

[TOPIC COORDINATORS]

Topic Concept Note Template **Thematic Process, 11th World Water Forum**

- **Theme Number: 4**
- **Theme Title: Water Governance and Diplomacy**
- **Topic Number: 4B**
- **Topic Title: Strengthening Political Will and Coordination**

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I. Topic Overview

Context

Global water pressures are intensifying. Water demand is projected to increase by more than 20% by 2050, while exposure to water stress could rise by over 40%, affecting an additional one billion people. These trends are compounded by profound inequalities in access to water and sanitation across regions, urban and rural areas, and people, with vulnerable and marginalized populations facing disproportionate barriers due to several reasons, such as discrimination, conflicts and climate crisis, lack of humanitarian funds and response capacity, affordability constraints, and geographic isolation.

International momentum

Since the 2023 UN Water Conference, water has regained strong political visibility on the international agenda. This renewed momentum is reflected in a series of milestones, including the UN System-wide Strategy on Water (July 2024), the Pact for the Future (September 2024), the One Water Summit (December 2024), and the Declaration on Water for Climate Action adopted at COP29 (November 2024, Baku), which launched the Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action. Initiatives such as the WASH Roadmap Call to Action, renewed in July 2025, have further

reinforced attention to humanitarian and fragile contexts, while COP30 (November 2025, Belém) underscored the need for integrated approaches connecting water, land use, infrastructure, disaster risk management and long-term climate strategies.

SDG 6 status

Despite this momentum, none of the SDG 6 targets are currently on track. If current trends persist, around two billion people will still lack access to safely managed drinking water by 2030. Achieving SDG 6 will require substantial investment, with new water and sanitation infrastructure alone estimated to cost around USD 114 billion per year by 2030, excluding operation and maintenance costs.

Key challenges

Beyond financing gaps, a central challenge lies in translating global commitments into concrete, place-based action. Local authorities play a pivotal role in water service delivery, land-use planning and risk management, yet often operate within fragmented governance systems and face limited financial, technical and institutional capacity.

Expected solutions

Multi-level governance, with a strong emphasis on place-based responses, is essential to translate global commitments into local action by aligning national policies with local priorities, strengthening local authorities, and ensuring coordination across sectors and scales, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts. Informed policy-making and implementation through data require robust and interoperable information systems, improved indicators capturing blue and green water use, aquifer sustainability and reuse, and greater consideration of virtual water flows in international trade, enabling evidence-based decisions and stronger accountability. Diplomacy and peace are equally critical, as water diplomacy can bridge science and policy, build trust, and support cooperation on transboundary and climate-related water risks, while contributing to stability and coherence across development, humanitarian and peace agendas and in alignment with existing international water agreements that account for evolving blue and green water hydrology under climate change, encouraging broader riparian accession.

Objectives of the Topic

Technical Objectives

- **Operationalize integrated, place-based water governance frameworks:** Support the design and implementation of integrated water management frameworks at city, regional and basin levels, ensuring coherence between water allocation, service provision, land-use planning, climate adaptation, disaster risk management and ecosystem protection, with systematic integration of gender and community considerations.
- **Promote integration of water professionals in strategic planning** and overall decision making in political and business communities, thereby placing “water” centrally and on top of agenda in all developmental / sustainability debates.
- **Strengthen water data systems, indicators and decision-support tools:** Enhance the use of harmonized data, SDG 6 monitoring frameworks, advanced indicators (including blue and green water use and aquifer sustainability), water insecurity analysis, and digital tools to improve water risk assessment, performance monitoring, decision-support and local implementation. Advocate for the inclusion of "Green Water" and total water storage in transboundary cooperation agreements to ensure a fairer assessment of water availability and equitable utilization between upstream and downstream states.
- **Integrate climate foresight and adaptive decision-making into water planning:** Develop and apply scenario-based prospective analyses incorporating blue and green water dynamics and hydrological shifts due to climate change on water availability and demand under climate change, and embed adaptive, flexible and non-regret decision-making approaches to avoid lock-ins and maladaptive infrastructure and policy choices.
- **Scale up implementation through innovation and investment-ready solutions:** Identify, test and deploy technical solutions and bankable projects—such as water reuse, desalination, digital water management and efficiency measures—supported by enabling policies, institutional coordination and financing mechanisms.

Policy and institutional objectives

- **Strengthen multi-level water governance and accountability:** Clarify roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms across national, regional, local and basin authorities to enable effective and coordinated water management, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts.
- **Enhance policy coherence and cross-sectoral coordination:** Improve alignment across water, energy, agriculture, urban development, climate and humanitarian policies, ensuring coherence between development objectives, emergency response and long-term resilience.
- **Translate global commitments into actionable policy and financing roadmaps:** Support the conversion of international commitments into concrete policies, regulatory frameworks and implementable plans at local and basin levels, including clear political and financial pathways and the systematic integration and prioritisation of humanitarian WASH needs.
- **Strengthen water diplomacy and transboundary cooperation:** Reinforce political dialogue, institutional coordination and cooperative mechanisms including notification and consultation drawn from existing international frameworks, for the sustainable and peaceful management of shared and transboundary water resources, considering climate and other humanitarian risks (such as conflict and displacement). Foster high-level dialogue on interpreting and operationalizing international water conventions (e.g., 1992 Helsinki, 1997 UN Convention) to explicitly address climate change adaptation, ensuring legal frameworks are responsive to hydrological variability and extreme events.
- **Embed science, data and inclusive dialogue in decision-making:** Strengthen the integration of scientific evidence, data, indicators and technical expertise into decision-making processes, while fostering trust-building and policy coherence through structured exchange among policymakers, humanitarian and development actors, experts, civil society, media and international organisations.

Capacity-building and knowledge objectives

- **Strengthen local institutional and operational capacity:** Enhance the

institutional, technical and financial capacities of local authorities, utilities and basin organisations to plan, finance, operate and maintain water infrastructure and services.

- **Foster peer Learning and knowledge exchange:** Foster peer learning, knowledge exchange and dissemination of good practices across cities, regions and countries facing similar water challenges.
- **Bridge Science, policy and practice:** By promoting co-produced knowledge, stakeholder engagement and inclusive decision-making, enabling local actors to effectively deliver sustainable water outcomes and contribute to climate resilience, sustainable cities and ecosystem protection. Enhance the scope of analysis of roles women play, and could play, in management and planning of water resources, with the aim of increasing their participation in water planning and management.
- **Build capacity in water diplomacy and conflict management:** By equipping national institutions and basin organisations with the legal, technical and analytical skills needed to engage effectively in transboundary water cooperation and negotiations, while promoting equitable participation among all riparian countries.

II. Key Issues, Opportunities, and Scope

Key Challenges

- **Weak governance, coordination and integrity:** Fragmented governance structures, institutional and regulatory weaknesses, poor coordination across sectors and levels, limited accountability, corruption risks, and low trust among partners undermine effective water management.
- **Insufficient political commitment and leadership:** Inadequate and inconsistent political commitment limits the sustainability of long-term water reforms and the delivery of shared objectives.
- **Data, knowledge and evidence gaps:** Persistent data gaps, limited interoperability, and insufficient integration of scientific evidence into decision-making hinder effective planning, risk assessment and policy implementation.
- **Financing and capacity constraints:** Inadequate, misaligned and insufficient

financing, combined with capacity gaps, affects both development investments and humanitarian WASH responses, particularly in contexts of conflict, displacement and climate crises. Many River Basin Organizations (RBOs) lack the financial and technical mandates to translate political commitments into adaptive, science-based management plans.

- Rising climate pressures and limited innovation uptake: Increasing climate-related risks (droughts, floods and transboundary tensions), coupled with limited access to technology and innovation, constrain adaptation and resilience opportunities while current international agreements could gain effectiveness by explicitly addressing blue and green water hydrological changes, thereby supporting wider riparian accession.

Opportunities and Strategic Importance

- Reinforcing political dialogue and multi-level coherence: Use inclusive political and technical dialogue platforms to strengthen political will, enhance coherence across sectors and governance levels, and support coordinated national, regional and transboundary implementation including updating existing international water agreements to reflect climate-driven hydrological changes and encouraging broader riparian accession.
- Leveraging renewed global political momentum on water and climate to drive national and local action.
- Integrating water, climate and disaster risk agendas: Advance collaboration across water, climate adaptation, biodiversity and disaster risk management communities to build shared frameworks, joint financing approaches and integrated policy responses, increasing political momentum, efficiency and impact.
- Prioritizing support for populations in need of humanitarian water and sanitation services, while strengthening links between emergency response, development planning and peacebuilding objectives.
- Harnessing digital tools, open data platforms and innovative technologies to improve transparency, accountability and decision-making, and to enable better monitoring, coordination and scaling of water solutions across governance levels.

Proposed Priorities of the Topic / Guiding Questions

- Evolution of water governance and political will (last 10 years)
 - How has water governance evolved over the past decade in terms of political prioritization, institutional arrangements, financing, and integration with climate, disaster risk and humanitarian agendas?
 - How can political will for water governance be better assessed, monitored and shared beyond existing reporting mechanisms, including through improved data transparency and coordination among development and humanitarian actors?
- Sustaining political commitment and accountability
 - What are the main governance and political economy barriers to sustaining political commitment for water reforms over time, including across electoral cycles?
 - How can accountability and integrity mechanisms be strengthened to ensure transparent, results-oriented and corruption-resistant water and sanitation governance, particularly in contexts with weaker institutional systems?
- Translating global commitments into local implementation
 - What coordination mechanisms are most effective in translating global water, climate resilience and humanitarian commitments into coherent national, basin and local action?
 - How can coordination across ministries, sectors and levels of government be strengthened to ensure effective and inclusive policy implementation?
- Evidence-based and innovative governance
 - How can scientific evidence, data, digital tools and innovation be more systematically integrated into political and strategic water decision-making to improve trust, transparency and cooperation?
 - How can data sharing and interoperable information systems support better risk management, performance monitoring and adaptive governance?

- How can we strengthen political will to harmonize national hydrological data with global monitoring standards to support science-based diplomacy?
- Cooperation and peace
 - How can transboundary and regional water governance frameworks contribute to peace, climate resilience and equitable development?
 - How can inclusive political and technical dialogue platforms better bridge scientific knowledge and policy formulation, support trust-building among stakeholders, and enable coordinated responses to shared water risks?
 - How can inclusive political and technical dialogue platforms encourage wider accession to existing international water agreements while integrating climate and blue/green water hydrological considerations?

Proposed Sessions of the Topic

Session 1 – Water Governance: Lessons from the past decade and priorities for the future

This session will take stock of how water governance has evolved over the last 10 years at national, regional and local levels, drawing on evidence such as the OECD Principles on Water Governance and country experiences. It will examine changes in political prioritization, institutional arrangements, financing and accountability, and identify what is needed for effective, efficient and inclusive water governance to address future water risks.

Session 2 – From Global Commitments to Results

This session will assess progress and gaps in global water commitments up to 2030 and beyond, focusing on governance, political support and financing. It will explore how accountability frameworks, indicators and monitoring tools can be strengthened to better capture governance performance, resource scarcity and

service delivery outcomes, and how political commitment can be sustained over time.

Session 3- Modernizing Transboundary Water Governance: Bridging Climate Science, Water Diplomacy, and Integrated Water Management

Focusing on regional and transboundary water systems and robust scientific evidence, this session will explore how political dialogue, water diplomacy, mutual trust, and effective institutional coordination can strengthen cooperation, prevent disputes, and enhance climate resilience. The session will emphasize practical and basin-specific cooperation mechanisms, including joint data generation and exchange, adaptive and integrated water management approaches, and institutional capacity-building. Discussions will highlight flexible, and incremental cooperation approaches that support confidence-building and translate shared regional objectives into coordinated and sustainable action on the ground.

1. III. Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

Policy and Strategic Outcomes

- A concise memorandum translating political commitments into prioritized financial, technical and humanitarian WASH actions, aligned with post-2030 priorities.
- Evidence-based guidance, tools and case studies to support integrated, cross-sector water governance and informed decision-making.
- Strengthened collaboration leading to innovative financing approaches and a pipeline of investment-ready water projects.
- Launch or scaling of basin-level, local and community-driven pilot initiatives demonstrating integrated governance and innovation adoption.
- Concrete recommendations to strengthen water integrity and accountability, including guidance on aligning current international agreements with climate and hydrological realities to support broader riparian engagement.
- Guidance on managing the water footprint and regulation of AI use.
- Policy Brief on "Climate-Ready Water Law": A strategic document recommending interpretative guidelines for applying UN Water Conventions in the context of climate change, specifically addressing flow variability and drought management.

- **Climate-Responsive Water Diplomacy" Manifesto:** A strategic declaration calling for the explicit integration of climate adaptation metrics—such as drought resilience and flood management—into future and existing transboundary water agreements, ensuring they remain robust against hydrological variability.
- **Policy Framework for Downstream Security:** A set of recommendations to strengthen international legal protections for downstream states, defining mechanisms to prevent significant harm from unilateral upstream infrastructure development in the absence of prior consensus.
- **Roadmap for Harmonizing National and International Water Laws:** A strategic pathway for States Parties to align their domestic legislation with global conventions (e.g., UN 1997, Helsinki 1992), ensuring that national mandates support, rather than hinder, transboundary cooperation and data sharing.

Technical and Knowledge Deliverables

- Policy briefs, governance frameworks and technical notes supporting strategic and institutional decision-making.
- Toolkits, methodologies, dashboards, synthesis reports, data platforms and case studies to support implementation and monitoring.
- Memoranda of Understanding, partnership frameworks, guidance on blended and innovative finance, and capacity-building workshops.
- City and regional pilots, transboundary programmes, community-based projects and innovation challenges to demonstrate solutions in practice.
- Key messages, infographics, videos, webinars and contributions to forum declarations to support outreach and uptake.
- **Framework for Integrated Hydrological Assessment:** A proposed methodology for transboundary basins that incorporates Green Water accounting and climate projections into joint planning and allocation models

Partnerships and Financing Outcomes

- Prioritise WASH funds for humanitarian responses (namely \$ 4 billions/ y)

- Partnerships with development banks, the private sector and regional organisations
- Identification of investment-ready projects and Memoranda of Understanding to mobilize financing
- The WASH Roadmap Humanitarian Call to Action 2025 and its rationale (already signed by 4 member states and hundreds of organisations) is presented and proposed to Member States (ministers) and WWC partners endorsement.

Actions and Initiatives for Implementation

- Pilot initiatives on climate adaptation, resilience and integrated water governance
- Basin-level and transboundary cooperation programmes
- Community-based water governance initiatives
- Innovation challenges and technology demonstration projects
- Systematic integration of water integrity principles into water and sanitation strategies and policy frameworks
- Launch of a "High-Level Dialogue on Downstream Resilience": An initiative to establish a permanent working group focused on the specific vulnerabilities of downstream countries in arid regions under changing climate conditions.

Communication and Visibility

- Contribution to forum declaration with a summary of the session's recommendations and main messages
- Communication on WASH sector achievements on SDG6 and prioritisation (thematic, region) before 2030.
- Count Every Drop" Campaign: Launch a global awareness initiative focused on "The Invisible Water" (Green Water), using simple infographics to explain how ignoring soil moisture and rainfall patterns in treaties hurts food security and fairness in downstream nations.

- Contribution to the Riyadh Declaration: Secure a specific clause in the final Forum Declaration that formally recognizes "Climate-Adaptive Legal Frameworks"

IV. Monitoring and Post-Forum Action

- Long-term Forum legacy

The outcomes would contribute to a lasting World Water Forum legacy through the development of a cumulative roadmap, updated from one Forum to the next, to highlight, track and monitor political commitments. Lessons learned, policy recommendations, tools and pilot initiatives would be consolidated into a shared legacy package accessible to all stakeholders, ensuring sustained knowledge transfer and institutional memory.

- Continuity and follow-up toward the 12th World Water Forum

The outcomes would support structured follow-up initiatives toward the 12th World Water Forum by mapping linkages between WWF11 processes and the 2026 UN Water Conference. A dedicated restitution of the main outcomes and decisions of the UN 2026 Water Conference (December 2026) could be presented at WWF11 (March 2027), alongside mechanisms to track progress on recommendations and initiatives across Forums.

- Contributions to global agendas and processes

The outcomes would feed into global and regional agendas, including UN processes, climate conferences and basin networks, through proposals for improved indicators and forward-looking priorities beyond the current global development frameworks. proposing indicators that track how international agreements reflect blue/green water changes and climate impacts while promoting accession by more basin states.

They would also support the formalization of coordination and complementarity between World Water Forums and UN Water Conferences.

- Strengthened reporting, accountability and partnerships

The outcomes would reinforce global reporting and benchmarking initiatives, enhance the visibility and impact of multi-level water governance, and

support continued partnerships, knowledge-sharing and monitoring mechanisms. This includes follow-up on Member State and World Water Council partner commitments under the WASH Roadmap Call to Action, expanded peer learning and capacity-building through online platforms and events, and improved reporting on integrity and corruption risks in the water sector.

V. Proposed Cross-Process Dialogue Areas

- Dialogue between 1B (Water Related disasters), 3A (enhancing Access to safe drinking water services for all) and 4B
- Joint Session with Topic 4A (Transboundary Cooperation / International Law)
- Dialogue between 4B and 4E (engaging unheard and vulnerable voices).
- Dialogue with 4C on climate change

Propose 1–2 dialogue ideas that could be developed jointly with other processes (Ministerial, Parliamentary, Local and Regional Authorities, Basin Authorities) during the Forum preparation cycle.

- Humanitarian WASH Call to Action could be presented to Ministries and Parliamentarians

Propose 1-2 regions where this topic should be particularly discussed (collaboration with the regional process).

- Humanitarian WASH Call to Action, with Ministerial process (as the call is oriented to Member States).
- Africa: To address the "Implementation Gap" highlighted in the Zambezi River Basin case study. The discussion should focus on how to transition African River Basin Organizations (RBOs) from consultative bodies into empowered institutions with the financial autonomy and technical mandates to manage "Green Water" and enforce benefit-sharing agreements.

The Mediterranean & Arab Region: As the world's most water-scarce region, it serves as the critical testing ground for the proposed "Climate-Adaptive Legal Protocols".