

# UN-Water Briefing Note

*A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations*

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## Summary of the 41st UN-Water Meeting: 2-3 April 2025

Participants arrived at the 41st UN-Water meeting with several serious challenges weighing on their minds. Despite some progress since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), were adopted in 2015, recent assessments have reported that [2.2 billion people](#) still lack clean drinking water, [3.5 billion people](#) still lack safely managed sanitation services, and [4 billion people](#) still experience severe water scarcity for at least one month per year.

In addition to the enormous challenge of turning this situation around, governments around the world were bracing for the US President's promised announcement of severe tariffs and the additional economic uncertainty these would bring, while also raising questions about the future of multilateral cooperation. In addition, the UN system itself is gearing up for changes that will result from its nascent UN80 reform initiative.

In the midst of this volatile landscape, many participants centered on the opportunities that the agenda items offered for addressing these challenges. The first day of the two-day meeting focused on planning to implement the first ever UN System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation. UN-Water was tasked with developing the implementation plan for the Strategy, and delegates reviewed priority collaborative actions (PCAs) to implement the Strategy to enable the UN to:

- Lead and inspire collective action on water and sanitation;
- Engage better for countries by leveraging whole-of-UN system support and by mobilizing stakeholders and partnerships for water and sanitation;
- Align UN system support for the integration of water and sanitation issues across sectors and mainstreaming into intergovernmental processes;
- Accelerate progress and transformational change by unifying UN system support through the five SDG 6 global accelerators (financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance); and
- Mobilize to elevate the ambition of UN Water Conferences.

On the second day, participants engaged in a lengthy discussion on preparations for the 2026 UN Water Conference, with a briefing from the representatives of the co-hosts, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Discussions focused on preparations during 2025, including the selection of themes for six interactive dialogues. Some highlighted the importance of a focus on action as well as

solutions-oriented communications. Throughout the meeting, some participants also suggested adopting a “hope narrative,” stating that the work of UN-Water should not focus on convincing people what is important, but instead generate hope and inspire participants to envision what is possible.

Approximately 90 participants attended the largest-ever UN-Water meeting, which convened from 2-3 April 2025 in Rome, Italy. More than 60 individuals registered to participate online. They left the meeting encouraged by the collaborative discussions, but recognizing that a great deal of work remains if SDG 6 is to be achieved by 2030.

## A Brief History of UN-Water

While over 30 UN organizations carry out water and sanitation programmes, no single UN entity is dedicated exclusively to these issues. In 1977, the UN's Inter-Secretariat Group for Water Resources began coordinating UN activities on water. Subsequently, in 2003, the UN Administrative Coordination Committee's Subcommittee on Water Resources was transformed into UN-Water and endorsed by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). UN-Water plays a coordinating role within the UN to ensure the UN family “delivers as one” in response to water-related challenges.

UN-Water Meetings bring together [Members and Partners](#) twice a year to carry out the mandate of informing policies, monitoring and reporting, and inspiring action on water and sanitation issues. Participants include representatives of the UN Secretariat and UN agencies, funds, programmes and other entities, multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), civil society organizations, and other organizations. Representatives from UN Member States also participate in UN-Water meetings as observers.

**Initiatives:** The overarching focus of UN-Water's Members and Partners is to support UN Member States to sustainably manage water and sanitation.

Efforts to inspire action include coordination of the annual observance of World Water Day on 22 March and World Toilet Day on 19 November. UN-Water releases the annual World Water Development Report (WWDR) on World Water Day.

Efforts to inform policies focus on placing water and sanitation issues on the agenda of key UN agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. SDG 6 calls for the international community to strive to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

Monitoring and reporting efforts seek to provide coherent and reliable data and information on key water trends and management issues. The [Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6](#) (IMI-SDG 6) builds on and expands the experiences and lessons learned during implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. It aims to:

- develop methodologies and tools to monitor SDG 6 global indicators;
- raise awareness at the national and global levels regarding SDG 6 monitoring;
- enhance technical and institutional country capacity for monitoring; and
- compile country data and report on global progress on SDG 6.

The first UN Water Conference took place in March 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Forty-six years later, the second UN Water Conference convened in March 2023. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) called for the UN 2023 Water Conference to review the implementation of the Water for Sustainable Development Decade and accelerate efforts towards meeting the SDGs.

Following up on the 2023 Conference, the UNGA, in resolution A/RES/77/334, which was adopted in September 2023, called for global conferences on water and sanitation to take place in 2026 and 2028. The resolution also requests the UN Secretary-General to present a UN system-wide water and sanitation strategy before September 2024. UN-Water was charged with developing a collaborative implementation plan for the strategy.

**Governance Structure:** UN agencies, programmes, and funds with a water-related mandate are Members of UN-Water. Partners are international organizations, professional unions, associations, and other civil society groups that are actively involved in water-related issues and have the capacity and willingness to contribute to the work of UN-Water and meet UN-Water's partnership criteria.

UN-Water Senior Programme Managers (SPMs) represent UN-Water Members. They provide the overall governance and strategic direction and constitute the highest operational decision-making body of UN-Water. UN-Water is supported in its work by its Technical Advisory Unit (TAU).

The UN-Water Chair is chosen among the UN Executive Heads after consultations within the CEB. The current Chair is Alvaro Lario, President, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The UN-Water Vice-Chair is elected among the UN-Water SPMs. The UN-Water Secretary is a senior staff member of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

### UN-Water Report

Chair Alvaro Lario opened the 41st meeting of UN-Water and highlighted the importance of the deliberations for the implementation of the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation.

In a video message from Jakarta, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water, Retno Marsudi, called for water to remain atop the political agenda. She said the high expectations for the future of water must overcome complex challenges, but added that many opportunities lie ahead and should not be wasted to ensure SDG 6 is achieved.

### Adoption of the Agenda

UN-Water Vice-Chair Bruce Gordon introduced the agenda and highlighted collaboration and coordination with others as essential. He noted the current political landscape that organizations face and noted the ongoing changes might impact the delivery of clean water and sanitation for all. The agenda was adopted without amendment.

### Implementation of Past Decisions

On follow-up on past decisions, UN-Water Secretary Madhushree Chatterjee reviewed a number of actions that had either been completed previously or would be the subject of consideration during the 41st UN-Water meeting. These items included:

- progress report of the Expert Group on Transboundary Waters;
- progress report of the Expert Group on Water Scarcity;
- progress report of the Expert Group on Groundwater;
- progress report of the Expert Group on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH);
- progress report of the Expert Group on Regional Level Coordination;
- progress report of the Expert Group on Water Quality and Wastewater; and
- progress report of the Task Force on Water Action Decade Implementation.

### Activities on UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation Entry Point 1: Lead and inspire collective action on water and sanitation

**Reporting back on World Water Day 2025 and on the UN World Water Development Report 2025:** Miguel de França Doria, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), presented the [UN World Water Development Report 2025: Mountains and glaciers - Water towers](#), noting it draws attention to the benefits mountain waters provide to societies, economies, and the environment. He described the numerous communications tools, including audiobooks and briefings, that can be used to highlight the issue.

TAJIKISTAN highlighted the importance of preserving glaciers and noted the International Conference on Glaciers' Preservation to be held from 29 May to 1 June 2025, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) underscored that coordinated efforts lead to better water resilience and highlighted the recently launched report on [Economics of Drought: Investing in nature-based solutions for drought resilience - Proaction pays](#). The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) described the successful campaign on World Day for Glaciers and World Water Day, which he said ranks among one of the most popular UN international observances.

**Update on World Toilet Day 2025:** Kate Medlicott, World Health Organization (WHO), described activities undertaken for World Toilet Day 2024 under the theme Sanitation for Peace, noting the campaign reached a large number of social media accounts. She said the peace, protection, and progress theme allowed for many entry points and a broad and inclusive approach.

She reported that the task force shaping the 2025 campaign will meet in April, draw on the 2024 campaign, and explore how melting glaciers disrupt sanitation. Farai Tunhuma, UN Children's

Fund (UNICEF), called for accelerated progress on safely managed sanitation and climate-resilient sanitation, and urged for the advancement of sanitation within the UN system.

**Update on World Water Day 2026 and UN World Water Development Report 2026:** Miguel de França Doria, UNESCO, provided an update on the UN World Water Development Report 2026, noting there are 23 lead agencies involved in the different parts of the report. He reviewed the production calendar leading up to the publication's launch in March 2026.

Felicia Vacarelu, UN-Water Communications Manager, invited participants to join the task force for World Water Day 2026, which will focus on the theme "Water and Gender."

Participants agreed to create a Task Force on World Water Day 2026. The Task Force will be coordinated by UNICEF and UN Women, with participation by over 20 UN Members and Partners.

**Presentations on Priority Collaborative Action 1 (PCA 1):** Members of the start-up teams for the first PCA briefed UN-Water members and partners on the workplans and main activities they have identified to unify and amplify UN voices for water and sanitation.

**Priority Collaborative Action 1.1 – Unify and amplify UN voices on water and sanitation:** Ebru Canan Sokullu, UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), highlighted that the activities under the PCA were identified as priority needs during the UN 2023 Water Conference. Therefore, the start-up team for PCA 1.1 focused on activities that aim to enhance coordination within the UN system to ensure consistency, impact, and alignment of communications on water and sanitation, as well as to elevate water and sanitation by strengthening leadership, engagement, and messaging.

The two-year work plan includes activities related to the development of a shared platform to improve collaboration within the UN-Water communicators network, amplifying the water agenda in non-traditional forums and processes, mobilizing water champions, and conducting regular feedback sessions with the communicators network to ensure effective coordination and cross-agency exchanges.

During the discussion, a speaker suggested linking with the newly established World Lake Day, which will be recognized every 27 August. Another speaker stressed the need to develop water-related messaging for international days that are beyond water-related days, such as World Food Day, which is celebrated on 16 October.

**Priority Collaborative Action 1.2 – Water beyond 2030:** Joakim Harlin, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), introduced PCA 1.2, through which UN-Water members and partners seek to provide the best available evidence based on SDG indicators reporting and data collection experience. The PCA also identifies activities for UN-Water Principals and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water to undertake as they advocate for water and sanitation in the global sustainable development framework beyond 2030. He called attention to expected actions related to upcoming global events, including the 9 July 2025 preparatory meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development's (HLPF) in-depth review of SDG 6.

During the discussion, a participant reported that the UNCCD will seek to feature water in its beyond 2030 strategy. Speakers noted the need to align the strategy with the UN's Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and the UN80 Initiative.

Current uncertainties related to the future of multilateralism were noted, along with the need to build on what has been achieved on SDG 6 thus far. A speaker suggested thinking about the challenges that others find compelling, such as hunger and immigration, and to develop messaging that incorporates these concerns.

### ***Special Session: Navigating Change***

Participants shared how current challenges in the multilateral system are impacting the water and sanitation community and their ability to deliver the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. The conversation was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Uncertainty and volatility were top of mind for many. To respond to the uncertainty, several recognized the importance of sharing information, including the country-level acceleration case studies that UN-Water has developed as examples of what is possible. Complexity was recognized to be a key component of the water and sanitation agenda, and delegates discussed how to lean into the agenda's cross-cutting nature and think about how to best communicate the interlinkages between water and issues that other audiences may value. Speakers also recognized that the ambiguity of the current situation can be paralyzing, yet at the same time they noted it provides an opportunity for the water community to shape the narrative going forward. Several also emphasized the need for messages of hope, rather than negatively framed communications.

### ***Activities on UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation Entry Point 2: Engage better for countries by leveraging whole-of-UN System support and by mobilizing stakeholders and partnerships for water and sanitation***

**Country Level Engagement:** Mary Matthews, UN Development Programme (UNDP), on behalf of the Task Force on Country Level Engagement, discussed their work to reinforce interagency efforts at the country level. She highlighted that Costa Rica, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Peru, and the Philippines have received seed funds, and said engagement countries were selected based on their SDG 6 reporting. These countries will report back and, thus, inform the assessment of coordination of water actions at the country level, which is part of the UN-Water Work Programme 2024-2025.

Matthews also reported that the newest SDG 6 Country Acceleration Case Studies focus on Bhutan, Rwanda, and Saudi Arabia. These reports will be presented on 22 July 2025 at the HLPF during the SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event.

During the discussion, speakers highlighted that, although the USD 10,000 seed fund grants are small, they are having a catalytic impact. A speaker noted the importance of the human right to biodiversity. Some called for sharing more information about the UN System-wide Strategy and the UN-Water offer for country-level engagement, to ensure all countries know about them. Challenges that UN-Water partners have faced in participating in the catalytic impact funding were noted, and the possibility of requiring leverage matching funds was raised. The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) offered to support catalytic projects with satellite data.

**SDG 6 Capacity Development Initiative (CDI):** Stephanie Rambler, UN DESA, described the coordination team, the technical and financial support sources, and the members of the CDI. She noted the pilot countries – Panama, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Gambia, and Madagascar (the latter still at the request stage) – were at



different levels of development. She illustrated national contexts and underscored, for instance, the effects on the Initiative of the upcoming national election in Costa Rica.

Gaetano Casale, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, discussed a two-day high-level integrated workshop held in Costa Rica. He commended its organization and participation from all levels. He drew attention to the 7th edition of the International Symposium on Knowledge and Capacity Development for the Water Sector, which will take place in Delft on 2-4 July 2025.

Participants called for: linking the pilot countries with other country-level engagement initiatives; the possibility of coordinating with a UNITAR-affiliated training center in The Gambia and a UNCCD office in Panama; and narrowing the identified capacity development gaps.

At the conclusion of the discussion, participants acknowledged the progress update and requested the CDI to develop a workplan, aligning with the two-year workplan (2025-2026) of PCA 2, as part of the Collaborative Implementation Plan. They also requested the CDI to provide a progress report and present a draft workplan at the 42nd UN-Water Meeting.

**Presentation on PCA 2 – Collaborate for joint country programming:** Virginie Gillet, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), presented on joint country programming, including a four-year outlook from 2025-2028. She discussed different aspects of the programming, including an assessment of current country-level action and the importance of collaborating at all levels, including transboundary. She noted that the PCA empowers Country Teams to leverage water in their systems approach towards SDG progress.

Comments from the floor urged engagement with national players to promote country-level support.

### ***Activities on UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation Entry Point 3: Align UN System support for the integration of water and sanitation issues across sectors and mainstreaming into intergovernmental processes***

**Repository of intergovernmental language on water:** Joakim Harlin, UNEP, presented this agenda item, noting resolutions that reference water and sanitation were currently being compiled for inclusion in a repository. He specified that, as a starting point, the compilation would include resolutions at the UN agreement level rather than the broader convention level, and resolutions that were global. He noted it would be a “living document.”

**Update on water and climate change activities:** Sonja Koeppel, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and one of the Expert Group Co-Coordination, presented on the work of the Water and Climate Change Expert Group. She noted the water for adaptation focus had shifted to water for climate change mitigation. She drew attention to the UN-Water Analytical Brief, its usefulness, and dissemination.

Anjani Kapoor, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), presented on the Global Goal on Adaptation Indicator Process, providing the background to the UAE-Belém work programme on indicators, and summarizing the inputs and support to the Indicator Work Programme up to the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 29) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024. She

highlighted two formal submissions made by UN-Water to the UNFCCC last year on proposed work modalities and initial views on indicator development.

Kamala Huseynli-Abishova, COP 29 Presidency, discussed work on water for climate action and enumerated the 68 countries that have endorsed the COP 29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action, as well as the 25 non-state actors. She noted steps on operationalizing and setting up the collaboration platform.

Comments from the floor included pledges of support; the necessity of collaborating while avoiding duplication; working on water accelerators; and calls for focusing also on sanitation and on changes in the water cycle, including in the flow of green water between the soil and the atmosphere. Participants discussed how to engage with the Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action and promote interaction between water issues and other sectors.

Participants requested the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate Change to: 1) support integration of the findings of the UN-Water Analytical Brief titled “Water Requirements of Climate Mitigation” into countries’ National Determined Contributions 3.0; and 2) cooperate with IMI-SDG6 to support development of water indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation, as requested and needed, and to report on progress at the 42nd UN-Water Meeting.

**Presentation on Priority Collaborative Action 3 – Mainstream water within UN Rio Conventions at all levels:** Sonja Koeppel, UNECE, on behalf of the start-up team for this PCA, presented the workplan and main activities to mainstream water within the Rio Conventions at all levels. Koeppel highlighted the objective to have the UN system provide targeted technical and scientific assistance, policy advice, and joint guidance to interested parties to the Rio Conventions, and to assist the parties to address water and sanitation considerations in Convention decisions, declarations, work programmes, and national implementation plans. The PCA work plan includes:

- developing a repository of agreed and still valid texts on water and sanitation within intergovernmental agreements and resolutions;
- preparing proposals for mainstreaming water and sanitation considerations in relevant Rio Convention work programmes and negotiated documents, as appropriate; and
- developing tools and policy briefs for countries on mainstreaming water-related considerations in the three Rio Conventions, and support provided to facilitate their uptake and implementation.

During the discussion, the UNCCD highlighted the need for work prior, during and after COPs, when decisions are drafted and implementation plans are developed. The UNFCCC highlighted, *inter alia*, that the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) guidelines are being updated to include the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) targets, which include a target on water. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands noted the opportunity for mutually strengthening multilateral environmental agreements, called for giving attention to the existing corpus of decisions on water, and stressed the need to enhance the ambition of this PCA to serve the interests of all MEAs.

Speakers also noted that more National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and NAPs are incorporating water issues.

***Activities on UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation Entry Point 4: Accelerate progress and transformational change by unifying UN System support through the five SDG 6 global accelerators: Financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance***

**Update on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework innovation accelerator:** Mary Matthews, UNDP, highlighted that this task force has focused on three issues: developing a water innovation “axel”; preparing an analytical brief on innovation and policy; and financing for innovation and innovation for financing. She reported that artificial intelligence will be used to map the connections among existing innovation hubs.

During the discussion, the International Association for Hydro-Environment and Research (IAHR) reported that it will be publishing a report on the digital transformation of the water sector.

**Update on the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 (IMI-SDG6):** Fiona Gore, WHO, provided an update on the IMI’s work since November 2024. Among other developments, she noted new data have been collected related to WASH and other indicators, and a citizen science workstream has published technical briefs. Joint activities have included country support in Zambia, Sierra Leone, Panama, and Colombia. Gender contextualization pilots have been launched in Senegal, the Philippines, and the State of Palestine. An SDG 6 Basin Map has been completed. The initiative has also contributed to discussions of the UN-Water Climate Expert Group and possible indicators for the GGA.

**The UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Catalytic Finance in Sanitation, Hygiene and Wastewater:** Dominic O’Neill, the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund, discussed the newly created UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Catalytic Finance in Sanitation, Hygiene, and Wastewater. He said the new Fund promotes public and private partnerships to unlock financing. The Fund, which is supported by the Netherlands and Switzerland, aims to serve as a collaborative platform and provide technical assistance, programmatic grants, and catalytic financing.

**Update from the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW):** Nelson Gomonda, AMCOW, presented the roadmap for the development of the post-2025 Africa Water Vision and Policy. He underscored the processes and steps undertaken to date, including the 2023 AMCOW General Assembly, which called to designate Water and Sanitation as the theme for the African Union (AU) in 2026. He said upcoming events in 2026 include the consideration of the post-2025 Africa Water Vision and Policy by the AU Assembly Heads of State and Government at their 39th Ordinary Session in February 2026.

Ageazit Gebreslassie, AMCOW, provided details of the Third African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water, which will take place in Lusaka, Zambia, from 27-29 May 2025.

During the discussion, some participants suggested that the AU should align their timeline with that of the SDGs.

**Presentation on PCA 4 – Improve availability and use of evidence and learning to accelerate progress:** Fiona Gore, WHO, presented on PCA 4, underscoring that UN-Water has chosen to focus on the data and information accelerator, as data can be a leverage on other accelerators. She described how PCA 4 supports Member States and the global community, such as through improved

awareness of the status of water and sanitation. She drew attention to the governance structures of the UN-Water IMI-SDG6. On PCA 4 output 3 (Broadened water and sanitation evidence base, improved data resolution and accessibility, and strengthened multi-stakeholder engagement for enhanced decision-making and action on water and sanitation), she called for drawing on multiple sources, such as citizen science, groundwater research, and lessons learned.

***High-level Intergovernmental Water Events***

**On the Road to the 2026 United Nations Water Conference:** On Thursday morning, 3 April, representatives from the co-hosts of the 2026 UN Water Conference—Senegal and the UAE—led a discussion on preparations for the Conference.

Mohamed C.B.C. Diatta, Senegal’s Sherpa for the 2026 UN Water Conference, highlighted that the Conference will focus on the overall objective of “Accelerating progress on SDG 6” and said the Co-Chairs are developing a vision statement. He thanked those who participated in the event on 3 March at UN Headquarters, which kicked off the conversation on the themes for the interactive dialogues that will take place during the 2026 event. He said a meeting of the UNGA on 9 July will formally adopt the themes, following which the Co-Chairs for the interactive dialogues will be selected. Diatta reported that a meeting in Dakar, Senegal, later this year will begin shaping the outcome for the Conference.

Shaima Hussain Gargash, UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described her government’s commitment to drive an inclusive and interactive process that brings people together. She looked forward to furthering global action on water together and stressed the importance of solutions-oriented communication.

Madhushree Chatterjee, UN-Water Secretary, reviewed the timeline for preparations until December 2025. She noted, following the discussions that took place on 3 March 2025, UN Member States, the UN system, and stakeholders have until 11 April to provide input. A draft background note will be circulated to UN Member States on 12 May, and they will be briefed in early June. On 9 July, the UNGA President will hold a consultation to finalize the themes for the interactive dialogues.

Chatterjee reported the 3 March event revealed there is broad support for retaining four of the themes adopted for the UN 2023 Water Conference: water for health; water for sustainable development; water for climate, resilience, and environment; and water for cooperation. On the fifth theme, some suggested changing the 2023 theme of “Water Action Decade” to water in the international agenda, water beyond 2030, or water and governance. A sixth theme will also be selected. She said proposals for a new theme included: means of implementation; pollution; human rights; nexus issues, such as security or food; and integrated water management.

During a lengthy discussion, several participants emphasized the need to focus on the messaging of the challenges to be addressed as well as the information to be shared about the Conference. A speaker suggested adopting a “hope narrative,” noting it should not focus on convincing people what is important, but instead should generate hope and inspire participants to envision what is possible.

Several speakers supported continuity in the themes from the 2023 Conference to the 2026 Conference, and inquired how the sixth theme will be selected. Some highlighted that support for a theme on

water for cooperation, including transboundary cooperation, reflects a change in many countries' willingness to discuss this issue.

Alternative proposals for the sixth theme included: finance; agriculture and transformation of the agro-food system; water resilience and land; human rights; wastewater; and spiritual and religious traditions. The need to have "cross-fertilization" of the themes was also proposed. One speaker suggested calling the dialogues "interactive action dialogues" to encourage a focus on action.

Many speakers highlighted the positive tone and inclusiveness of the 3 March event. Speakers noted the accreditation process for the 2026 Conference is already open and encouraged ensuring participation is broad, including by funding constituency groups such as Indigenous Peoples and youth.

A speaker noted there are three stages for the conference: preparations, the conference itself, and follow-up. He said follow-up work starts the day after the conference ends, and asked what the role of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water would be in these three stages.

A delegate noted that planning for the end of the 2030 Agenda could start by incorporating preparations for the 2028 UN Water Conference into the process leading to the 2026 Conference. Follow-up and measurement of existing commitments were also stressed.

**Stakeholder Engagement: Roadmap for rights holders' engagement in the 2026 UN Water Conference: Implementing the UN Human Rights Council's request to the Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation, resolution 57/13 of 2024:** Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, described his role in ensuring a human rights dimension is included in the Conference through the Special Rapporteur's Roadmap for a broad and inclusive civil society representation at the 2026 UN Water Conference. He suggested listening to those who are generally left out, and deviating from "business as usual" by engaging civil society in the preparatory process.

**Global Public Private Partnership Forum:** Eugenie Avram, AquaFed, described AquaFed's vision for the 2026 UN Water Conference as an active and ongoing process to build partnerships between all stakeholders to attain results on the ground towards SDG 6. She noted the Conference is a platform to accelerate existing partnerships and enable new projects with financing and expertise. She said the programme launch would take place in New York on 8 July, before the UNGA meeting.

**Our Water, Our Voice – Creating a participatory path towards the 2026 UN Water Conference:** Lesha Witmer, Women for Water Partnership, also on behalf of other organizations, discussed stakeholder engagement. Underscoring that 58% of the world's population is not connected to the internet, she noted that involving civil society, youth, women, small formers, or others requires time. She called for ensuring delegates are prepared before attendance, and supported the use of existing networks, such as umbrella organizations.

Comments from the floor included the International Labour Organization (ILO), who drew attention to the role of trade unions and employer organizations. UN Habitat highlighted the "Stronger Together Movement" and their own online thriving community of practice.

**11th World Water Forum:** Abdulaziz Ali Alqahtani, Saudi Arabia, provided an update on preparations for the 11th World Water Forum. He described the outcomes of a preparatory meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia, and noted the work of the Centre of Excellence on Water and Climate Resilience serves as a blueprint. He said the global consortium for wastewater and surveillance can be used as an indicator of public health threats and offers a replicable model. He also drew attention to: water resource management systems for small islands as a scalable model for grassroots engagement; the Bali Coalition to Strengthen Training in the Water Sector, which supports training of water professionals; and the Water Resources Development Fund as an inspiration for similar funding opportunities.

Julia Carlier, World Water Council, recalled the success of the 10th World Water Forum in 2024, which took place in Bali, Indonesia, and called for a strong follow up process. She commended the sturdy relations between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, and described strong engagement with governments in the preparations for the 11th World Water Forum, which will take place in Riyadh in 2027. She reported the themes of the 2027 event will be: water security; water finance; water for humans and nature; water for diplomacy; value of water; and innovation for water.

**Sanitation and Water for All High-level Sectors Ministers' Meeting:** Anjani Kapoor, SWA, described the preparatory process in the lead up to the High-level Meeting of Water, Sanitation, and Environment Ministers, scheduled to take place in October 2025, in Madrid, Spain. She noted that climate and environment ministers have been invited, and efforts are being made to break sectoral silos. She noted the meeting will promote coordinated action on water and sanitation as enablers of climate resilience and sustainable development.

Participants commended efforts to bring in different ministries and called for a constructive, coherent and coordinated approach to each meetings.

**Presentation on Priority Collaborative Action 5 – Mobilize to elevate the ambition of UN Water Conferences:** Stephanie Rambler, UN DESA, provided an overview of the workplan and main activities aimed at mobilizing and elevating the ambition of the UN Water Conferences. She suggested reactivating the UN-Water Task Force on the Water Action Decade, as a home for this PCA. She drew attention to the 9 July session where the UNGA President will convene a one-day meeting to finalize the themes for the 2026 UN Water Conference; and to the high-level preparatory meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference that will take place in Dakar in December 2025. She called for this PCA to mobilize the water community and find creative ways of bringing expertise to the table.

Sogol Jafarzadeh, UN University (UNU), stressed the role of this PCA in supporting Member States while also engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including from academia. She noted it would provide a platform to exchange and disseminate material based on the thematic dialogues.

Participants commented on the need to focus on "what comes next"; agree on a basic objective before debating how to attain it, particularly in light of restricted time and resources; be proactive; reaffirm principles; and define common obstacles to reaching any agreed goal.



## Contributing Actions

Vice-Chair Gordon introduced this item. He defined Contributing Actions as individual and joint actions taken by UN entities and partners within their respective mandates and at all levels that contribute towards the implementation of the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. He broke down contributing actions by strategy Entry Point (EP) and drew attention to the Contributing Actions [website](#).

Delegates subsequently met in five parallel roundtable discussions organized around the following EPs: EP1: Lead and inspire collective action; EP2: Engage better for countries; EP3: Align UN system support for the integration; EP4: Accelerate progress and transformational change; and EP5: Account through joint review and learning.

## Decision on the Next UN-Water Meeting and Closing

Federico Properzi, UN-Water Chief Technical Advisor, introduced the proposed decision on the date and location for the 42nd UN-Water meeting, noting UNITAR's offer to host the meeting at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, from 30 September to 1 October 2025. Participants approved this decision.

In closing the open session of the meeting, Chair Lario thanked participants for their focus, commitment, and cooperation. He highlighted that the meeting had identified collaborative actions on how to implement the Strategy and looked forward to continuing cooperation. He closed the open session at 3:34 pm.

## Upcoming Meetings

**12th Roundtable on Financing Water:** The roundtable will focus on the theme, “Strengthening the Sustainability of Water Investments: Alternative Financing Approaches and Models.” The meeting aims to explore funding and financing models that can foster greater sustainability and resilience of water-related investments. **dates:** 16-17 April 2025 **location:** Jeddah, Saudi Arabia **www:** [oecd.org/content/oecd/en/events/2025/04/thematic-meeting-on-strengthening-the-sustainability-of-water-investments-12th-roundtable-on-financing-water.html](https://oecd.org/content/oecd/en/events/2025/04/thematic-meeting-on-strengthening-the-sustainability-of-water-investments-12th-roundtable-on-financing-water.html)

**UN Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs 2025:** This tenth annual Forum discusses science, technology, and innovation cooperation around thematic areas for the implementation of the SDGs. **dates:** 7-8 May 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** [sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2025](https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2025)

**69th meeting of the Global Environment Facility Council:** The GEF Council, which meets twice annually, develops, adopts, and evaluates the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 2-6 June 2025 **location:** Washington, DC, US **www:** [thegef.org/events](https://thegef.org/events)

**62nd Sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies:** Deliberations during this meeting will feed into the Amazonia Climate Change Conference (COP 30). **dates:** 16-26 June 2025 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** [unfccc.int/sb62](https://unfccc.int/sb62)

**41st International Association for Hydro-environment Engineering and Research World Congress:** IAHR will be held on the theme, “Innovative Water Engineering for Sustainable

Development,” and focus on the importance of innovative water engineering in meeting the SDGs and water resources targets. **dates:** 22-27 June 2025 **location:** Singapore **www:** [2025.iahr.org](https://2025.iahr.org)

**High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2025:** HLPF 2025 will convene under the theme “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind.” **dates:** 14-23 July 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** [hlpf.un.org/2025](https://hlpf.un.org/2025)

**15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands:** COP 15 will be held under the theme “Protecting Wetlands for our Common Future.” **dates:** 23-31 July 2025 **location:** Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe **www:** [www.ramsar.org/meetings](https://www.ramsar.org/meetings)

**World Water Week 2025:** The Week will focus on the theme, “Water for Climate Action,” which recognizes the pivotal role of water in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to build resilience safeguarding ecosystems and communities. **dates:** 24-28 August 2025 **location:** Stockholm, Sweden **www:** [worldwaterweek.org](https://worldwaterweek.org)

**World Toilet Day:** This day is celebrated annually to inspire action to tackle the global sanitation crisis and help achieve SDG 6, which promises sanitation for all by 2030. **date:** 19 November 2025 **location:** worldwide **www:** [un.org/en/observances/toilet-day](https://un.org/en/observances/toilet-day)

**42nd UN-Water Meeting:** The 42nd UN-Water Meeting will discuss implementation of the UN System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation and preparations for the 2026 UN Water Conference, among other agenda items. **dates:** 30 September - 1 October 2025 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** [unwater.org](https://unwater.org)

For additional upcoming events, see [sdg.iisd.org](https://sdg.iisd.org)

## Glossary

CDI	Capacity Development Initiative
GGA	Global Goal on Adaptation
IMI-SDG 6	Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
PCAs	Priority Collaborative Actions
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN DESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNITAR	UN Institute for Training and Research
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization