United Nations | United Nations Water Conference
United Arab Emirates, 2026

RÉPUBLIQUE DU SÉNÉGAL
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ÉMIRATS ARABES UNIS

Bulletin

HIGH-LEVEL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE UN WATER CONFERENCE DAKAR

Monday January 26, 2026

Together for a Better Water Future

The Head of State, Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar Faye, is presiding over the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Water Conference in Dakar this Monday, January 26, 2026, at the CICAD. Following the 9th World Water Forum in March 2022, Senegal will provide a unique platform for stakeholders from around the world to develop a roadmap and launch discussions in preparation for the major event in Abu Dhabi in December 2026.

Focus

A decisive step

The high-level preparatory meeting in Dakar, which starts today, is of decisive importance. It should consolidate the content of the six interactive dialogues, align stakeholders' priorities with the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), drive the strategic directions and structure the draft political messages of the Conference. It will also be the starting point for a strong diplomatic dynamic from Dakar to United Arab Emirates , towards the Conference of December 2026.

To achieve this goal, Dakar will be the world capital of water for two days. All the actors who have a decisive role to play in ensuring that better access to water and sanitation is no longer a utopia. If the UN works for peace and development on different continents, it is obvious that access to water and sanitation must be at the top of the international agenda and multilateral processes. That is why, we must welcome the strong mobilization that will allow for collective and inclusive reflection so that Dakar is a decisive step towards the Conference and the achievement of SDG 6.

SITUATION REGARDING ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

URGENCY OF NEW CONCRETE ACTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

The high-level meeting in Dakar must provide an opportunity to mobilize the international community for concrete actions to reverse current trends

1. Global situation of access to drinking water and sanitation

Universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation remains a major global challenge, despite the progress made over the past two decades. According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), 2.1 billion people worldwide did not have safely managed drinking water services in 2024, of which more than 100 million were directly dependent on unimproved surface water sources (WHO & UNICEF, 2025).

In terms of sanitation, the situation remains even more worrying. The same report estimates that 3.4 billion people did not have access to safely managed sanitation services, of which approximately 354 million were still engaged in open defecation, exposing populations to major health risks (WHO & UNICEF, 2025). In addition, 1.7 billion people do not have basic hygiene facilities at home, compromising efforts to prevent waterborne and infectious diseases (UNICEF, 2025).

These deficits are marked by strong geographical and socio-economic inequalities. Populations living in least developed countries are more than twice as likely to be deprived of water and sanitation services than those in middle- or high-income countries, illustrating the deeply unequal access to essential services (UNICEF & WHO, 2025).

2. Progress and limitations in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6

Since the adoption of Agenda 2030, progress has been observed, notably an increase in global coverage of safely managed drinking water services from 68% in 2015 to about 74% in 2024 (UNICEF DATA, 2025). However, this progress remains insufficient to achieve the targets of SDG 6 by 2030, particularly with regard to sanitation and hygiene.

Disparities between urban and rural areas persist strongly. Rural areas still concentrate the majority of populations without access to essential services, highlighting the need for targeted policies and differentiated investments to reduce territorial inequalities (WHO & UNICEF, 2025). UN Water reports recall that, at the current pace, several countries will not achieve the objectives set without a significant acceleration of investments and institutional reforms (UN-Water, 2025).

3. Situation of access to water and sanitation in Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region lagging most behind in access to drinking water and sanitation. A significant proportion of the population still does not have access to safely managed services, which results in a high prevalence of waterborne diseases, including cholera, regularly reported during major epidemics on the continent (Reuters, 2025; UNICEF, 2025).

The main explanatory factors identified in the literature include rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, limited institutional capacity and increasing impacts of climate change, which exacerbate episodes of drought and flooding (UN-WATER, 2025). These structural constraints hinder the sustainable provision of water and sanitation services, particularly in informal urban areas and landlocked rural regions.

4. 4. Health, social and political issues

The lack of access to drinking water and sanitation is a major determinant of social and health inequalities. UNICEF and WHO reports show that the most vulnerable populations, children, women, and marginalized communities, are the most exposed to water-borne diseases, malnutrition, and preventable mortality (WHO & UNICEF, 2025).

International literature emphasizes the need for integrated approaches, based on human rights, evidence and climate resilience, to accelerate progress towards SDG 6. This includes strengthening sector governance, the mobilization of sustainable funding, technological innovation and increased involvement of local communities and civil society (UN-WATER, 2025).

Bibliographic references

- *OMS & UNICEF (2025). Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2024: Special focus on inequalities. Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP).*
- *UNICEF (2025). Fast facts: 1 in 4 people globally still lack access to safe drinking water. UNICEF Press Release.*
- *UNICEF DATA (2025). JMP Report 2025: Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.*
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CHEIKH TIDIANE DIÈYE, MINISTER OF HYDRAULICS AND SANITATION OF SENEGAL

«Produce concrete results through a holistic and transformative vision of the global water agenda 2030»

The United Nations Water Conference 2026 is part of the continuity of the global dynamic relaunched in 2023 in New York around the 2nd edition. It marks a decisive step leading the international community to go beyond declarative commitments to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) n° 6 and produce concrete results through a holistic and transformative vision of the global water agenda by 2030; which places water and sanitation at the heart of international development priorities in a sustainable manner.

It is in this spirit that the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in September 2024, the resolution defining the modalities of the 2026 Conference and entrusting Senegal and the United Arab Emirates with the co-organization.

The choice of our country to co-organize this world-class event with the United Arab Emirates is by no means coincidental. It enshrines Senegal's growing political role as a credible, committed and unifying actor in relation to water and sanitation issues.

Over the years, Senegal has demonstrated its ability to convey structuring messages and foster inclusive frameworks for dialogue, notably through the successful organization of the 9th World Water Forum in 2022 and the adoption of the Dakar Declaration which continues to feed international reflections on water security, peace, and sustainable development.

The co-organization of a United Nations Conference on such a vital issue as water offers increased international visibility, strengthens our diplomatic influence and constitutes an opportunity to accelerate public policies, attract investments and mobilize funding, notably in the sectors of water, sanitation and the environment.

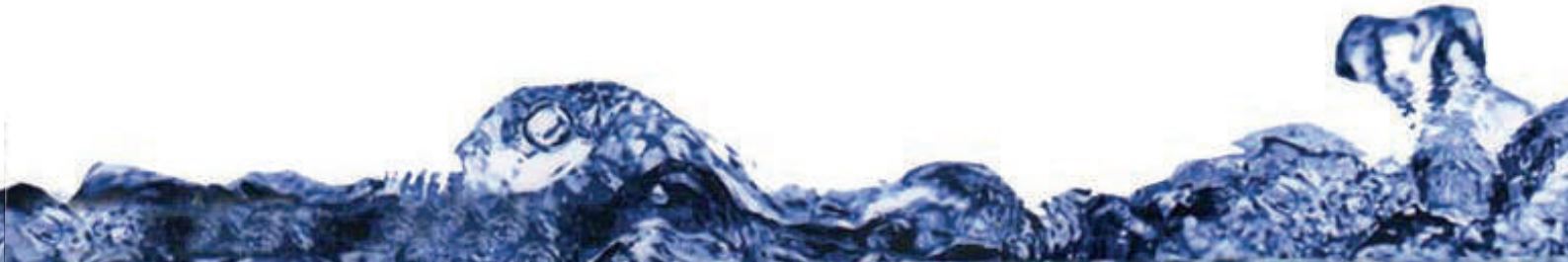
Thus, in view of our experience and engagement on the international scene, Senegal, alongside the United Arab Emirates, has conducted since May 2024 a year of intensive informal consultations, involving member states, entities of the United Nations system, the private sector, civil society and the academic world. These exchanges allowed to build a resolutely inclusive approach and to prepare the decisive formal steps of the process in New York.

The year 2025 was marked by two important milestones. The consultation session on 3 March gathered contributions from Member States on the themes of the interactive dialogues. Then, on 9 July, under the auspices of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, the six (06) themes of the interactive dialogues were adopted by consensus. These are: (1) water for people, (2) water for prosperity, (3) water for the planet, (4) water for cooperation, (5) water in multilateral processes and (6) investments for water.

In this continuity, a call for candidates was launched by the United Nations, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates to nominate the co-chairs of these dialogues. Each dialogue to be co-chaired by a developed and a developing country. This step is essential to structure the roadmap and ensure the political balance of the Conference.

It is in this context that the Dakar High-level Preparatory Meeting is of decisive importance. It should consolidate the content of the six (06) interactive dialogues, align stakeholders' priorities with the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), drive the strategic directions and structure the draft political messages of the Conference. It will also be the starting point for a strong diplomatic dynamic from Dakar to Abu Dhabi, towards the Conference of December 2026.

The 2026 United Nations Water Conference and the Dakar High-level Meeting offer Senegal a strategic opportunity to link its national priorities, African ambitions, and global dynamics.



STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE DAKAR MEETING

As the seminal pre-Conference event, the Dakar High-level Meeting will be a key moment to explore contributions to the preparatory process and co-create a shared ambition for the 2026 UN Water Conference.

Coming nearly one year in advance of the Conference, the Dakar High-Level Meeting will put in place the groundwork for the 2026 UN Water Conference. It will offer a unique and timely opportunity to build high-level political commitment, provide a foundation for action and partnerships, and initiate discussions on the six interactive dialogue themes.

The Dakar High-level Meeting will review the progress and the gaps in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 and exchange ideas to accelerate the achievement of the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The roadmap from Senegal to UAE is a year action that will build political momentum and deliver concrete wins for water. Each step of the journey makes a valuable contribution towards an impactful, action-oriented Conference that will deliver on its promise to accelerate implementation of SDG 6: ensure available and sustainably managed water and sanitation for all.

SIX HIGH-LEVEL INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

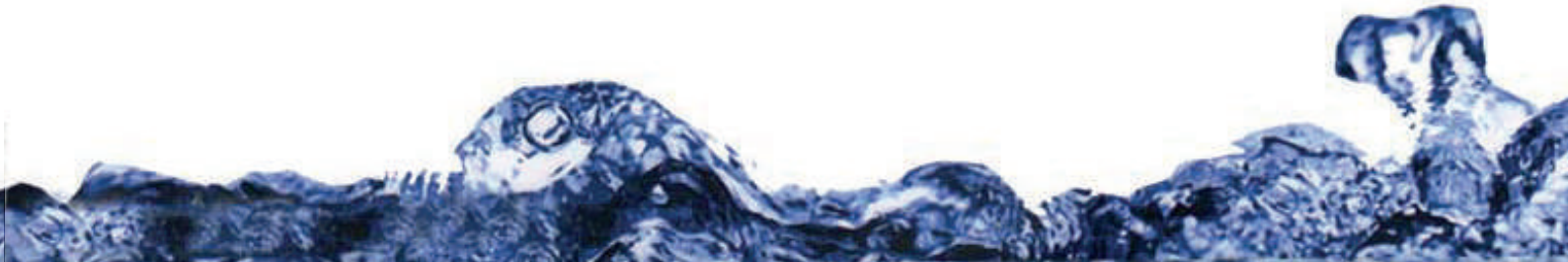
Roundtables to launch discussions on the six themes of the interactive dialogues will be organized. The purpose of these roundtables is to initiate discussions on the content, design and interconnections between the six interactive dialogues that will take place during the 2026 UN Water Conference.

The discussions will bring the contributions submitted during the consultation process by the States Members, the United Nations system and stakeholders, for think pieces, for each of the themes of the interactive dialogues of the Conference. From these contributions, the participants will actively contribute to the shaping of interactive dialogues for the Conference of the UN on water of 2026.

The six roundtable discussions will be chaired by the newly appointed co-chairs, represented at ministerial level, and will be organized in collaboration with the UN DESA and UN-WATER. The roundtables will build on relevant discussions held at the UN Water Conference from 2023 and on the latest data and information to examine the current situation, identify the major challenges and solutions, and make recommendations, taking into consideration the Framework of global acceleration of the achievement of SDG 6 and its five accelerators: funding, data and information, capacity development, innovation and governance. The discussions will place particular emphasis on actions aimed at accelerating progress in these respective areas. Participants will also have the opportunity to offer concrete suggestions on how to make the format of interactive dialogues more collaborative.

(a) Water for people

- Since 2015, real progress has been achieved. Nearly 1 billion people have gained access to safe water, and 1.2 billion to safe sanitation. (WHO/UNICEF, 2025)
- Despite the gains, a quarter of the global population - 2.1 billion people- still live without safe water and nearly half of humanity - 3.4 billion people - live without safe sanitation. We need to move eight times faster on drinking water and six times faster on sanitation to meet these targets. (WHO/UNICEF, 2025)
- Around the world, 77% of schools have a basic drinking water service in 2023, while 447 million children lacked a basic drinking water service at their school.
- Seven out of 10 women and girls aged 15 and older are mainly responsible for fetching water, compared to men and boys – placing them at risk of gender-based violence and undermining their health, education, and economic participation.
- Rural communities continue to lag significantly behind their urban counterparts, with access to basic WASH services often three times lower in rural areas.
- To ensure the enjoyment of the rights to water and sanitation by all, the needs of those furthest behind must be prioritized, including women, girls, persons with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, slum dwellers, asylum seekers, among others.
- Realizing the human rights to water and sanitation requires a shift in how we design and deliver services to achieve equitable distribution—placing people at the center, targeting inequality, and anchoring actions in legal obligations. When fulfilled, these rights serve as a powerful catalyst



for healthier communities, stronger economies, and more equitable societies. (SG Background Note, 2025)

- Universal access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is critical to global health. Achieving these targets would help save 829,000 lives annually, which is currently the number of people that die from diseases directly related to unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene practices. (United Nations, 2022)

(b) Water for prosperity

- Water can be more than a natural resource; it can create a foundation for prosperity. If managed sustainably, water can be a vehicle for growth, promote economic and social development, boost job creation, and increase urban- rural resilience.
- Economic sectors also play a key role in shaping water stress levels. Agriculture remains the dominant user of freshwater, accounting for 72% of total withdrawals in 2022, followed by industry (15%) and services (13%).
- The time has come to move beyond siloed interventions and build a water-resilient economy that considers the needs of all water users and utilizes synergies between them.
- Water is a fundamental driver of the world's agrifood systems. As the largest contributor to global freshwater withdrawals, the agricultural sector holds a key role in ensuring sustainable water management.
- Scaling innovations that address water efficiency challenges, such as water- resilient food systems and artificial intelligence-driven leak detection systems, can curb water losses and embed greater resilience in water management schemes.
- Recent global monitoring data on industrial wastewater highlights that industrial water users still discharge the majority of their effluent untreated. The limited number of countries reporting on SDG 6.3.1, which represent 8% of the world's population, safely treat only 27 % of industrial wastewater. This shortfall exemplifies the challenges still faced by ecosystems and downstream water users.
- There are clear opportunities to scale innovative technologies to diversify water supplies by utilizing safe water reuse and decentralized water treatment systems. Potable and non- potable reuse schemes can unlock the value of treated wastewater, creating new value chains in water, nutrient, and resource recovery, alongside easing pressure on conventional water sources.

(c) Water for planet

- Water solutions are central to tackling global climate, biodiversity, desertification, and environment-related challenges and to building resilient societies and economies. As water is the primary medium through which people experience climate change, the use and effective management of water resources, including groundwater, are fundamental for climate adaptation as well as to manage increased risks from floods, droughts, sea-level rise and accelerated glacier melt.
- Nine out of ten disasters triggered by natural hazards during the last decade were water- related. The scale and cost of water-related disasters continue to grow, causing significant losses and damages to people, nature, economic assets and infrastructure. Universal early warning systems, with prioritization for least developed countries and small island developing states, are essential.

For example, nearly 95% of infrastructure loss from 2010 to 2019 was linked to water-related disasters, over 3 billion people were affected by droughts and floods since 2000, and current costs of droughts are estimated to exceed $307 billion annually.

Since 1970, 83 per cent of freshwater species populations have declined, and 25 per cent of freshwater fish species are at risk of extinction. As of 2024, 50 per cent of countries reported one or more degraded water-related ecosystem types. Loss of permanent surface water in 364 river basins driven by a combination of human activities, such as unsustainable water use and land conversion, as well as climate change-induced droughts has impacted over 93 million people. (SDG Report 2025)

Integrated water resources management provides an actionable framework to balance competing water demands across sectors such as agriculture, energy and forestry. Sustainable land-use management and healthy soils are essential for enhancing climate resilience, protecting biodiversity, preventing desertification, and supporting ecosystems from source to sea.

- Strengthening intergovernmental coordination across climate, water, biodiversity, and desertification processes, can help drive coherent action, including at the country level through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and other national strategies.

- Financing remains a major challenge where global investment needs range from $6.7 trillion by 2030 to $22.6 trillion by 2050 to meet SDG 6 targets water-related climate finance remains limited, representing about 3% of total climate finance. Addressing this gap will require leveraging funding streams across sectors and clearly articulating the multiple co-benefits of water investments.

(d) Water for Cooperation

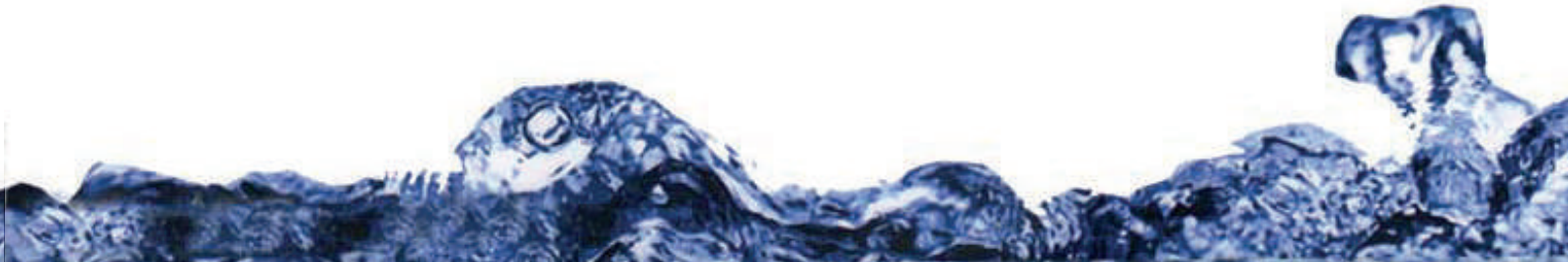
- Water has the capacity to unite and act as a driver of peace, sustainable development, climate action and regional integration. Even in times of severe water scarcity, cooperation on surface waters and groundwaters has been a game changer and countries have demonstrated an ability to collaborate based on international water law principles in order to find and implement mutually beneficial solutions.

- Water cooperation generates economic, social, environmental and political benefits, such as improved agricultural output, hydropower production, flood protection, and access to clean water and sanitation. Cooperation should also involve water-related sectors such as energy, agriculture, health, and environment. It is necessary to link water to other sectors following an integrated water resources management approach.

- Water cooperation relies on wide-ranging multi-stakeholder engagements and partnerships, including with civil society, concerned populations, local communities, the private sector, women and youth. Water should be a priority in bilateral and multilateral cooperation at all levels.

- Science, data and knowledge exchange are essential to underpin cooperation: more investments in the knowledge base and scientific cooperation are needed. Advancing water cooperation and governance demands capacity-building at all levels (international, regional, national, and local) to reach agreements and manage water's complex cross-sectoral ties.

- Transboundary waters account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows. More than 3 billion people worldwide depend on transboundary water resources. While there has been some progress, among the 153 UN



Member States with transboundary waters, only 43 have operational agreements that cover 90% or more of their shared rivers, lakes and aquifers, and at least 20 countries lack any such arrangements. (UNECE, UNESCO and UN-Water, 2024. Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Mid-term status of SDG Indicator 6.5.2, with a special focus on Climate Change – 2024)

- The two global UN water conventions are essential tools for supporting cooperation based on the fundamental principles of customary international law. More countries should accede to and implement the UN water conventions.

- River, lake and aquifer basin organizations are veritable agents of peace and need to be strengthened or set up where they are lacking. It is crucial to strengthen basin organizations and support their efforts towards inclusive, sustainable, and integrated water resource management, by promoting information exchange, experiences, and best practices.

Cooperation on groundwater is especially lagging behind. Given the importance of groundwater for tackling growing water scarcity and sustaining biodiversity, establishing cooperation mechanisms or expanding existing ones on groundwater is crucial.

Cooperation needs to be linked to major sources of public and blended finance so that joint projects and partnerships can move rapidly from plan to implementation.

(e) Water in multilateral processes

- As humanity's most precious resource, water unites us all. It must be at the center of the global political agenda.

- Water is a key integrating element, reaching water and sanitation targets impacts progress across all SDGs. With SDG 6 off-track, there is an urgent need to identify effective implementation pathways. Evidence-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will enhance learning and accountability in advancing the global water agenda.

- Nearly 50 years after the first UN Water Conference, the UN 2023 Water Conference reignited global attention and led to mandates for the 2026 UN Water Conference on SDG 6 and the 2028 Final Comprehensive Review Conference on the Water Action Decade. Yet, this resurgence occurs within a volatile multilateral landscape. The challenge now is to maintain the positive momentum generated in 2023 and to sustain a meaningful global water dialogue and action.

- There is a growing prioritization to embed water within intergovernmental processes, as demonstrated by the integration of water-related considerations in the Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD), UNEA and other global events. Despite progress, water issues are less visible in other UN processes such as the Summit of the Future, Financing for Development Conference and the UN Food Systems Summit.

- With only five years left in the 2030 Agenda, how can water feature in global processes up to and beyond 2030? This is a key time to consider the future of water dialogues and action. This discussion will set the foundation for the next UN Water Conference in 2028 and other multilateral processes and milestones leading up to and beyond 2030 such as the Pact for the Future and the 2027 SDG Summit.

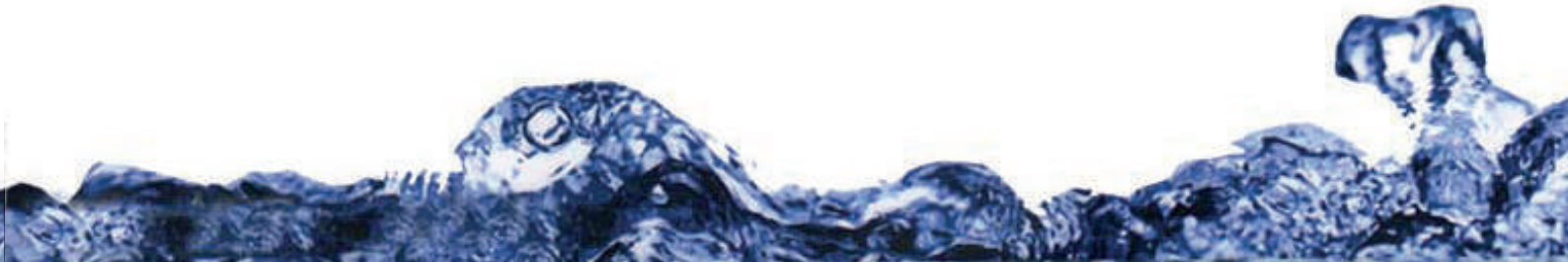
(f) Investments for water

Financing and investments for water remains a significant challenge.

- According to the World Bank, the global water investment gap is estimated at US$6.7 trillion through 2030.
- As of late 2024, only 8.9% of total official development assistance was allocated to water supply and sanitation sectors, according to the OECD.
- The UN-Water GLAAS 2024 report found that only 25% of responding countries reported having sufficient human and financial resources to fully implement their national WASH Plans.

- Investing in water and sanitation is not solely about increasing financial resources; it entails a comprehensive approach that includes tools, technologies, institutional capacity, policy instruments, and partnerships. These investments not only serve human needs but also generate long-term broad economic and social benefits, including job creation, climate resilience, and improved health outcomes.
- Delivering global water-related goals, including SDG 6, requires a robust enabling environment, as articulated in the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. This includes not only sufficient and accessible financing but also timely, disaggregated data and information systems, cutting-edge technology and innovation, strengthened institutional and human capacities, and inclusive and effective governance for accelerating progress.

- Private sector participation in the water sector is considerably low. According to the World Bank Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) Database, US$3.2 billion in new water sector public-private partnerships (PPPs) were registered globally in 2023, up from US$2.7 billion in 2022.35 However, private sector participation remains modest overall—estimated at less than 2% of total investment in the water sector—highlighting a persistent under-leveraging of private capital.
- Mobilizing innovative financing models, such as blended finance, outcome-based funding, and water bonds, can help close the funding gap. In the context of diminishing ODA, strengthening domestic resource mobilization will also be essential to ensure sustained financing for water and sanitation services.
- Leveraging digital innovation - e.g., AI, big data, blockchain- for real-time water monitoring and predictive management is an opportunity.
- Scaling up capacity development through collaborative international efforts—including South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation—via online learning platforms, and regional centers of excellence is needed. Strengthening partnerships across sectors and borders will be key to aligning finance, technology, and skills.



Conference Agenda

Time	DAY 1 – 26 January 2026	DAY 2 – 27 January 2026
08:00 – 09:00	Arrival of participants and registration	Parallel meetings – Dialogue Space [3]
09:00 – 12:30	High-level Opening Session - Arrival of dignitaries - Opening ceremony - High-level roundtable - Presentation: Vision, objectives and agenda - Launch of the UN-Water GLAAS 2025 Report	Roundtables launching discussions on the six themes (e) & (f) ID (e): Water in multilateral processes
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch Parallel meetings – Dialogue Space [1]	Coffee break and networking
14:00 – 15:30	Roundtables launching discussions (a) to (d) ID (a): Water for people ID (b): Water for prosperity	ID (f): Investments for water
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break and networking	Lunch Parallel meetings – Dialogue Space [4]
16:00 – 18:30	ID (c): Water for the planet ID (d): Water for cooperation Interactive Session 1 (60 min) Strengthening multistakeholder, inter-sectoral and intergenerational engage-ment Parallel meetings – Dialogue Space [2]	Interactive Session 2 (90 min) - Report-back and reflections - Creating a shared atmosphere for the 2026 UN Water Conference
18:30 – 19:30		High-level Session On the road from Senegal to the United Arab Emirates - Synthesis of outcomes - Roadmap and conclusions Press Conference