

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WATER FOR PEOPLE

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

An extract of the Global Online Stakeholder Consultation:
Inputs to Interactive Dialogues Concept Papers

About this Paper

This paper is an extract from the report of the Second Global Online Stakeholder Consultation: Inputs to Interactive Dialogues Concept Papers, which summarizes inputs received from stakeholders to a global online stakeholder consultation organized by UN DESA in connection with the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, which will be held from 2 December to 4 December 2026, in the United Arab Emirates.

The main Report can be found [here](#), including links to all responses and all inputs to the six Interactive Dialogues, as well as detailed background information and a summary.

This paper presents summaries of key messages for Interactive Dialogue: Water for People, the human rights to water and sanitation, including for those in vulnerable situations, for healthy societies and economies.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

WATER FOR PEOPLE

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

246 responses were received for the Interactive Dialogue theme pertaining to Water for People.

Challenges

Ensuring the human right to water and sanitation for all remains an urgent, yet complex global priority. The primary challenges voiced by stakeholders include **inadequate financing, the exclusion of vulnerable groups, climate change, and extreme weather** events. In particular, frustration was expressed by stakeholders over **chronic underfunding of WASH infrastructure** due to declining public investments and aid, debt constraints and austerity measures, lack of political will, and the inability of funds to reach local actors.

"We've discovered that monies are often available to deploy sanitation solutions; however, those monies are not being allocated for these purposes largely due to political will and conflicting priorities." Ocean Sewage Alliance, A Project of Multiplier, USA

These factors, combined with a **lack of enforcement mechanisms** for the human right to water, fragmented institutions and overlapping mandates contribute to humanitarian WASH being one of the most underfunded sectors worldwide, according to respondents.

"The key reason of lack of progress on access to water for people is that most solutions continue to be developed without involving the people for whom the solutions are developed."
International Food Policy Research Institute, Canada

Stakeholders also noted that **persistent inequalities in WASH decision-making** and the prioritization of wealthier, urban, non-indigenous communities continues to exacerbate gender and social inequalities.

Other areas for improvement highlighted by consultation participants include emerging water pollutants like per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and microplastics from agriculture and industry, privatization and profit-driven models that undermine affordability, data gaps that prevent water quality monitoring and service performance, and the targeting of water infrastructure in armed conflict.

"In many of our rural areas, the right to water is undermined as water sources are diverted or sold to private companies, leaving villagers with dry wells and polluted streams. Women and children often walk miles daily to fetch clean water, revealing a deep injustice in access to this basic right."
Fondazione Proclade Internazionale Onlus, India

Solutions

In the face of these challenges, stakeholders have devised many solutions that are both innovative and pragmatic. These approaches can be characterized by their emphasis on being **community-led**, **prioritizing nature-based solutions**, and **embracing digital transformation**.

"By co-creating aspirational, water-efficient products with local partners, it turns personal hygiene access into livelihood and climate-resilient business opportunities for women and entrepreneurs." Hansgrohe Group, Germany

Participants in the consultation are actively closing the gender gap through **women-led WASH committees** and are embedding Human Rights-Based Approaches into national water policy. **Solar-powered water pumps and wastewater reuse systems** are being implemented. Tools for **AI-assisted water negotiations** and transparency platforms for water rights were mentioned by stakeholders as solutions.

Inspiration can also be derived from stakeholders' progress in establishing **south-to-south financing mechanisms, youth engagement programs, and basin-level governance** models that promote multi-level maintenance of waterways.

"Without integrated, or at least coordinated planning, negative interlinkages will continue to exist and inhibit the service functionality."
Eawag: The Swiss Federal Institute on Aquatic Science and Technology, Switzerland



PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

In their responses, stakeholders shared examples of partnerships that have proven helpful in promoting Water for People. A few of these are highlighted below.¹

The SAFECONOMY – Reinventing the Textile Circular Economy pilot project, developed by Northumbria University, aims to implement innovative technology to treat textile wastewater in Pakistan. These modular and mobile wastewater treatment systems will use Molecular Distortion Technology to close the circular economy loop and to mitigate emissions from the treatment process. Northumbria University has partnered with private companies like Sapphire, the World Wildlife Fund, other academics, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and other government stakeholders to strengthen community leadership and ensure alignment with existing sustainability goals and incentive programs. Thus far, over 70 per cent of water reuse has been achieved, thereby mitigating the costs of industrial pollution.

Highlighted by: SAFECONOMY by Northumbria University, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Highlighted by: Agala WASH by Optimal Greening, Nigeria

The Agala WASH pilot project is dedicated to providing clean water and sanitation services to rural and disadvantaged communities in Lagos, Nigeria. Undertaken by Optimal Greening, this initiative leverages the Water Ease for Development Alliance (WEDA) approach featuring the implementation of green technologies. Industrial boreholes, water treatment facilities, solar power energy, and biodigester systems that treat wastewater now directly serve the 1,100 community members of Agala, Lagos, provide 25 jobs, and generate 13kWp of power capacity. With the support of partners from the local and national government as well as the public and private sector EDP, USAID, Grundfos Foundation, Vitol Foundation, Lagos State Ministry of Environment and AllOn, Agala WASH is now scaling up to reach more communities in the surrounding area.

¹These examples reflect inputs shared by stakeholders and are presented for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply endorsement by the United Nations. 4

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

As part of the consultative process, stakeholders were asked to identify one transformative action needed to accelerate progress towards the Water for People objectives. A few examples can be found below.

“Governments must adopt and enforce gender-responsive, rights-based water policies, backed by sustainable financing and accountability mechanisms, to ensure universal access for vulnerable groups.”

Women Environmental Program, Nigeria

“By 2030, governments and local leaders must embed the human right to water into national strategies, pairing infrastructure with values-driven leadership.”

Paxaterra Global, USA

“Governments and UN agencies must establish a global framework for groundwater protection, integrating rights-based access with climate resilience.”
Association for Farmers Rights Defense, AFRD, Georgia

“Governments & finance institutions must embed ecosystem health into WASH, recognizing wetland protection & restoration as vital to achieving human rights to water.”
Wetlands International, Brazil



Figure 7: Visual representation of keywords stakeholders used to describe their perspectives on the theme: Water for People.