

LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS FOR THE 2026 UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE

Water Policy Group (WPG) offers to provide critical information for the success of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, being the aggregated opinions and perspectives of national water Ministers and top officials globally, and broken down by region and country income category.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has agreed (A/78/L. 110) that the *2026 United Nations Water Conference to Accelerate the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for All* will be held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from December 2–4, 2026. The conference's goals include:

“Supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6:

- Identifying challenges and obstacles, as well as opportunities and innovative ways to support SDG 6 implementation.
- Exchanging views and developing actions and initiatives needed for accelerating progress.
- Sharing ongoing efforts, best practices, and experience gained in the acceleration of SDG 6 implementation.”

In 2021 and 2023 Water Policy Group surveyed national water leaders for their opinions and experience on the issues they face in seeking to achieve better water outcomes for their countries. Ministers and top officials from 126 countries of all regions and income categories participated in the surveys of 2021 and 2023. The results of these were presented at the preparatory processes for the 2023 United Nations Water Conference.

Ministers and top officials willingly shared their experiences. Consolidated and ‘anonymised’ results were published in the [Global Water Policy Report 2021](#) and the [Global Water Policy Report 2023](#), with the 2021 results presented at the *High Level Political Forum* of 2022 and all results available to the *2023 United Nations Water Conference*. In 2022, regional reports were also published for [Africa](#) and the [Asia-Pacific](#).

The reports described perceptions of the primary risks and challenges being faced at the national level (2021 and 2023), the relative difficulty of the SDG targets and reasons for this (2021) and how multilateral processes could be helpful at the national level (2023), as well as many other key topics.

The consolidated results were presented at a series of [global webinars](#).

PROPOSAL

Water Policy Group is willing to undertake a further survey in 2025 as its primary contribution to the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. The results will be available early enough to assist UN member States and participating organisations in their preparations for the Conference, and for any further analysis or follow up needed in the lead up to the Conference.

SURVEY APPROACH

The Survey will provide data at the global and regional level, and also according to income category, on the experience of the people responsible for water outcomes at the national level, on the value of the SDGs and other international processes. This is to give insight on how these processes can best support improved in-country outcomes.

There is no other source of this data.

These results do not necessarily reflect the official positions of governments. They do reflect the collective 'lived experience' of the Ministers and top officials responsible for delivering the best possible water outcomes for their populations.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

This Survey will be structured to broadly answer the following questions:

1. What are the risks and challenges being faced?
 - These are the same questions asked in 2021 and 2023, and will reveal whether and how risks and challenges are changing over time.
2. What aspects of governance and financing are considered to be the main reasons for slow progress against SDG 6 targets, and why?
 - These questions follow up the 2021 survey that identified governance and finance as the main reasons for insufficient progress against SDG 6 targets.
3. How can international processes help get better water and sanitation outcomes at the national level?
 - These questions follow up the 2021 survey about reasons for non-achievement of each SDG 6 target and 2023 survey on how multilateral processes can best help, specifically exploring the potential benefits of:
 - a [comprehensive non-binding global scale water policy framework](#) setting out high level objectives, targets, guiding principles and priorities at all levels¹;
 - a **sustainable water management protocol** under which participating countries would voluntarily prepare and agree on principles, guidance and standards that they would endeavour to observe;
 - 'mainstreaming' of water into the processes of 'beneficiary' sectors, (e.g. food, energy, climate, environment etc) in a way that is most helpful for integrated national policy making; and
 - better coordination of water-related work of the United Nations system.
4. How well are water issues considered in decision-making of other sectors?
 - These questions follow up 2023 questions on cross-sectoral integration.

The proposed high-level questions are set out in Annex A. Each will have drop down answer for participants to choose from and rank, as well as space for them to write their own responses.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROPOSED 2026 UNWC INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

The Survey will support discussion of each of the proposed Interactive Dialogues as set out in Annex 2. In summary, the Survey asks about:

- the value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets.

¹ <https://waterpolicygroup.com/index.php/2023/03/13/policy-scaffolding-for-water-management-issues/>

- how United Nations and other multilateral processes can help achieve good water outcomes nationally, and how and why these benefits are or are not currently being achieved.
- whether water is adequately considered in decisions and policies in other sectors, including for national security, international cooperation and peace, and the reasons that it is or is not adequately considered.

The Survey results will be collated and published well prior to the 2026 United Nations Water Conference to assist participating States and organisations to prepare for the Conference.

SURVEY PROCESS AND SAFEGUARDS

This is not a survey of official positions. Instead, it seeks to understand what individuals with water policy leadership experience collectively believe is inhibiting better outcomes on SDG 6 and other global water-related goals, providing exceptionally valuable insight and feedback for the Conference. This brings with it the need for respondents to trust that their personal identities will not be revealed in case their response differs from their official government position on any issue.

To secure this trust, as occurred in 2021 and 2023, the Survey results will be analysed and consolidated independently by academic staff of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Global Water Institute to protect the identity of the Survey participants so that they may answer freely from their own personal opinions and experience. UNSW ethics approval will be obtained. Neither Water Policy Group nor the co-hosts nor the UN will have access to the respondents' identities. The report will reveal only how many Ministers or top officials responded from how many countries in each of the seven UN SDG regions and four income categories and possibly according to water stress status.

TIMETABLE

- August-October 2025: Survey open.
- November-December 2025: Analysis of results .
- January-March 2026: Preparation of report.
- April-November 2026: Results released, provided to UN Member States and presented at Conference preparatory meetings.
- 2-4 December 2026: Results presented at UN 2026 Water Conference

COSTS

This Survey will be done and the results reported at no cost to any country or organisation. Water Policy Group operates without any external funding and Water Policy Group reports are published online and freely available to anyone. UNSW also covers its own costs of survey analysis, report preparation and secretariat support.

ABOUT WATER POLICY GROUP

The Water Policy Group is an unincorporated group of currently ten people with a common purpose of improving water outcomes anywhere and everywhere, drawing on our experience working on water policy within governments and international bodies. Our [members](#) have been decision makers and trusted advisers within governments and international bodies handling complex water policy and strategy. We are able to advise anyone on water policy options and implementation strategies. Our members want their knowledge, networks and experience to help achieve the sustainable development of water resources.

For our current members and other information see www.waterpolicygroup.com.

Water Policy Group
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ANNEX A: DRAFT HIGH-LEVEL QUESTIONS FOR THIRD 'LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS' SURVEY

Note: All questions will have drop-down lists of possible answers for respondents to rank in order of importance to them, and well as a box for them to complete their own answer if it does not appear in the drop-down list.

PART A: ABOUT YOU AND YOUR COUNTRY [Same as 2021 and 2023]

A1: What is your role?

A2: What is your country?

PART B: ABOUT RISKS AND CHALLENGES [Same as 2021 and 2023]

B1: In your opinion, which of the following are the greatest risks to maintaining or achieving good water management in your country?

B2: In your opinion, which of the following are the greatest challenges to maintaining or achieving good water management in your country?

PART C: ABOUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 6 [Follows up questions from 2021]

C1: In your opinion, is achieving the SDG 6 targets (listed below) in your country possible or not possible? In the case of target 6.6, due in 2020, the question is whether you think this was adequately achieved:

C2: In your opinion, for each target that you consider is 'not possible', 'maybe' (or 'not achieved' for 6.6), why is this?

C3: In your opinion, why is 'lack of financing' or 'governance problems' a main reason for one or more SDG6 targets being "not possible" or "maybe"? [New question drilling down on this finding from 2021 that these were the major problems.]

C4: In your opinion, how useful has SDG6 been for the achievement of better water outcomes in your country? [New question set]

C5 (only for those that answered positively to C4): In your opinion, why has SDG6 helped achieve better water outcomes in your country? [New question set]

C6 (only for those that answered negatively to C4): In your opinion, why has SDG6 not helped achieve better water outcomes in your country? [New question set]

PART D: ABOUT HOW INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES CAN IMPROVE NATIONAL WATER OUTCOMES

[Follows up 2023]

D1: In your opinion, how can international processes (such as of the United Nations) best help you to achieve good water outcomes in your country? [Same question as 2023]

D2: In your opinion, why is 'agreeing on principles, common standards, approaches or procedures' a helpful function of international processes? [New question for ranking various benefits of policy scaffolding].

D3: In your opinion, why will having globally agreed principles, standards and procedures make it easier for governments to adopt and implement these nationally? [New question on this particular benefit of policy scaffolding].

D4: In your opinion, will better coordination of water-related work of the United Nations system, such as through the [United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation](#), help you get better water outcomes in your country?

D5 (only for those that answered 'yes' to D4): In your opinion, what are the main reasons better coordination of water-related work of the United Nations system will help you get better outcomes in your country?

D6 (only for those that answered 'no' to D4): Why do you think the better coordination of water-related work of the United Nations system will not help you get better outcomes in your country?

PART E: ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WATER OUTCOMES FOR OTHER OBJECTIVES [Follows up 2023 but with different questions]

E1-7. In your opinion, is water adequately considered in decisions and policies on [the environment / climate change / disaster risk reduction / food security / energy security / public health / economic development / peace, security and international cooperation?] in your country?

E8 (only for those that answered 'yes' to any of E1-7): In your opinion, what are the main reasons that water was adequately considered in decisions about other sectors in your country?

E9 (only for those that answered 'no' to any of E1-7): In your opinion, what are the main reasons for water not being adequately considered in decisions about other sectors in your country?

ANNEX B: WATER LEADERS SURVEY THREE: CONTRIBUTIONS TO 2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES²

The Survey will provide data to assist consideration of each of the proposed Interactive Dialogue themes as set out below. In summary, the survey asks about:

- the value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets.
- how United Nations and other multilateral processes can help achieve good water outcomes nationally, and how and why these benefits are or are not currently being achieved.
- whether water is adequately considered in decisions policies in other sectors, including for national security, international cooperation and peace, and the reasons that it is or is not adequately considered.

The Survey results will be collated and published well prior to the 2026 United Nations Water Conference to assist participating States and organisations to prepare for the Conference.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 1: WATER FOR PEOPLE

Description: “The human rights to water and sanitation, including for those in vulnerable situations, for healthy societies and economies”.

Proposed theme focus: “The proposed theme for this dialogue in 2026 would focus on SDG 6 targets 6.1 (drinking water), 6.2 (sanitation and hygiene), and 6.3 (wastewater and water quality). It would also build on the connections with SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (health), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 10 (inequalities)”.

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets, including SDG 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3. It asks about their degree of difficulty and if potentially not possible to achieve, why this is so.

Part E of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders on whether water is adequately considered in decisions policies in other sectors, including on food security, public health and economic development, and the reasons that it is or is not.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 2: WATER FOR PROSPERITY:

Description: “Valuing water, Water-Energy-Food nexus, advancing integrated and sustainable water resource management, wastewater and water-use efficiency across sectors, and economic and social development”.

Proposed theme focus: “The proposed theme of interactive dialogue 2 would focus on SDG 6 targets 6.3 (wastewater and water quality), 6.4 (water-use efficiency), and 6.5 (integrated water resources management) with interlinkages to SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).”

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for

² As set out in the Note by the Conference Secretary-General for the Conference Preparatory Process

achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets, including SDG 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5. It asks about their degree of difficulty and if potentially not possible to achieve, why this is so.

Part E of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders on whether water is adequately considered in decisions policies in other sectors, including on economic development, food security and energy security, and the reasons that it is or is not.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 3: WATER FOR PLANET:

Description: “Climate, Biodiversity, Desertification, Environment, Source to Sea, Resilience, Disaster Risk Reduction”.

Proposed theme focus: “The proposed theme for this dialogue in 2026 would focus on SDG 6 targets 6.3 (wastewater and water quality) and 6.6 (freshwater ecosystems). It would also build on the connections with SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (oceans), and SDG 15 (land).”

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets, including SDG 6.3 and 6.6. It asks about their degree of difficulty and if potentially not possible to achieve, why this is so.

Part E of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders on whether water is adequately considered in decisions policies in other sectors, including the environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and the reasons that it is or is not.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 4: WATER FOR COOPERATION

Description: “Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and inclusive governance.”

Proposed theme focus: “The proposed theme for this dialogue in 2026 will focus on SDG 6 targets 6.5 (integrated water resources management & transboundary cooperation), 6.a (international cooperation), and 6.b (stakeholder participation). Water cooperation across borders, within countries, and across sectors generate benefits that accelerate progress across all Sustainable Development Goals, in particular promoting peace (SDG 16) and strengthening partnerships (SDG 17)”.

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets, including SDG 6.5, SDG 6.6a and SDG 6.6b. It asks about their degree of difficulty and if potentially not possible to achieve, why this is so.

Part E of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders on whether water is adequately considered in decisions policies in other sectors, including for national security, international cooperation and peace, and the reasons that it is or is not.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 5: WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES

Description: “SDG 6, the 2030 Agenda and beyond, and global water initiatives.”

Proposed theme focus: “At its core, interactive dialogue 5 in 2026 is proposed to explore the platforms, frameworks, and spaces available for international dialogue on water issues, integrating insights from all dialogues of the 2026 UN Water Conference, as well as look at how water is addressed in the broader

global, multilateral and intergovernmental processes. This proposed dialogue will support the achievement of all the SDG 6 targets and is relevant for the entire 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals)".

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing all of the SDG 6 targets.

Part D of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders on how United Nations and other multilateral processes can help them achieve good water outcomes nationally, and explore how and why these benefits are or are not achieved.

PROPOSED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 6: INVESTMENTS FOR WATER:

Description: "Financing, technology & innovation, and capacity Building"

Proposed theme focus: "This dialogue is directly linked to all targets under SDG 6, with particular emphasis on the SDG 6 means of implementation targets 6.a (international cooperation and capacity building) and 6.b (participation of local communities). It also supports progress across the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 4 (education), SDG 9 (infrastructure and innovation), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals)".

How will the survey support this proposed theme?

Part C of the survey seeks the opinion of national water leaders about the overall value of SDG 6 for achieving better water outcomes nationally and about their experience in implementing each of the SDG 6 targets, including SDG 6.6a and SDG 6.6b.

Following 2021 survey findings that the main constraint on achieving SDG 6 targets were 'lack of financing' and 'governance problems', further questions will be asked to understand the nature of these problems.

ENDS