



STATE OF PLAY REPORT

Interactive Dialogue E
“Water in Multilateral Processes”
2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE

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State of Play No. 1

Foreword from the Co-Chairs

This State of Play Report sums up the current state of affairs in preparation of the 2026 UN Water Conference as a contribution to this year's High-level Political Forums dedicated to SDG 6. It is also intended to initiate the formal consultation process under Interactive Dialogue E "Water in Multilateral Processes" (ID E) of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. As Co-Chairs of the Dialogue, we are committed to conducting a participatory and forward-looking consultation process that helps to shape the future of global water governance. Since its launch at the High-Level Preparatory Meeting in Dakar in January 2026, discussions have continued across a range of bilateral meetings, international forums and stakeholder engagements. **This State of Play Report seeks to capture the current state of discussions, emerging areas of convergence, and key questions that remain under consideration.** It does not aim to prejudge outcomes or reflect agreed positions. Rather, it is intended to provide a common reference point for the next phase of consultations, enabling participants to build on discussions already held instead of repeatedly starting from scratch. In that regard, we acknowledge the valuable contribution of the [SDG 6 Synthesis Report](#) and the **Informal Preparatory Working Group's (IPWG) concept paper**, which has provided important input to the dialogue and already in its draft version helped stimulate discussion on options for strengthening international water governance beyond 2030. As consultations continue, we hope that this report will support a more informed, focused and productive dialogue on how to strengthen coherence, accountability, stakeholder participation and political leadership on water within the multilateral system.

➔ Mandate and expectations of ID E

In view of an accelerated global water crisis, UN Member States have been calling for a stronger intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation on water issues. Interactive Dialogue E "Water in Multilateral Processes" was established by Member States as one of the six thematic dialogues of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference – building upon the 2023 UN Water Conference recommendations on establishing regular UN water conferences, stronger UN system coordination on water, and enhanced linkages with other multilateral processes. Its mandate moves these recommendations into practice. The currently identified governance gaps weaken political visibility, complicate coordination across sectors and institutions, and limit opportunities for systematic stakeholder engagement and follow-up. The discussions under ID E take place at a time when the whole UN system is under broad review in the context of the UN 80 reform. Building on lessons learned from other global environmental processes as well as on promising developments such as the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation, enhanced global water governance has the potential to serve as a gateway for a new way of successful multilateral cooperation. At the same time, the approaching end of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development raises important questions on how progress on water-related goals and targets can be sustained beyond 2030.

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Against this backdrop, Member States have assigned Interactive Dialogue E “Water in Multilateral Processes” a forward-looking role in shaping the future of global water governance. ID E provides an opportunity for substantive discussion on establishing a structured intergovernmental UN process on water and considering its next steps, including through a follow-up resolution. While interest in stronger and more effective cooperation on water has overall increased since the 2023 UN Water Conference, our consultations thus far have revealed that the way forward will require careful preparation and balanced steps to bridge a wide array of positions. They also reflect broad support for building on existing frameworks and institutions, with the aim of strengthening coherence, avoiding duplication, and enhancing coordination across the UN system. ID E aims to identify practical and politically feasible pathways for reducing fragmentation across the multilateral system by better aligning existing commitments and initiatives in relation to water-related goals. In synergy with the other IDs of the 2026 UN Water Conference, ID E will develop recommendations on how to better integrate water across global processes, including the Rio Conventions, sustain political momentum beyond 2030, and strengthen coordination and collective action at all levels in the lead-up to the 2026 UN Water Conference and the SDG Summit in 2027. The dialogue will thus provide a space for developing concrete proposals for strengthened and more efficient UN system delivery on water and sanitation in line with the objectives of UN80 and the relevant decisions taken by Member States such as those on mandate provision and implementation. The dialogue will also take into account the role and modalities of the UN 2028 Water Conference that serves as the Final Comprehensive Review of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” (2018-2028) and other relevant UN Conferences in 2027 and 2028 such as UNFCCC COP32 presided by the African Group or the UN Ocean Decade Conference and the 4th UN Oceans Conference, which could provide relevant opportunities to feed into the implementation of results of the UN 2026 Water Conference.

Overall, **water is a potential blueprint for enhanced system-wide coherence, efficiency, and delivery across sectors, multilateral processes and institutions.** Ensuring coherence across all interactive dialogues of the 2026 UN Water Conference will be essential to advancing a more integrated and effective system of multilateral cooperation on water, since many aspects raised reach beyond the focus of ID E alone.

→ Current state of discussions under ID E

Consultations under ID E remain ongoing and are far from concluded. Discussions to date have highlighted a broad range of perspectives regarding the level of ambition, institutional arrangements, and desired pathways. The SDG 6 Synthesis Report recommends **a future intergovernmental process for water at the UN beyond 2030** to keep water a priority on the international agenda. Such a process could be convened within the General Assembly or ECOSOC, with substantive outcomes, including the possibility of intergovernmentally agreed declarations. Along the lines of the analysis presented by the IPWG regarding the different levels of strengthening of the intergovernmental processes and UN system coordination, the

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views range from minimal coordination to extensive coordination bodies and legally binding instruments.

Consultations have consistently underscored that **strengthening multilateral cooperation on water should ultimately serve to accelerate implementation on the ground**. Throughout the dialogue, Member States and stakeholders have emphasized that discussions on governance should remain closely linked to improving delivery, mobilizing means of implementation, strengthening national capacities and supporting concrete outcomes for people and ecosystems. Some countries have voiced concern that new multilateral processes might not be feasible either due to (geo)political challenges, concerns over national sovereignty, the ongoing UN80 reform or the general lack of available funding that new organisational structures might require from Member States. Both concerns could be taken into account by focusing discussions on an intergovernmental process that could serve as a means for better coordination and targeting of multilateral action (e.g. more coordinated mandate and resource provision in line with UN80, better integration of water issues into existing intergovernmental action on relevant other sectors) and the promotion of policy guidance on global water challenges according to Member States' expressed needs. Thereby, efficiency and impact could be increased exactly where it is most needed, while aligning to Member States' sovereignty and priority setting. Similarly, and while the level of ambition varies, consultations have also revealed **growing convergence around several core principles**, including the **need for stronger political attention to water, enhanced coordination across multilateral processes and more continuous intergovernmental dialogue beyond existing time-bound frameworks**. Across consultations, many participants have stressed that regular intergovernmental engagement should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means to strengthen implementation, facilitate policy coherence, improve monitoring and subsequent accountability in terms of following-up on agreed results and sustain political momentum beyond 2030. Expanding our perspective beyond the water community, calls for strengthening existing multilateral arrangements on water are also coming from other sectors. For example, Agriculture Ministers from 59 Member States from all regions in a ministerial Communiqué at the 18th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture in January 2026 called for stronger intergovernmental cooperation on water and agriculture within the UN, in particular for regular UN Water Conferences with negotiated outcomes and a stronger role for UN-Water.

There is **strong consensus on the existing gap on water in multilateral processes** and the **need for a coherent overarching intergovernmental dialogue on water**, which would then enable linkages to other multilateral processes. While UN-Water serves as an UN-internal coordination mechanism, coordination and continued dialogue among Member States is missing. As of now, Member States have neither effective dialogue nor efficient coordination mechanisms among themselves on all aspects of the water cycle – nor on its relevance across sectors. This reinforces a focus on narrow interest areas and hinders coordinated and integrated approaches as well as transparent funding without duplications. Further, there is a lack of means and mechanisms to engage Major Groups and other Stakeholders on Water. Many stakeholders have emphasized the importance of ensuring more inclusive participation by indigenous peoples, local communities, women and girls, youth, scientific institutions, civil

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society, local and regional authorities and the private sector. Several consultations also highlighted the importance of strengthening science-policy interfaces, improving efficiency of existing data and monitoring systems, and fostering greater exchange of knowledge and best practices to support evidence-based policymaking and more effective implementation. Likewise, due to water's cross-sectoral nature, and therefore often for good reason, work on water issues is distributed across the UN system as is the decision-making on water. While its coordinating role is crucial, UN-Water is not a legal entity in its own right. This undermines its ability to support mainstreaming of water into other multilateral processes. This enables fragmentation and a lack of prioritisation of water across basically all UN entities, which in turn leads to inefficiencies and increases costs of addressing water challenges in a coherent and strategic manner. UN-Water is excluded from representing water in many UN processes. This is also highlighted in the **SDG 6 Synthesis Report**, which recommends **strengthening UN-Water as an "enabler of joint delivery"** across the UN system. This would require the provision of a legal status as a UN entity, sustainable funding and an enhanced coordination office to give water a stronger voice within the UN system.

Many Member States and Stakeholders welcome progress delivered through the 2023 UN Water Conference, such as the UN System-wide Strategy on Water, and applaud the appointment of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water. Some Member States raised that the new position currently lacks a more clearly defined role regarding conferences and intergovernmental processes. Furthermore, there are no effective linkages between UN water conferences and other multilateral processes (such as UN Oceans, the Rio Conventions, or food systems). The Water Action Agenda or work under the Water Action Decade consist of voluntary commitments that lack systematic follow-up and often do not constitute additional but rather recycled efforts on water action. Many participants also emphasized that water should increasingly be addressed as a cross-cutting enabler across the broader multilateral agenda, including sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, food systems and financing for development, thereby strengthening coherence and reducing fragmentation across international processes.

A recurring proposal is to establish **regular water conferences within the UN system**. The ideas on the design of such conferences vary from focused thematic conferences every 3-4 years with continuous Interactive Dialogues, to negotiated outcomes or close linkages to the Rio Conventions. Many countries that support the idea of regular UN Water conferences caution that any Water Conference must deliver without increasing the administrative (e.g. through additional reporting duties) and financial burden on UN Member States and their citizens. What is needed would instead make use of existing monitoring on water in multilateral processes for targeted dialogue and issue recommendations for action. Echoing the call for regular intergovernmental dialogue on water issues, several countries also asked to have a dedicated home for water within the UN system that goes beyond time-limited frameworks. Several countries and stakeholders highlight that such conferences could deliver on scaling up best practices and stronger cooperation between existing initiatives and organisations. The proposal for regular UN water conferences is also reiterated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation and follows the summarized recommendations from civil society organisations during the Dakar preparatory conference.

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However, there are also concerns regarding the proposal for regular negotiated outcome documents that could impact or even take away parts of national sovereignty or local authority. It will therefore be important to discuss negotiated outcomes of future UN Water Conferences as a means to guide multilateral action, promote the mainstreaming of water into other relevant multilateral processes and galvanize action from the global to the local level according to Member States' needs and in alignment with national sovereignty and priority setting.

In this context, while some Member States refer to existing mechanisms, from the UNECE Water Convention, to the role of UN-Water and the different Rio Conventions, which also deal with water aspects from their respective viewpoint, albeit not in a comprehensive manner, others argue that a lean intergovernmental process can strengthen coordination and political momentum without affecting national sovereignty or existing legal frameworks, but fostering Member States' ability to address challenges in their national capacity and enhancing the coordination of decision-making on water within the UN so as to facilitate more efficient and strengthened UN support to Member States according to their own needs and priorities.

The **Special Envoy on Water calls for a forward-looking discussion** on how to transition from the 2030 Agenda towards a credible and coherent post-2030 framework. Many countries have highlighted that **the dialogue beyond the so-called 'water bubble' needs to be broadened**, considering the multilateral landscape as a whole, including multilateral development banks, the Rio Conventions and the Sendai Framework. In terms of participation, several countries have highlighted that the link between multilateral structures and the citizens on the ground has been lost. Feedback from the civil society forum in Dakar also **called for guaranteed spaces for stakeholders to participate in interactive dialogues**. The proposal to ensure different constituencies' participation through regular channels and mechanisms was brought forward by several stakeholders and countries, including an ongoing engagement in between conferences. In nearly all instances the work of **UN-Water was considered as crucial**, while most see a need to further **strengthen the coordination mechanism** to deliver on what is needed to elevate water in the UN system.

In terms of concrete proposals, some Member States and stakeholders have brought very specific ideas to the table for consideration within the scope of ID E:

- Kazakhstan has put forward the establishment of a UN Water Organisation,
- Tajikistan announced its ambition to launch a 'Dushanbe Water Framework' through a possible negotiated outcome of the UN 2028 Water Conference,
- The European Union and its Member States are advocating for a strong, well-structured intergovernmental process on Water under a UN Mandate with regular UN Water Conferences and potential regional pre-dialogues
- IUCN has developed a detailed proposal for a new global water framework.

All of these initiatives are highly appreciated in so far as they underline the need for an improved global water governance as a common denominator.

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While a range of ideas has been put forward, a closer examination reveals greater convergence than may be evident at first glance. Across regions and stakeholder groups, there is **growing recognition of the need to strengthen coordination, political visibility, action-oriented accountability and implementation-oriented cooperation on water**. Although views differ on how these objectives should best be achieved, many contributions share a common concern: ensuring that water remains a political priority within the multilateral system and that progress on water-related commitments can be sustained beyond 2030. Consultations further suggest that **many of the proposals currently under discussion should be viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive**. Strengthening existing mechanisms, improving coordination across the UN system and exploring options for a more structured intergovernmental process on water may together constitute elements of a gradual and evolving approach towards stronger global water governance.

The discussions indicate **clear expectations that the 2026 UN Water Conference should deliver concrete outcomes**. Given the distinct mandates of the 2026 and 2028 UN Water Conferences, the kick-off of the post-2030 discussion at the SDG Summit in 2027 and the yet to be discussed overarching ambitions on sustainable development after 2030, many participants have stressed the importance of **taking tangible steps now rather than postponing key decisions**. A regular intergovernmental conference or forum on water under the UN (possibly with negotiated outcomes) would turn the current political momentum into advancing collective action (comparable to the UN Oceans Conference in the field of ocean governance). Such a platform beyond 2030 could deliver on two aspects in particular:

- (1) Independently from any broad post-2030 development framework, **water needs a comprehensive political process to enhance coherence and provide guidance within the multilateral space in line with the objectives of UN80 – now and beyond 2030**.
- (2) Existing and future multilateral objectives that directly and indirectly depend on the availability and quality of water resources, the health of societies, the health of ecosystems and their services, the resilience of societies and economies to climate change and extreme weather events, will require coordinated multilateral approaches and decision-making on water and sanitation to allow for their achievement and **efficient, appropriate and needs-based support to Member States**.

Once discussions on a post-2030 framework formally kick off, Member States will have to further shape their priorities for the role of water in any such post-2030 development. The 2026 UN Water Conference has the necessary mandate and the right timing to contribute relevant water findings **to the post-2030 debate with meaningful engagement and input also in the lead-up to the SDG Summit in 2027**.

Consultations have highlighted several areas of ambition for Interactive Dialogue E. These include:

- I. Advancing a clear commitment to a comprehensive and continuous intergovernmental process on water under the umbrella of the United Nations, consisting of regular

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- conferences and a follow-up process in between each conference on a time scale to be discussed and decided upon in a follow-up resolution in 2027;
- II. Preserving and, where appropriate, transferring the water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda into a post-2030 framework;
 - III. Strengthening the coherent integration of water as a cross-cutting enabler across relevant multilateral processes, including the Rio Conventions and other global policy frameworks.

Together, these efforts seek to ensure that water remains a visible political priority, supported by effective institutions, sustained dialogue, and coordinated action at all levels.

Taking everything into account so far, ID E will continue its work along key questions:

- What could be the concrete set-up for a continuous intergovernmental process on water post-2030?
- Which scope should conferences actually have to increase coordination and efficiency in multilateral decision-making and action on water, to foster mainstreaming of water into intergovernmental processes and action in other sectors and to deliver tangible results to accelerate action for people on the ground?
- Which structures are productive and allow for participation, whilst not increasing the bureaucratic and financial burden for the UN and its Member States alike?
- What can a continuous, effective stakeholder participation structure look like?
- Which role should the existing UN structures play?
- How to better link the water process with other multilateral processes?
- How could the 2028 UN Conference on the Final Comprehensive Review of the UN Water Action decade and other relevant UN Conferences be used to feed into the implementation of conclusions of the 2026 UN Water Conference in order to safeguard water coherence beyond 2030?

➔ Outlook and next steps within the preparatory phase for ID E

The coming six months will be crucial for advancing consultations under Interactive Dialogue E “Water in Multilateral Processes” and further refining options for strengthening global water governance. A **key milestone** will be the **High-level Political Forum (HLPF)**, which provides an important opportunity for Member States and stakeholders to engage with us, take stock of the state of implementation of SDG 6, and deepen discussions on pathways beyond 2030. Particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring meaningful stakeholder participation and incorporating diverse voices into the consultation process. To broaden engagement and allow for more inclusive participation following HLPF, a formal **online consultation** will be convened in July. This will provide an additional opportunity for Member States, stakeholders, experts, and practitioners to contribute views, identify areas of convergence, and submit additional input emerging from previous discussions. Building on these discussions, a second State of Play Report will be published in early autumn. It will reflect the evolution of consultations, capture new insights and areas of convergence, and help inform subsequent discussions at World Water Week in Stockholm, the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, and other milestones

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on the road to the 2026 UN Water Conference. Through this iterative process, Interactive Dialogue E aims to progressively build a shared understanding of practical and politically feasible pathways towards stronger, more coherent, and more accountable global water governance facilitating tangible local consequences.

Water in multilateral processes:
***Let us raise our water voice, let us join forces -
the time to deliver is now!***

Together. For Water.

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