



2026

GLOBAL WATER POLICY REPORT

LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS



waterpolicygroup.com



In partnership with



UNSW
Global Water
Institute



LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS IN 2026

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1. NATIONAL WATER LEADERS SURVEY



- ‘National Water Leaders’ are Ministers, water department heads and others with **significant influence over national water policy**.
- National Water Leaders of **102 UN member states** participated in this project.
- They gave their opinions, experience and perspectives, **not official positions**.
- As their **identities are protected**, they spoke freely.
- **Good coverage** of all regions and national income categories.
- Across the three surveys, **151 United Nations Member States** participated in **at least one survey**, while national water leaders from **34 countries** participated in **all three**.

2. COMPREHENSIVE REPRESENTATION

SDG Region ¹	Countries in survey	Countries in region	% of countries in region
Central and South Asia (CSA)	7	14	50
Europe and North America (ENA)	22	47	47
East and Southeast Asia (ESEA)	9	16	56
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)	18	33	55
North Africa and West Asia (NAWA)	12	24	50
Oceania (OCE)	10	14	71
Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)	24	48	50
TOTALS	102	196	52

*Countries of the national water leaders who participated in the survey.

3. SURVEY QUESTIONS

National Water Leaders were asked about:

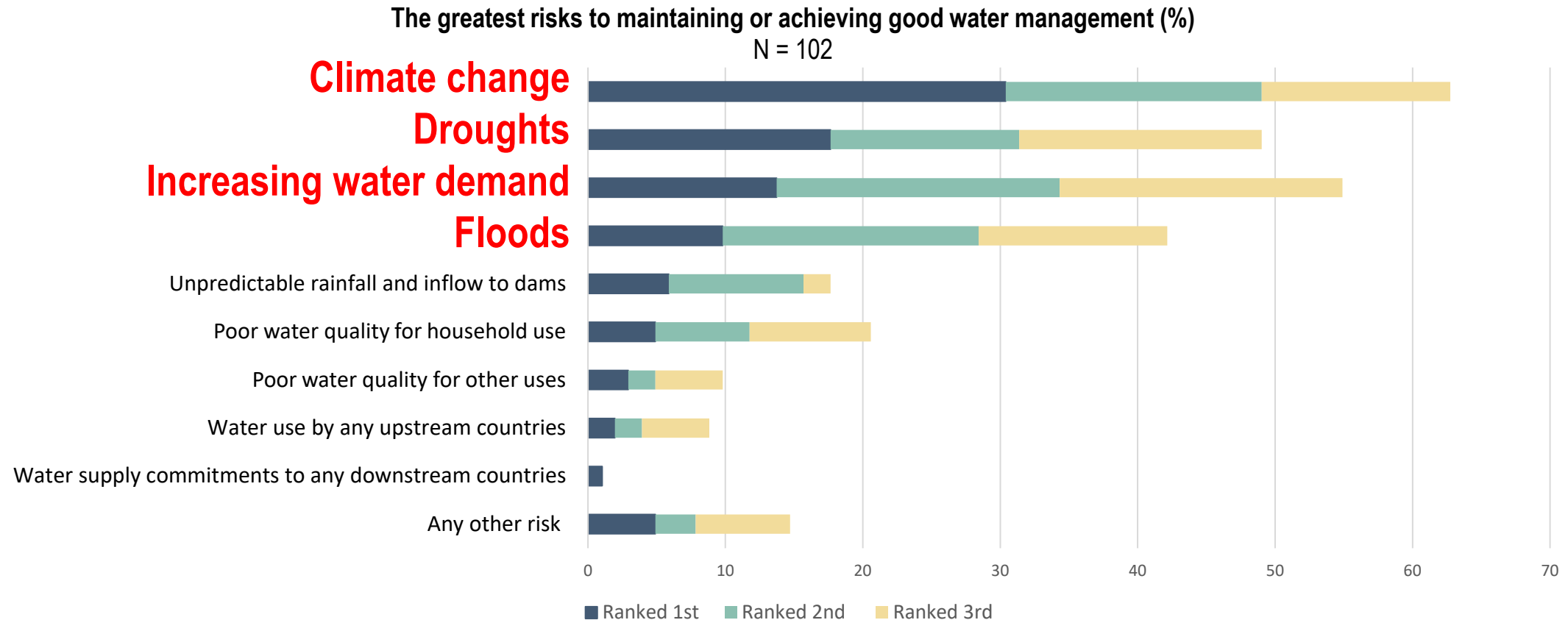
- risks and challenges they face
- their experience with SDG 6 targets
- how international processes can best assist them
- their experience integrating with other sectors

This is what they said...

4. MAJOR RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING GOOD WATER MANAGEMENT

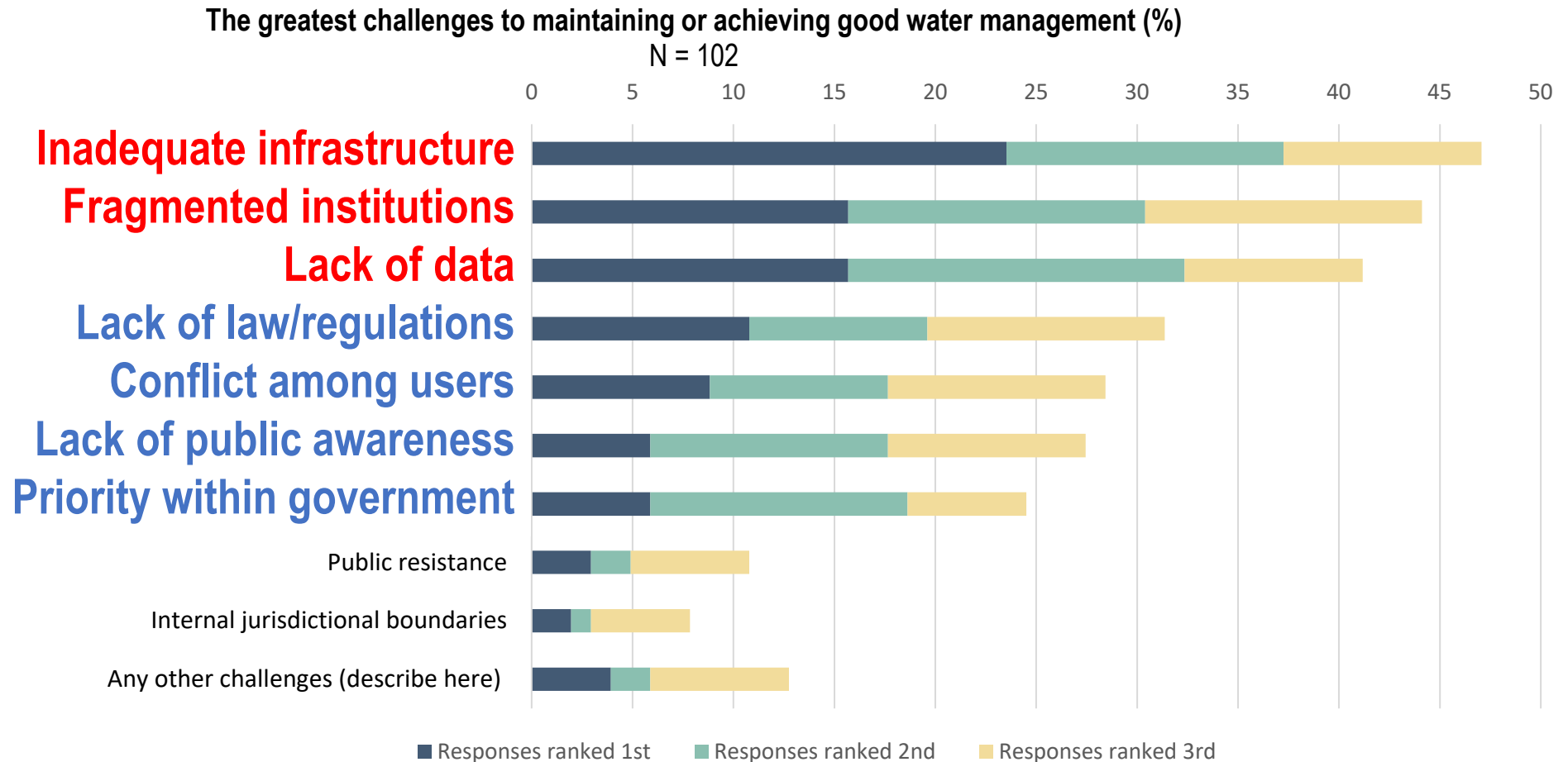
Question: In your opinion, what are the three greatest risks to maintaining or achieving good water management in your country?

Note: these are matters that generally cannot be directly controlled by the government.

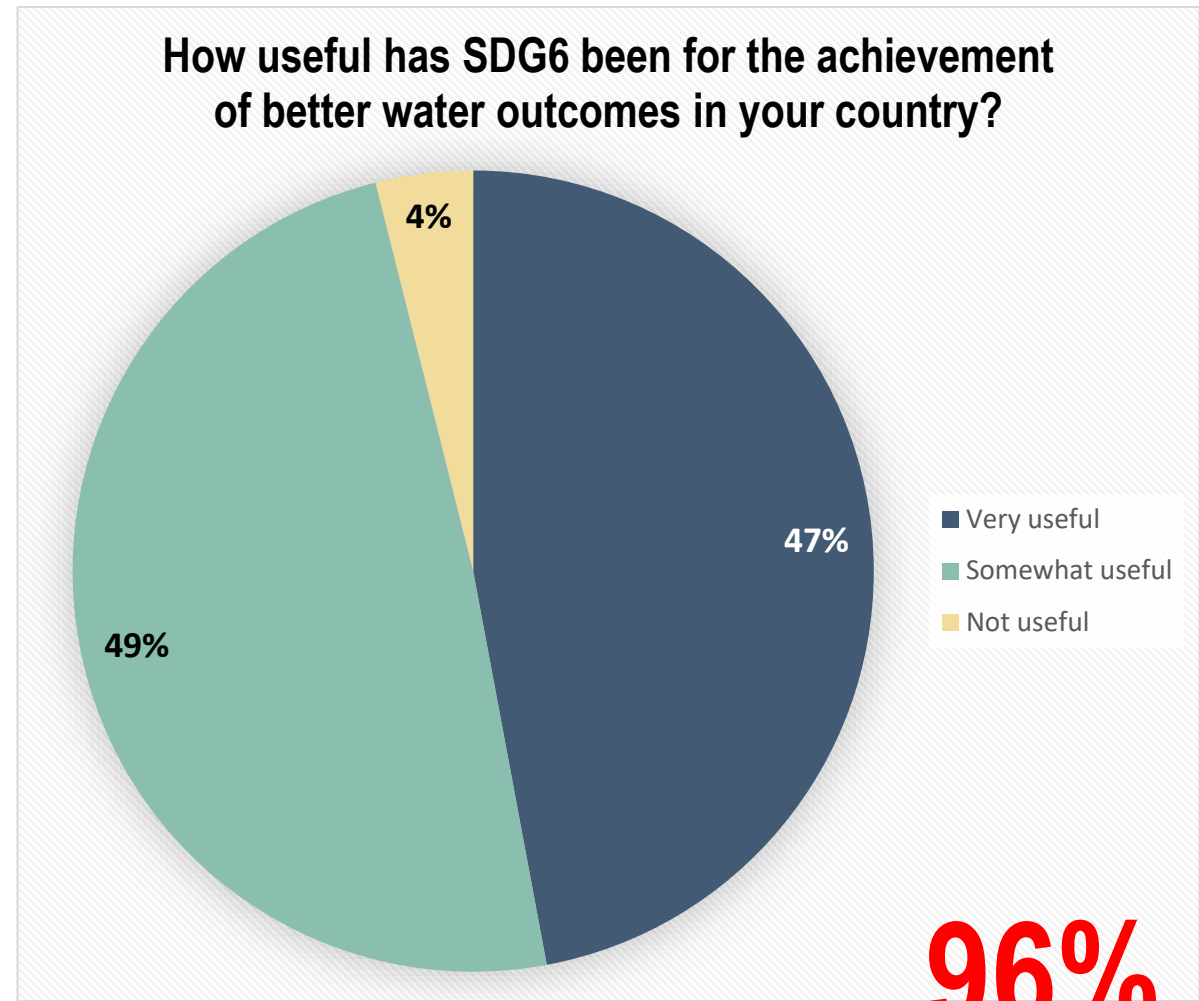


5. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO GOOD WATER MANAGEMENT IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Question: In your opinion, what are the three greatest challenges to maintaining or achieving good water management in your country? *Note: these are matters that generally can be directly controlled by governments.*



6. WAS SDG6 USEFUL?



	Very useful %	Somewhat Useful %	Not useful %
Low income	64	36	0
Lower-middle income	48	52	0
Upper-middle income	68	32	0
High income	19	71	10
Lower water stress	43	53	4
Higher water stress	58	42	0
Global	47	49	4

96% say “YES”

7. WHY HAS SDG 6 HELPED ACHIEVE BETTER WATER OUTCOMES?

Why has SDG6 helped achieve better water outcomes in your country? (%)

N = 98

Governments have to report their progress,
which pushed them to try harder

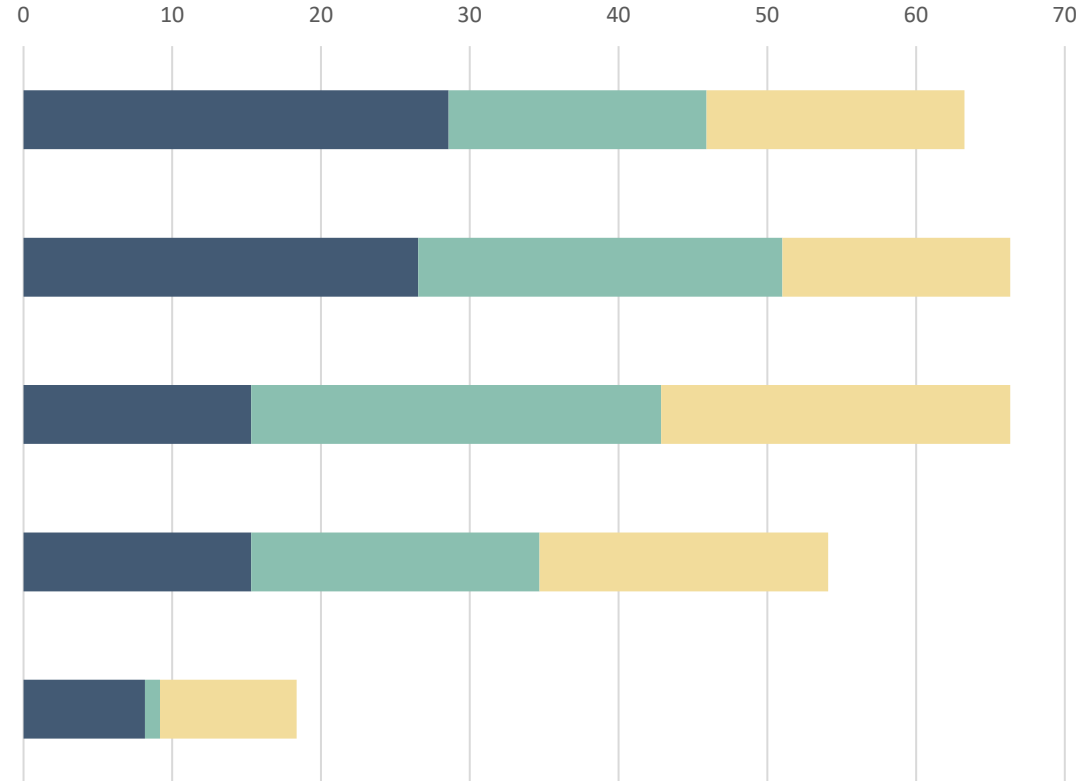
Priority setting became easier

Easier explanation to the public

Water stakeholders and community leaders
support governmental efforts

Other

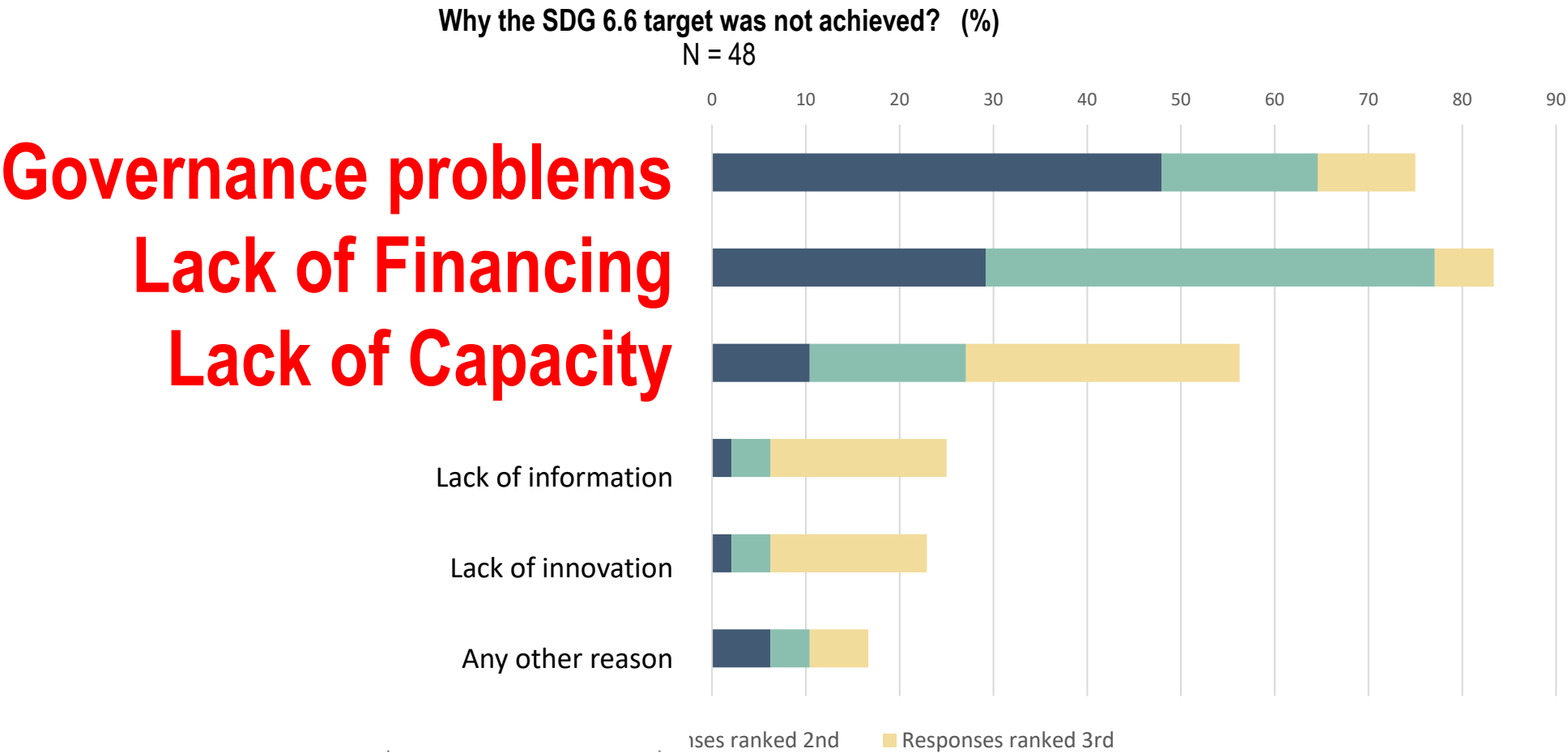
■ Responses ranked 1st ■ Responses ranked 2nd ■ Responses ranked 3rd



8. WILL YOUR COUNTRY BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE SDG 6, AND WHY?

SDG	Possible	Not sure	Not possible	1 st reason	2 nd reason
6.1 Drinking water	56	21	23	Lack of financing	Governance
6.2 Sanitation and hygiene	54	21	25	Lack of financing	Governance
6.3 Water quality	40	36	24	Lack of financing	Governance
6.4 Efficiency and scarcity	57	20	23	Lack of financing	Governance
6.5 IWRM and transboundary	58	22	20	Lack of financing Governance	
6.6 Ecosystems (by 2020)	11	40	49	Governance	Lack of financing
6.6a International cooperation	67	25	8	Lack of financing	Governance Capacity Innovation
6.6b local participation	85	13	2	Lack of financing	Capacity
Average	53		22		

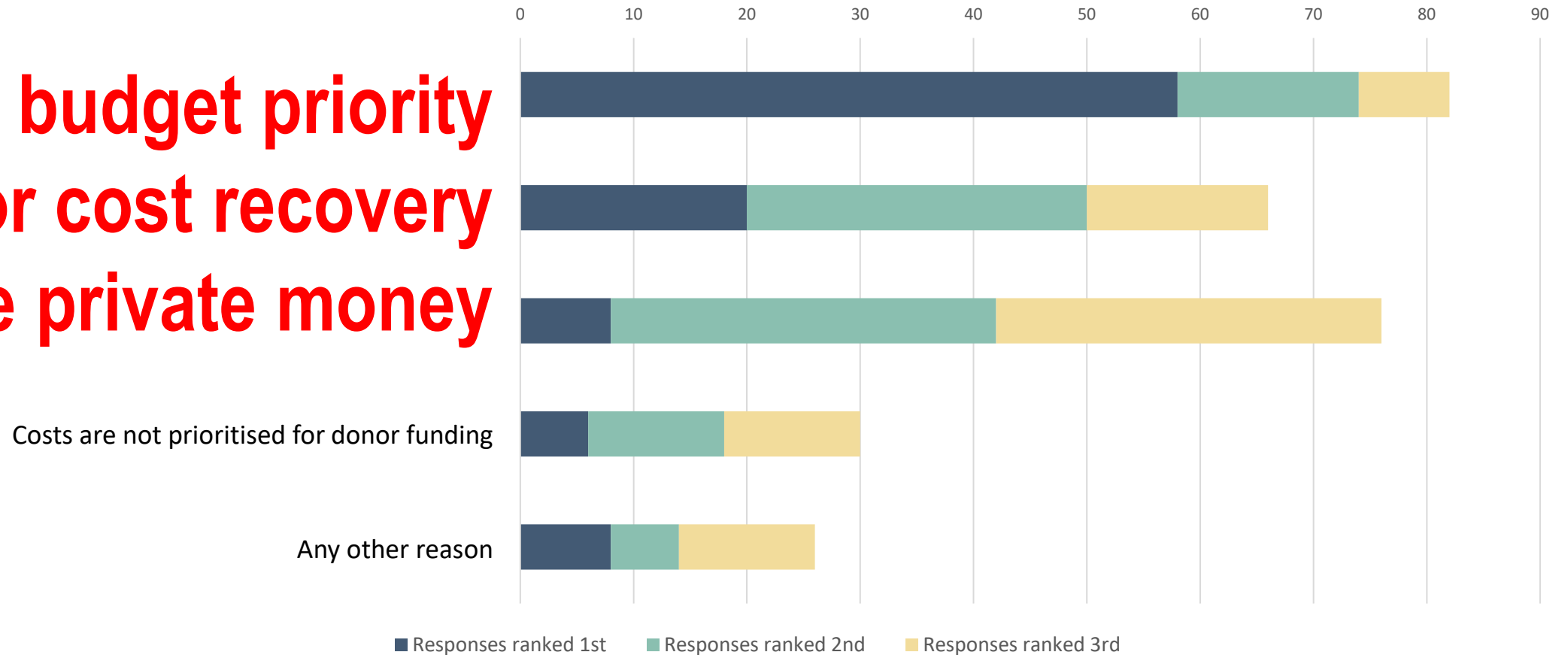
9. SAMPLE RESULT: CASE OF SDG 6.6 (ECOSYSTEMS)



10. WHY IS FINANCING A PROBLEM?

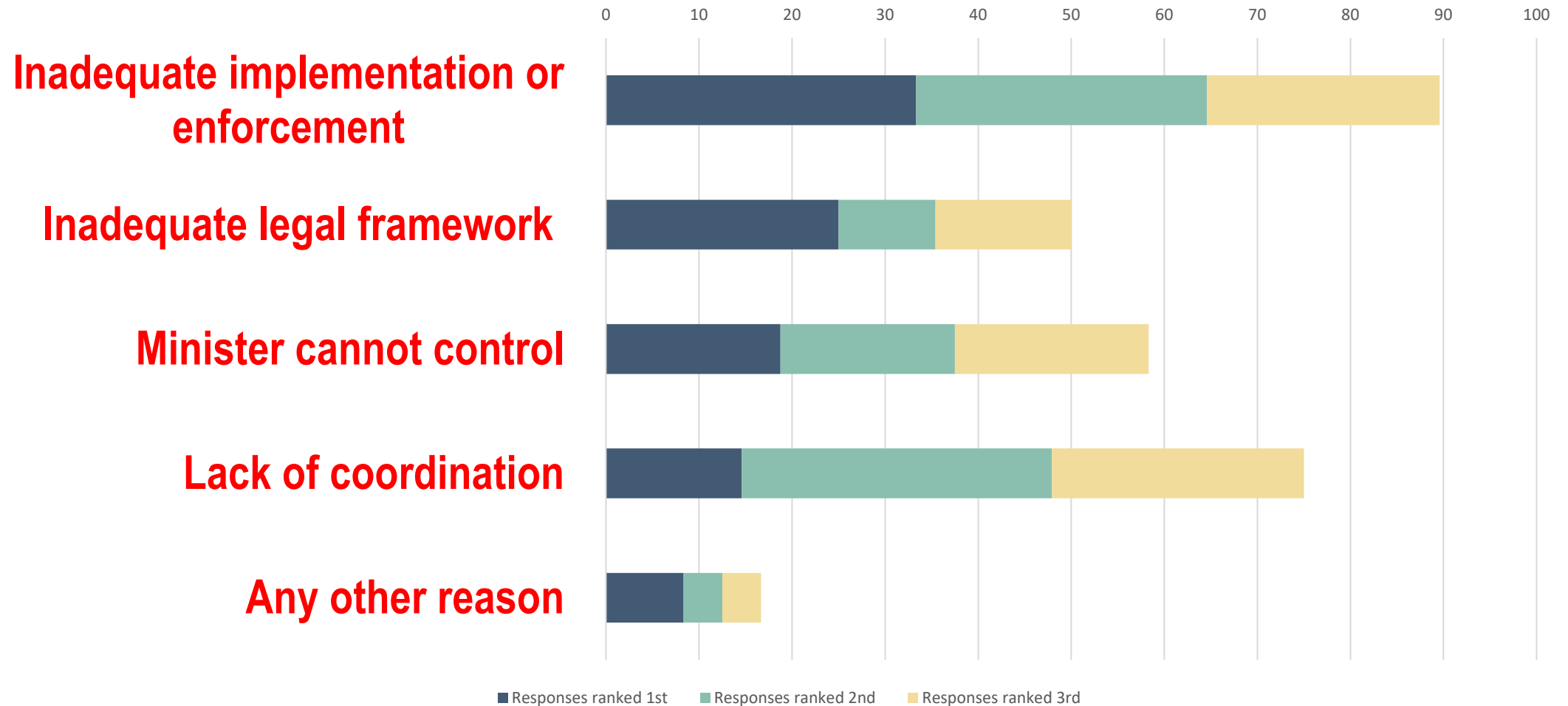
Why is 'lack of financing' one of the main reasons for any of the SDG6 targets being "not possible"? (%)
N = 50

Low budget priority
Poor cost recovery
Little private money

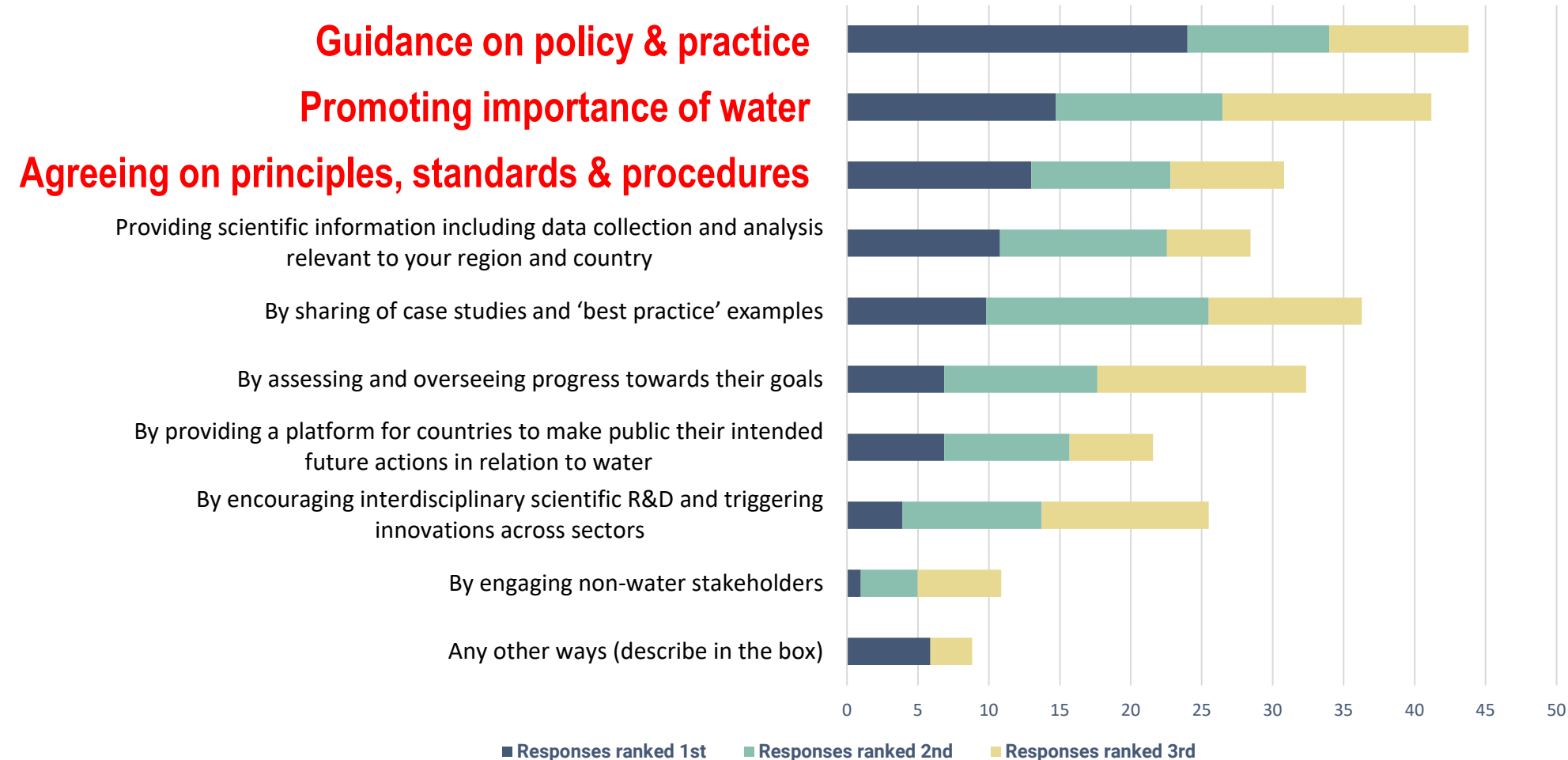


11. WHY IS GOVERNANCE A PROBLEM?

Why is 'governance problems' a main reason for any of these SDG 6 targets being "not possible"? (%)
N = 48



12. HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES IMPROVE WATER OUTCOMES?



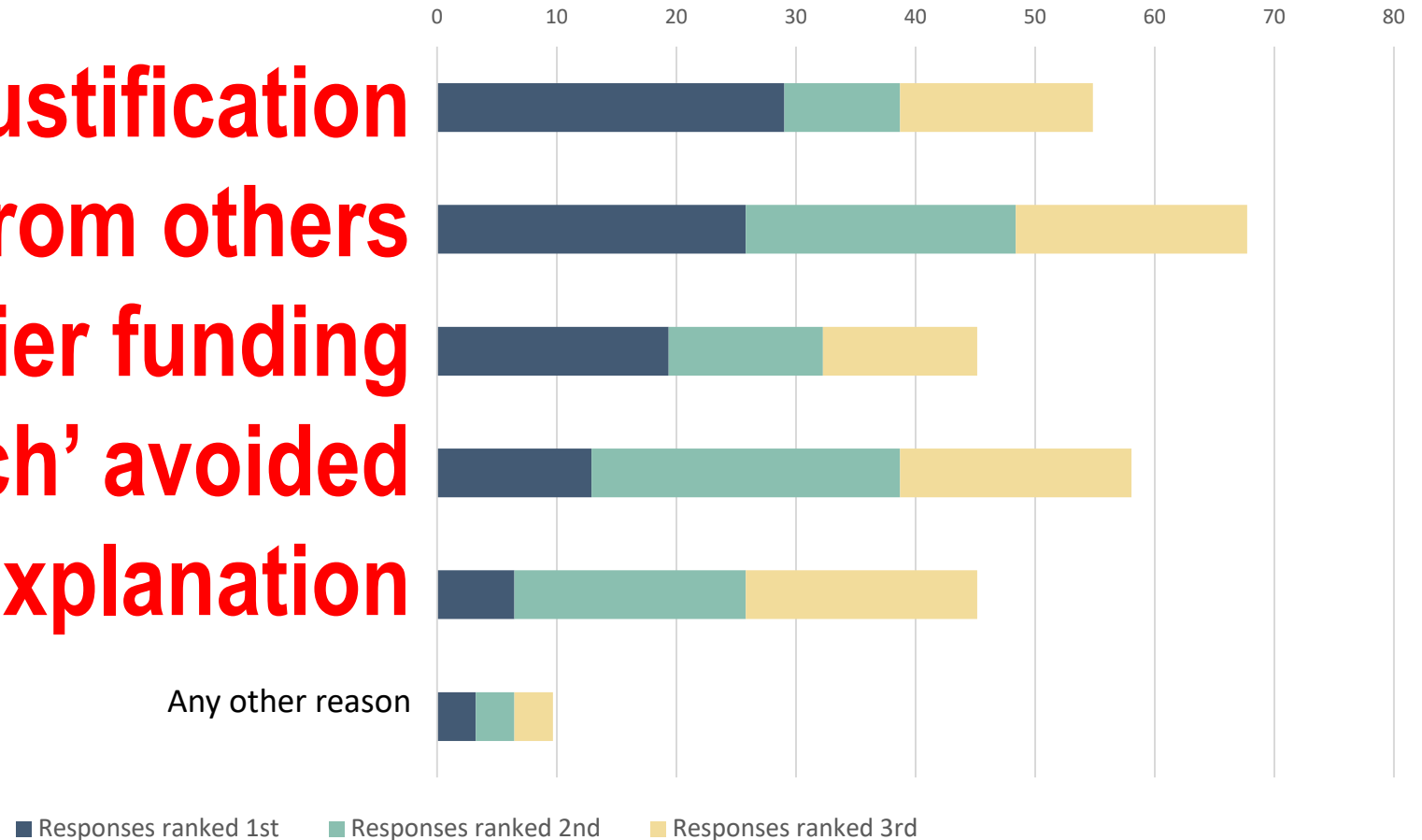
12. HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES IMPROVE WATER OUTCOMES?

	Category	Most often ranked as the most important benefit
Income	Low	Providing guidance on policy and practice
	Lower-middle	Providing guidance on policy and practice
	Upper-middle	Promoting the importance of water across sectors
	High	Providing guidance on policy and practice
Water stress	Lower	Providing guidance on policy and practice
	Higher	Providing guidance on policy and practice

13. HOW WILL GLOBAL PRINCIPLES/STANDARDS MAKE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION EASIER?

Easier justification
Learning from others
Easier funding
‘Starting from scratch’ avoided
Easier explanation

Any other reason

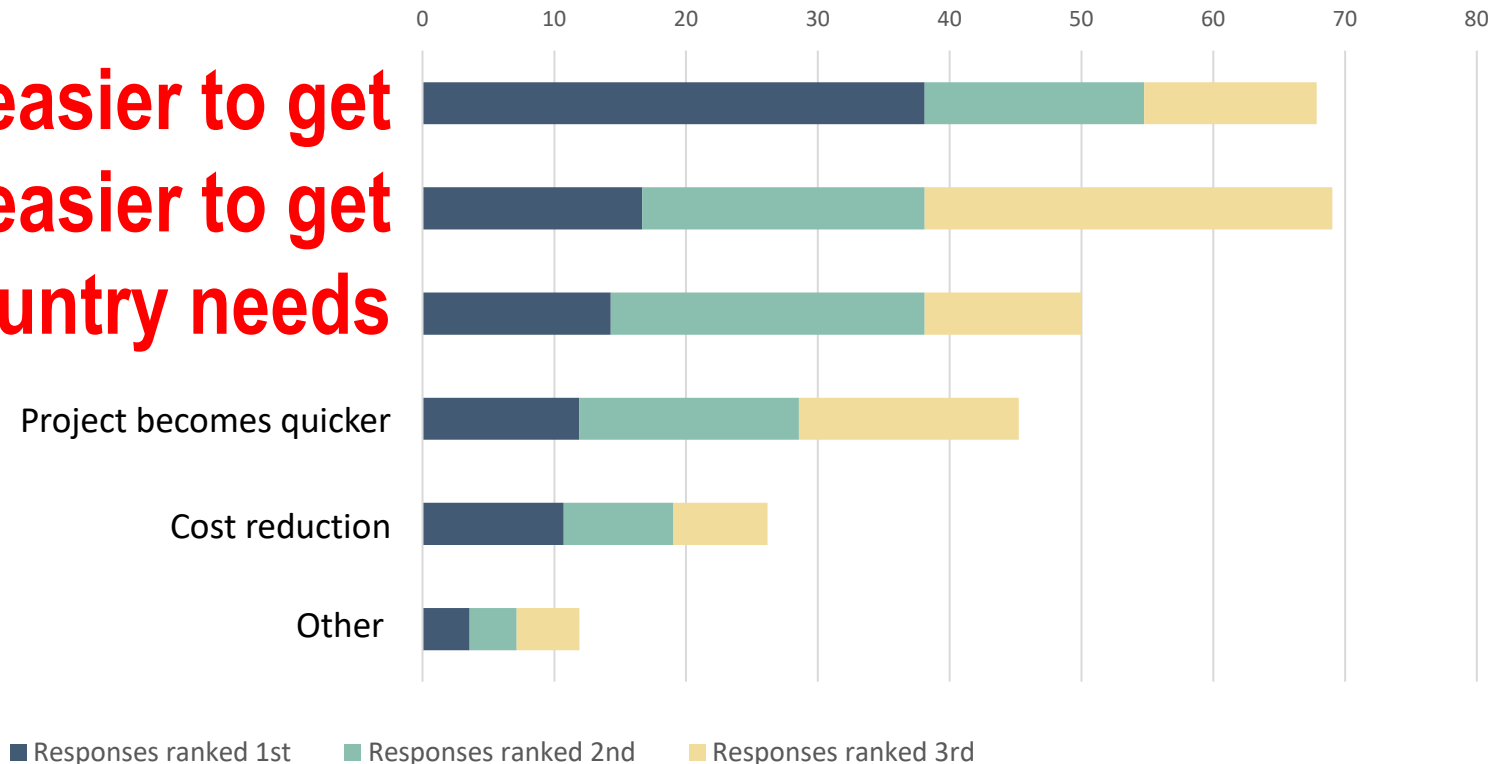


14. WILL BETTER COORDINATION OF THE UN SYSTEM'S WATER WORKS HELP BETTER WATER OUTCOMES IN YOUR COUNTRY?

	Yes (82%)	No (8%)	Don't know (10%)
Low income	100	0	0
Lower-middle income	93	0	7
Upper-middle income	89	0	11
High income	53	19	28
Low Stress	81	10	10
High stress	95	0	5
Global	82	8	10

15. WHY DO YOU NEED BETTER COORDINATION OF UN SYSTEM?

External funding easier to get
Support within country easier to get
Better fit to country needs



16. IS WATER ADEQUATELY CONSIDERED IN POLICY DECISIONS ON....?

Policy Sector	Yes %	No %	Most common top two reasons for 'No'
Environment	72	28	Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives Lack of clear roles and responsibilities for water management across sectors
Climate change	75	25	Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives Lack of clear roles and responsibilities for water management across sectors
Disaster risk reduction	75	26	Differing priorities and conflicting objectives Lack of clear roles and responsibilities for water management across sectors
Food security	75	25	Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives Differing priorities and conflicting objectives
Energy security	72	28	Differing priorities and conflicting objectives Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives.
Public health	76	24	Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives Lack of clear roles and responsibilities for water management across sectors
Economic development	67	33	Differing priorities and conflicting objectives Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives
National security	71	29	Insufficient awareness of the importance of water for their objectives Lack of clear roles and responsibilities for water management across sectors
Average	73	27	

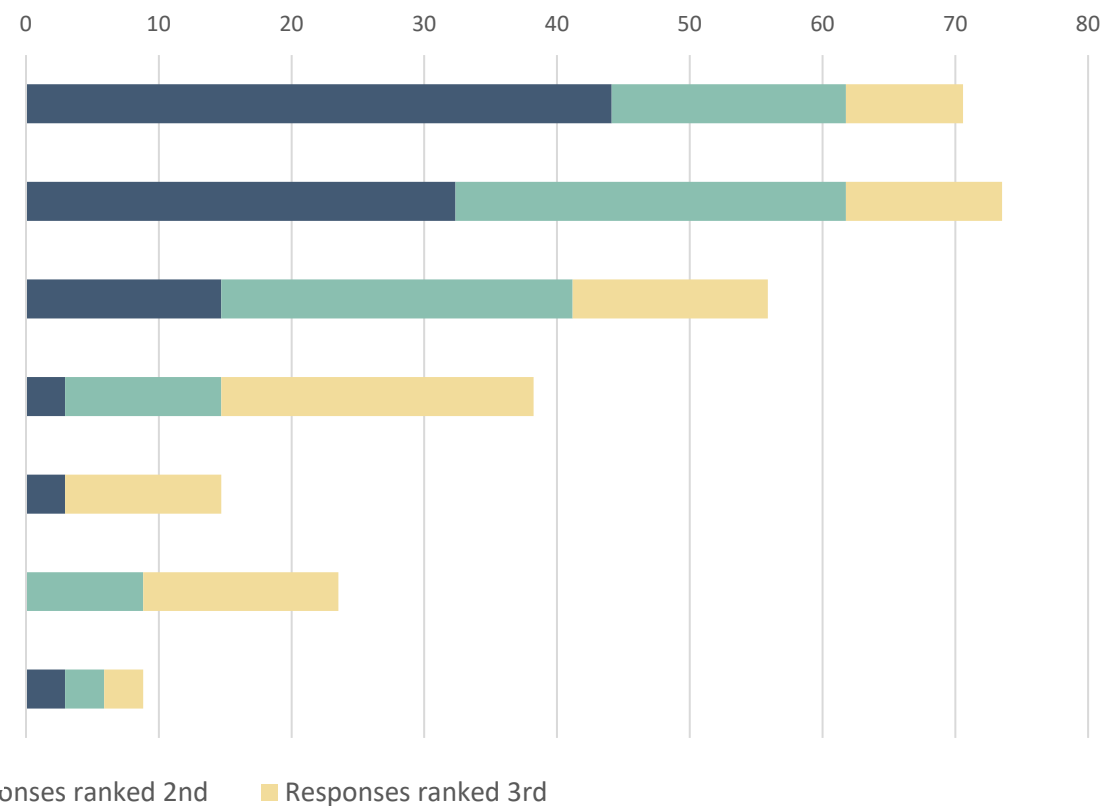
17. WHY LOW PRIORITY OF WATER IN POLICY SETTING FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

What are the main reasons for water not being adequately considered in decisions policies on economic development? (%)

N: 34

Water lost priority competition
Lack of awareness of decision makers
Political/Institutional barriers
Lack of clear roles across sectors

Poor relations between relevant Ministers and officials
Lack of established communication or coordination channels
Any other reason



18. LISTENING TO NATIONAL WATER LEADERS: WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

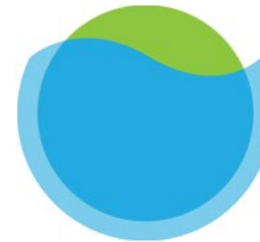
- Climate change, floods, droughts and increasing demand are the major in-country risks.
- Infrastructure, governance and data are the major in-country challenges.
- SDG6 is useful in almost all countries, for many reasons.
- About half of them say they can achieve SDG6, the other half say not, or they don't know, depending on their country situations.
- Lack of financing and governance problems are the main impediments to achieving SDG6, for several reasons.
- UN and other international processes can be most helpful by providing guidance on policy and practice and promoting the importance of water in non-water sectors.
- Most think better UN system-wide water coordination will assist them, especially with external funding and internal support.
- Most think water is well considered in policies of other sectors in their country.

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