



2026 United Nations Water Conference

Interactive Dialogue Water for Planet: climate, biodiversity, desertification,
environment, source-to-sea, resilience, and disaster risk reduction
Dominican Republic

I. Introduction

The interactive dialogue on “Water for Planet” situates water at the core of climate action, biodiversity conservation, combating desertification, environmental protection, source-to-sea connectivity, and risk-based resilience. Based on the 2023 Water Conference, this concept paper proposes a systemic approach that links freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems; urban and productive land; and human wellbeing. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other climate-vulnerable countries face converging risks—sea-level rise, aquifer salinization, massive influx or sargassum seaweed, droughts, extreme rainfall, and marine heatwaves—risking SDG 6 targets and related goals.

The Dominican Republic and partners propose to focus the interactive dialogue on three main goals:

- I. nature-positive and climate-resilient water systems from “source-to-sea”.
- II. risk-informed and inclusive WASH services that remain functional under multi-hazard stress.
- III. scalable finance and partnerships to accelerate implementation.

The dialogue will present solutions that: protect and restore freshwater-coastal-marine connectivity; deploy nature-based solutions (NBS) at watershed and coastal areas; strengthen early warning for drought and flood; address salinization and water scarcity; reduce pollution, including nutrients and plastics; and enable resilient livelihoods, particularly for women, youth, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities.

II. Status and trend



Water security is increasingly shaped by climate variability and long-term change. Intensifying droughts and heat stress reduce baseflows and groundwater recharge; extreme precipitation causes flood peaks and increases sediment and nutrient loads; and sea-level rise and storm surges lead to saline intrusion in coastal aquifers. Urbanization and land-use changes fragment watersheds, while marine heatwaves and degraded coastal ecosystems undermine fisheries and storm buffers.

Globally speaking, progress on SDG 6 remains off-track¹, with persistent gaps in access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), wastewater treatment, water-use efficiency, integrated water resources management (IWRM), and protection of water-related ecosystems. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) face structural constraints: small and exposed watersheds, limited economies of scale, high per-capita infrastructure costs, and climate-amplified shocks.

Freshwater shortages, drought cycles, saline intrusion, and coastal erosion affect communities, tourism, agriculture, and industry. Excess nutrient loads and land-based pollution degrade coral reefs, seagrasses, and mangroves, reducing blue-carbon potential and natural coastal protection. Seasonal massive flow of pelagic sargassum — symptomatic of basin-scale nutrient imbalance and warming—impacts public health, fisheries, and water intakes.

At the same time, promising trends are emerging: rapid advances in remote sensing and hydro-meteorological services; fit-for-purpose desalination and reuse methods; decentralized, modular, and energy-efficient WASH systems; natural capital accounting and blue/green bonds; as well as community-driven watershed restoration.

III. Challenges and emerging issues

1. Fragmented governance across freshwater, coastal, and marine domains impedes end-to-end (“ridge-to-reef”) solutions and misaligns mandates among

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/#:~:text=Goal%206%20targets-.Facts%20and%20figures,services%20at%20home%20in%202024.>



water, environment, agriculture, urban development, disaster management, and finance authorities.

2. Finance is often inadequate and difficult to access for SIDS and LDCs. Project preparation pipelines are thin; transaction costs are high; and many projects are considered too small for traditional climate finance. Loss and damage from water-related hazards strain fiscal space.
3. Water quality degradation from nutrients, sediments, pathogens, and plastics compromises ecosystems and WASH outcomes.
4. Data collection, monitoring, and early warning gaps persist—particularly for groundwater levels and quality, drought indicators, flood risk mapping, and coastal salinity fronts—limiting proactive action and risk-informed investments.
5. Gender and social inequalities increase vulnerability. Women and girls face a disproportionate burden of WASH responsibilities; marginalized communities face higher exposure and lower adaptive capacity, as intergenerational equity isn't fully addressed.
6. Emerging climate signals—compound and cascading events, marine heatwaves, coral bleaching, sargassum and saline intrusion—are advancing faster than the standard infrastructure and ecosystem management design.

IV. Solutions

1. Source-to-Sea (S2S) governance and investment frameworks.
2. Nature-based solutions at scale.
3. Resilient WASH and water supply under multi-hazard stress.
4. Pollution reduction and circular water.
5. Data, early warning, and digital public goods.
6. Inclusive governance and local leadership.
7. Financing the transition.

V. Recommendations and conclusions

1. Endorse “source-to-sea” as a standard for speeding up SDG 6, requesting UN agencies and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to align programs and indicators accordingly.



2. Invite Member States to adopt national S2S policies and establish inter-ministerial mechanisms connecting water, climate, biodiversity, coastal, and DRR agendas.
3. Call on climate and biodiversity funds (GCF, Adaptation Fund, GEF) and MDBs to create dedicated SIDS windows for S2S NBS, resilient WASH, and coastal aquifers.
4. Promote gender-responsive, locally-led adaptation with direct access financing for community-based organizations and municipal utilities.

Conclusion: Water is the connector across climate, biodiversity, and resilient development. By institutionalizing source-to-sea action, scaling nature-based solutions and resilient WASH, and unlocking finance tailored to SIDS and vulnerable countries, the international community can deliver measurable SDG 6 acceleration.

VI. Guiding questions

1. Which policy and regulatory changes are most effective to institutionalize source-to-sea action linking IWRM, coastal zone management and marine spatial planning?
2. How can countries design bankable, programmatic pipelines for S2S NBS and resilient WASH that aggregate small projects and reduce transaction costs, particularly in SIDS?
3. How can nutrient and plastic pollution be rapidly reduced through circular water/wastewater approaches and nature-based solutions, and how should success be measured (MRV)?
4. What governance and financing models ensure that women, youth, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities lead and benefit from water-climate-biodiversity investments?
5. What concrete commitments can Member States and partners announce in 2026–2030 to operationalize S2S action, resilient WASH, and pollution reduction.