Region Concept Note: Americas

Regional Process, 11th World Water Forum

- **Region: Americas**
- **Sub-region(s):**
    - **South America**
    - **North America,**
    - **Central America and Caribbean**
- **Regional Coordinators: Latin American Water Council and Development Bank for Latin America and the Caribbean**

I. Regional Water Context

Rationale and Context

The Americas region holds approximately 31% of the world's freshwater resources, but distribution is highly unequal across countries and basins.

- **Socio-economic Context:** The region is highly urbanized, with over 80% of the population living in cities, placing immense pressure on aging water infrastructure.
- **Sub-Regional Water Realities & Availability:**
    - *North America:* Characterized by highly industrialized water management systems facing intense structural drought in western basins (e.g., Colorado River), requiring complex demand-side economic modeling and infrastructure modernization.
    - *Central America and the Caribbean:* Highly vulnerable to climate shocks. The Central American Dry Corridor faces chronic, multi-year water scarcity driving migration, while Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) suffer from acute freshwater lens vulnerability, saltwater intrusion, and catastrophic hurricane impacts.
    - *South America:* Driven by macro-basins (Amazon, Plata, Orinoco, Magdalena) that provide vast volumes of water, contrasted against acute sub-regional stress points like accelerated glacier retreat in the tropical Andes and localized, prolonged droughts in the Southern Cone.
- **Water usage:** The agricultural sector is the primary consumer (70%), followed by domestic use (20%) and industrial use (10%).
- **Coverage gaps:** While global data indicates 86% of populations have basic access, severe disparities persist. Peri-urban informal settlements and remote rural communities lag

significantly behind, where access to safely managed, legally compliant services remains an ongoing developmental challenge.

- **Groundwater dependence:** Aquifers are essential for agricultural irrigation, the periphery of major cities, and rural supply networks. However, they are increasingly threatened by unregulated over-extraction, agricultural runoff, and industrial pollution.
- **Climate Impacts:** The region is highly vulnerable to extreme events, including intensified prolonged droughts, and severe flooding in the Southern Cone and hurricanes in the Caribbean, which threaten water security.
- **Transboundary dynamics:** Over 70 shared river basins and highly complex transboundary aquifers (e.g., the Guaraní Aquifer, the Amazon Basin) require strengthened international cooperation and joint management frameworks and collaborative management institutions.

Key Drivers and Systemic Pressures Shaping Water Security

- **Hydro-climatic Variability:** Accelerated glacier retreat in the Andes disrupts seasonal water cycles for millions. This intensifies the need to mobilize blended finance for climate-resilient water storage infrastructure, distribution network maintenance, and the scaling of reclaimed water/wastewater reuse.
- **Demographic Transitions:** Rapid urban expansion outpaces municipal planning, exponentially increasing inter-sectoral competition for raw water allocations between agriculture, human consumption, and energy generation.
- **Pollution and public health:** Insufficient municipal and industrial wastewater treatment degrades urban rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. This creates severe ecological crises and systemic public health risks.
- **Ecosystem Degradation**: Continued deforestation and wetland conversion demand the rapid recovery of critical source watersheds through the deployment of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) and green infrastructure.
- **Digitalization and tech. gaps:** Inequitable access to digital monitoring systems limits real-time data collection. Scaling up telemetry, remote sensing, and smart-metering is vital for efficient agricultural irrigation and reducing Non-Revenue Water (NRW) in municipal networks
- **Governance and Finance:** Fragmented regulatory frameworks, a lack of inter-institutional coordination at the river basin level, and deep capital investment gaps hinder the achievement of universal water and sanitation coverage (SDG 6).

II. Key Regional Issues, Opportunities, and Priorities

Key Regional Challenges

- **Water Scarcity & allocation:** Optimizing demand-side management, modernizing irrigation systems, and enforcing fair allocation mechanisms in water-stressed economic zones.
- **Sanitation Quality:** Bridging the "safely managed" sanitation gap and eliminating untreated discharges and restoring damaged aquatic ecosystems.
- **Climate Resilience:** Embedding comprehensive disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies into national macroeconomic planning to mitigate the economic losses caused by floods and droughts.
- **Institutional Governance:** Reducing institutional fragmentation, clarifying mandates between environmental ministries and water utilities, and securing long-term capital financing.
- **Data Deficits:** Expanding and modernizing hydrometeorological stations to ensure open-access, high-quality, and reliable data for climate modeling.
- **Infrastructure Finance gaps:** Mobilizing international climate funds, national budgets, and private sector equity. Current fiscal budgets are insufficient to meet SDG 6 targets.
- **Scaling innovation**: Overcoming regulatory barriers to scale up proven Nature-Based Solutions (NbS), such as upstream forest conservation for downstream urban watershed protection.

While the main regional challenges are outlined above, each of the three American subregions faces distinct issues that can foster horizontal cooperation both within the subregions and with other regions.

The following additional challenges listed below will enable a more comprehensive regional diagnosis:

- **Urban water security**: not only in agricultural areas. Cities such as Bogotá, Mexico City, Lima, Montevideo or São Paulo show that scarcity is also an urban problem, associated with population growth, aging infrastructure, water losses and dependence on vulnerable sources.
- **Equity and affordability:** Significant gaps in water and sanitation services remain, primarily affecting rural areas, urban fringes, indigenous populations, and vulnerable socioeconomic groups. Current data from the World Bank indicates that millions of people in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to lack access to safe water and sanitation, highlighting a critical challenge for regional development and social equity.
- **Water allocation conflicts and nexus dynamics:** The management of water resources in Latin America is increasingly defined by competing interests, including agriculture, human consumption, mining, hydropower, and urban development, all while balancing environmental integrity. A defining paradox of the region is that its significant aggregate water availability masks profound spatial inequalities and intense, site-specific conflicts over resource allocation.

Proposed Regional Priorities

- **Priority 1: Accelerating universal access to safely managed water and sanitation (SDG 6):** Strengthening the operational efficiency of public, private, and community-managed utilities through innovative regulatory frameworks, national subsidies, and transparent public-private partnerships (PPPs) to address underinvestment, fiscal sustainability, tariffs, subsidies, and climate finance, highlighting that financing is a key regional priority.
- **Priority 2: Water quality and pollution control:** Accelerate the expansion of safely managed sanitation services to restore and preserve the water quality of regional aquatic ecosystems. This priority focuses on mitigating agricultural runoff, mining effluents, and industrial discharges through the systematic identification, enforcement, and monitoring of targeted watershed protection measures.
- **Priority 3: Enhancing Climate Adaptation through Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM:** Enhancing regional climate adaptation through increased water storage in reservoirs and integrated water resource management, by improving monitoring, completing cadastral information, water loss measurement, aquifer information and early warning systems.
- **Priority 4: Driving Regional Socio-Economic Integration through Water Cooperation:** Leveraging shared river basins and aquifers as non-political catalysts for economic cooperation, technical exchange, and joint cross-border investments.

III. Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

- **Policy and Strategic:** A "Regional Water Manifesto" providing consensus-based messages for the Forum's Political Declaration. However, its implementation requires formal government endorsement; therefore, country-level commitments must be channeled through subregional systems such as the Central American Integration System (SICA) to secure the necessary subregional institutional approval.
- **Technical and Knowledge:** Synthesis reports on best practices for circular economy and technology innovation in the regional water sector.
- **Partnerships and Financing:** Creating innovative financing mechanisms involving development banks and the private sector investors to accelerate the achievement of SDG 6 through community management models and strengthening water operators.
- **Actions and Initiatives:** Launch of a sub-regional pilot program for community-led water management in rural areas and implement adaptation plans to recover critical basins to ensure the provision of sustainable ecosystem services that integrate disaster risk management into water planning.
- **Communication:** A high-visibility digital campaign highlighting Americas-specific water solutions to a global audience.

IV. Proposed Cross-Process and Inter-Regional Collaboration

Operationalizing Thematic and Political Linkages

- **Water for Prosperity Track (Municipal & Utility Focus):** This track will be made operational by connecting macro-level economic policies directly to municipal actions. In collaboration with regional associations of local authorities, a *"Mayors' Water Prosperity Toolkit"* will be developed. This toolkit will provide local governments with actionable templates for upgrading water infrastructure, implementing transparent tariff structures, and launching urban circular economy initiatives (such as sludge-to-fertilizer systems).
- **Political Process Track (Policy-Facing Outputs):** Establishing formal channels to brief regional legislative bodies, environment ministries, and municipal leaders. This ensures that the *Regional Water Joint Statement of Principles* is directly integrated into local urban zoning laws, public investment portfolios, and national climate change adaptation plans (NDCs).

Inter-Regional Dialogue & Global Relevance

- **Inter-Regional Collaboration (Africa & Mediterranean):** Establishing a structured South-South and Triangular cooperation framework. Bi-annual knowledge exchanges will focus on shared technical challenges, including:
    - *Desalination and Arid-Zone Management:* Sharing North American and Chilean desalination regulatory frameworks with Mediterranean counterparts.
    - *Transboundary Aquifer Governance:* Exporting the technical and legal lessons of the Guaraní Aquifer framework to North African and Middle Eastern transboundary water initiatives.

- **Transferable Global Value of the Americas' Experience:** The region offers unique, battle-tested models that can add clear value to global water security discussions:
    - *Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):* Successful models from Central and South America offer a global blueprint for funding upstream watershed conservation through downstream utility revenues.
    - *Decentralized Community Management:* The formal integration of community water boards (*ASADAS/JAAS*) into national regulatory frameworks provides a highly scalable model for Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to bridge the rural water service gap.
    - *Leveraging Transboundary Water Cooperation for Regional Integration***:** The Americas offer a robust, battle-tested framework for transforming shared water challenges into catalysts for socio-economic stability and regional integration, pivoting away from traditional global conflict narratives. A prime example of this can be found in Central America, where despite 40% of its river basins being

transboundary and facing severe pressures from localized pollution and climate vulnerability, the sub-region's geopolitical history is defined by institutional cooperation rather than hostility. Decades of successful multilateral governance—exemplified by the long-standing **Trifinio Plan** (spanning El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) and the joint **Sixaola River Basin Commission** (between Costa Rica and Panama)—provide scalable, global models. These initiatives demonstrate how institutionalized transboundary frameworks can prioritize proactive ecological management, shared economic development, and collaborative diplomacy over the mere remediation of water-related disputes, offering valuable blueprints for arid and politically sensitive regions worldwide.

V. Monitoring, Legacy, and Post-Forum Follow-up

To ensure the continuity and impact of the Forum's outcomes, a tracking mechanism should be established to follow up its recommendations, mirroring the methodological rigor applied by the Global Water Partnership (GWP) to the 33 criteria of SDG 6.5.1 indicator, which measures the degree of implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Implementing a structured follow-up framework will facilitate the systematic monitoring and assessment of progress regarding regional commitments.

- **Legacy:** Establishing a regional monitoring platform to track the implementation of the commitments agreed at the World Water Forum until 2030, using measurable indicators on SDG 6 access, climate resilience, financing, water quality, data systems and transboundary cooperation.
- **Governance and Accountability**: Creating a clear reporting mechanism with designated institutional responsibilities, periodic progress reports, independent technical validation and public disclosure of results.
- **Follow-up:** Aligning Forum outcomes with the regional agendas of the Organization of American States (OAS) , the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Development Bank oy Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF), Central America Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), national governments, regulators, utilities, basin authorities and subnational governments.
- **Future Planning:** Using the Americas Regional Report as a baseline for the 11th World Water Forum process and as a living reference for future regional preparations toward the 12th World Water Forum.