

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WATER FOR COOPERATION

Transboundary and international water cooperation, including scientific cooperation, and inclusive governance

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 Cooperation, transboundary and international water cooperation, including scientific cooperation, and inclusive governance.

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143 responses were received for the Interactive Dialogue theme pertaining to Water for Cooperation.

Challenges

The flow of water does not heed the geographic boundaries humans have placed across it. As such, transboundary and international cooperation is necessary for meeting the targets set forth in SDG 6. Challenges to this, according to participants of this consultation, however, stem from **inadequate, outdated, and fragmented governance** that result in poor cross-sector coordination and limited implementation of water-related conventions.

"Structural barriers and governance gaps hinder collective, rights-based responses to shared water challenges." Asia Water Council, Republic of Korea

Stakeholders noted that fewer than half of shared water basins have operational agreements and remain largely unregulated. Amongst participant responses there were numerous references to the **securitization, politicization, and mistrust riparian states sharing water basins**. They explained that this can contribute to the use of water as a strategic or political weapon and is linked to unilateral infrastructure projects, hydro-hegemony, and the lack of dispute-resolution mechanisms.

"More attention should be given to transboundary aquifer systems that are shared by two or more countries and that are more vulnerable as are not visible and are key to regional peace and development." International Water Resources Association (IWRA), France

Additionally, **inadequate data sharing and scientific collaboration** can perpetuate these geopolitical tensions and lead to a lack of standardized or interoperable systems, **persistent data gaps, and weak joint monitoring systems**. Stakeholders also alerted to the **worsening geopolitical tensions** due in part to competition for scarce resources, increased migration, and security risks as consequences of climate-driven variability, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation. In this sense, climate change is portrayed as both a driver and a multiplier of challenges to cooperative water action by stakeholders.

Persistent data gaps and reluctance to share information and upstream-downstream tensions hinder cooperation, worsened by climate change and geopolitics. Scientific-Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (SIC ICWC) of Central Asia, Uzbekistan

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

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

Water Europe advances the vision of a Water-Smart Society, built around the core principle of the 'Value of Water.' It calls on policymakers, researchers, technology developers, innovators, and stakeholders to work together to create a society that is water secure, sustainable, and resilient. The initiative addresses global water challenges while fostering innovative solutions in the water market and upholding the human right to water in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and quality. Its model integrates one core value, three strategic objectives, and five innovative concepts, generating a 'flying wheel' effect that accelerates progress toward a Water-Smart Society. This comprehensive approach offers a roadmap for valuing and sustainably managing water for future generations.

Highlighted by: Water Europe, Belgium

Highlighted by: CMF, Indonesia

The Transboundary Water Knowledge Exchange Hub provides a dedicated space for dialogue and knowledge exchange on transboundary water cooperation, allowing practitioners to share experiences, case studies, ideas, and information on upcoming opportunities. It brings together practitioners, researchers, and advocates working from global to basin levels to promote stronger collaboration over shared water resources. The Hub seeks to translate knowledge into action, foster peer-to-peer learning beyond formal events, and connect professionals worldwide to generate new insights. Supported by partners including UNU-CRIS, UNESCO IHP, IGRAC, INBO, IHE Delft, and Oregon State University, the Hub strengthens cooperation and advances more effective management of transboundary waters globally.

¹These examples reflect inputs shared by stakeholders and are presented for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply endorsement by the United Nations. 3

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

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

"Governments and basin authorities should establish institutional frameworks for youth engagement in water governance, ensuring training, co-leadership, and sustainable funding for youth-led transboundary initiatives." Parlement National de la Jeunesse Burkinabè pour l'Eau, Burkina Faso

"By 2030, governments and regional bodies must modernize outdated bilateral agreements and institutionalize community participation." Kenya National Association of Water Resources Users' Association (KeNAWRUA), Kenya

"Downscaling of global data to be useful locally."

Water Policy Group, Australia

"Training communities to test, interpret, and share water data—through scientific and ceremonial methods—builds trust, bridges governance gaps, and enables inclusive, dignified SDG 6 implementation across borders." Deep Water Movement NPO, South Africa



Figure 10: Visual representation of keywords stakeholders used to describe their perspectives on the theme: Water for Cooperation.