that the UN 2023 Water Conference would be instrumental in addressing the information gaps and promoting good practices.

“The science of water measurement and prediction is progressing rapidly, but that information is frequently not translated to decision-makers in ways that make it useful and used. Identifying information needs for water-related decisions would both help those making these decisions and clarify for scientists what research is most needed.” (Global Water



Environmental Dimension

Source: UN Photo/Mark Garten

Water and climate

Stakeholders repeatedly called for the UN 2023 Water Conference to address the **interlinkages between water and climate change**. Many stakeholders emphasized the hazardous impact of climate change on water resources. For instance, they indicated that climate change affects water availability, rainfall and evaporation processes. In this regard, some stakeholders recommended prioritizing action for countries already facing water scarcity during the Conference. In addition, stakeholders stressed the importance of finding alternatives to conventional water supply systems during the Conference.

Water and agriculture

Some participants expressed concerns over desertification and degradation of arable soils and suggested for the UN 2023 Water Conference to feature **smart and low-carbon agriculture practices**.

“The perverse and brutal effects of climate change influence the quality and quantity of agricultural production in the world. The sharing of tried and tested best practices around the world must be disseminated and promoted.” (NGO Afrique Esperance, Benin)

Furthermore, some stakeholders recognized the difficulties affecting water infrastructure in rural areas. It was suggested to address the necessity for efficient irrigation equipment and systems during the interactive dialogues of the Conference.

“In many areas throughout the world, water infrastructure planning and funding are not connected to how water is used on farms, thus leading to inefficiencies in how water is managed.” (Netafim, United States)

Water and urban settings

The need to prioritize clean **water and sanitation in urban areas** was mentioned as another

potential topic for the Conference's interactive dialogues. Several characteristics of the water cycle are impacted by urbanization, including groundwater quality recharge and surface water runoff. Some stakeholders even called urban expansion the key stressor for water in the coming decades and for this to be further discussed at the UN 2023 Water Conference.

“More than 2/3 of the global population is expected to live in cities by 2050, yet urban water shortages are on the rise. What are the upstream and downstream actions we can take to ensure conservation and efficient use of resources so that everyone's health and wellbeing needs are met?” (Unilever, United Kingdom)

Stakeholders expressed worries about the spread of communicable diseases in urban settings due to a **lack of clean water and sanitation** facilities. It was highlighted that vulnerable communities with insufficient water infrastructure are most susceptible to diseases such as legionella. Relating to this, stakeholders also made a prominent call for the UN 2023 Water Conference to address the **impact of COVID-19 on access to water resources**.

Improving water quality, reducing pollution

The **need for stronger cooperation** was another theme flagged in multiple submissions. Many contributors indicated their **support to multilateral environmental agreements**, including sea level rise thresholds and the role of environmental local protection.

Stakeholders recommended focusing on **water quality** during the interactive dialogues of the Conference, taking into account that the quality of water is critical for human development and ecosystem services. Some stakeholders suggested efforts to promulgate **legislation prohibiting the abandonment of plastic waste** in rivers and lakes. In addition, stakeholder stressed the importance of finding alternatives

to conventional water supply systems during the Conference. According to stakeholders, the interactive dialogues should stress the need to prioritize engagement to address **multiple forms of water pollution**, including pharmaceutical pollution, which affects both groundwater and surface water, such as rivers, wetlands, lakes and the ocean.

Throughout the consultation, there was a strong call for the implementation of **pollution-controlling common measures** in all states, not only developed countries. In addition, stakeholders provided that the interactive dialogues should address how to **unify water quality standards among countries**.

Enhancing water resilience

The **adaptation of the water sector to climate change** was spotlighted as an important overarching issue to be debated during the interactive dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference. In this regard, many inputs referred to all **coastal communities** as prioritized areas of action and protection. The need for **transboundary cooperation on adaptive water management** and sharing of best practices was repeated throughout the consultation. Stakeholders elaborated on the fact that fostered cooperation and **effective partnerships** would contribute to enhanced synergies and advanced water resilience. Some inputs suggested to highlight during the interactive dialogues of the Conference the potential for a common framework to align projects and share efforts, instead of duplicating them. A strong call for the establishment of **global risk-sharing mechanisms** was made as well by stakeholders.

“Sustainable, integrated disaster risk-informed land and water resource management is necessary for successful disaster preparedness, risk reduction and climate change adaptation in order to minimize the consequences of such disasters and protect those most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.” (Soroptimist International, United States)

Many stakeholders recommended addressing **Nature-Based Solutions** during the interactive dialogues of the Conference, considered that groundwater is a key resource to achieving water security under climate change and extended drought, compared to surface water supplies' variability.

“For many years, Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) have been implemented to respond to water-related challenges. From coastal defense, riverine solutions, water filtration and urban water management solutions: the field is expanding in terms of proven results and inspirational examples. A dialogue session on opportunities and barriers to implementation or upscaling will help to bring NBS interventions in the water sector to a next level.” (IHP-HWRP committee, The Netherlands)

Multiple stakeholders flagged the subject of **groundwater** as a critical theme to be discussed during the UN 2023 Water Conference.

“Groundwater provides half the water withdrawn for domestic use and is thereby essential to States as duty-bearers and to household and communities that self-supply from wells and boreholes. We need to better recognize this resource's role and develop it wisely to realize the human rights to water and sanitation and to protect groundwater and aquifers upstream of water services delivery points, also for future generations.” (Stockholm International Water Institute, Sweden)

Water and data

Multiple submissions highlighted the need to prioritize **data collection and sharing** as critical for SDG 6 reporting, monitoring and decision-making activities. **Bridging the information gap** was highlighted as an important topic to discuss during the interactive dialogues, as coordination of water, sanitation, disaster-risk-education and climate risk data could lead to a more effective implementation of SDG 6.

“Without data, shared between countries, management decisions towards sustainable water use and integrated water resource management cannot be made. This is especially important for transboundary systems.” (SLR Consulting, South Africa)

In addition, some stakeholders spotlighted the need for the interactive dialogues to focus on **standardization and openness of data management**, which are crucial instruments for water utilities, commissions and authorities. Stakeholders suggested addressing opportunities for technology capacity and transfer, including sharing water management techniques with developing countries.

Water and knowledge and technology

Stakeholders recommended highlighting the **benefits of digitalization** to manage and conserve water resources, address water scarcity and climate resilience.

Multiple stakeholders stressed that innovation aimed at **filling the gaps of existing water resources and practices** should be prominent in the interactive dialogues. Along this line, stakeholders advocated for strong efforts towards **environmental engineering**.

In addition, stakeholders underscored the importance of addressing **multi-stakeholder dialogues** and joint-learning during the UN 2023 Water Conference. In particular, cooperation between multiple sectors, as well as developed and developing countries, was prominently mentioned as potential topics for the Conference.

“However, it is impossible for water related goals to be achieved without the water sector working closely with other sectors. These sectors include engineering, public health, environmental management, planning and those in charge of making policies and the community at large. We as water practitioners cannot promise the public safe water if we do not work together with those in charge of waste management, similarly, we

cannot boast of sustainable water infrastructure without engaging engineers.” (Technical Water Managers, Kenya)

Water-Energy-Food Nexus

Stakeholders called for the Conference to address the connection between water and other key areas for sustainable development, such as renewable energy and food security. Stakeholders shared that multisectoral dialogues involving water providers and energy providers should be promoted. In addition, some inputs called for the alteration of consumptive and productive practices and the reduction of carbon footprint, to be addressed.

Fair Water Footprints

Multiple stakeholders called for the Conference to discuss **Fair Water Footprints and the human use of water** during the UN 2023 Water Conference. In addition, stakeholders noted their concerns on the effects and consequences of increased human use of water, such as the decline of water availability for other species and ecosystems.

For more information about the UN 2023 Water Conference, please check [here](#).



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