

2026 United Nations Water Conference

Inputs from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for the Interactive Dialogues' Concept Papers

1) Water for People

Trends and Challenges:

Many are still left behind: The Asia-Pacific region continues to fall short of SDG targets 6.1 (safe and affordable drinking water) and 6.2 (sanitation and hygiene), with only little progress since 2015 in achieving universal and equitable access to affordable drinking water for all (6.1). However, even if progress has been recorded in some countries or subregions, such national or regional-level averages can mask substantial variations within countries, such as rural-urban or other socio-economic divides. In various countries in the region, there is a significant gap between the availability of drinking water and sanitation services for the furthest left behind and the furthest ahead population groups ([ESCAP, 2024](#); [ESCAP, n.d](#)). Even though measures have been identified and even formally adopted by various states in the region to extend WASH services to often left behind groups, they regularly fall short of being fully implemented. In many countries in the region, women also remain to have a limited participation in water policy and management processes ([WHO, n.d](#)).

Special vulnerabilities of coastal areas and SIDS: The majority of the world's population living in low-elevation coastal zones are located in Asia and the Pacific ([Reimann et al., 2023](#)), with the Pacific having the most Small Island Developing States (SIDS) after the Caribbean. Groundwater aquifers in coastal areas and SIDS are regularly over exploited, and as a result become oversalinated. This poses a serious threat to water supplies across the region and gives rise to gendered health risks ([UNESCO, 2015](#); [Islam et al., 2019](#)).

Good Practices and Solutions:

Addressing WASH in unpaid care work: In the Philippines, ESCAP has implemented a gender-responsive project aimed at reducing the unpaid care burden disproportionately carried by women and girls. The project led to the drafting of a provincial care ordinance that prioritizes care services and infrastructure, particularly safe and sustainable access to water resources. The ordinance commits the provincial government to investing in provision of improved water infrastructure, such as Jetmatic pumps and water systems, especially in remote and disadvantaged community areas. It also promotes time- and labour-saving equipment, including washing machines and stoves, to ease domestic work and improve efficiency. By integrating access to water resources into care policies, the ordinance demonstrates how essential service

investments can ease unpaid labour whilst simultaneously enhancing water services and climate resilience ([ESCAP, 2022](#)).

Water for Women Fund: The Australian Government has implemented ‘Water for Women Fund’ as part of its commitment to gender equality and inclusive WASH across 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific. With an investment of AUD159.9 million from 2019 to 2024, the Fund has partnered with civil society organizations to deliver 20 climate-resilient and socially inclusive WASH projects. These initiatives have reached over 4.4 million people, focusing on improving health outcomes, reducing gender disparities, and strengthening community resilience to climate risks ([Water for Women Fund, n.d](#)).

Fiji Urban Water Supply and Wastewater Management Project: Rapid urban growth and climate change have strained water supply and sanitation systems in Fiji’s capital, Suva, leading to communities being vulnerable to shortages and pollution. To address this, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Investment Bank (EIB), and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) cofinanced a USD 405 million investment program to expand water supply and wastewater treatment infrastructure. The project integrates new reservoirs, treatment plants, and sewerage systems with climate resilient design, ensuring reliable clean water access and improved sanitation for urban residents. Early outcomes include increased water supply reliability for over 300,000 people, reduced pollution entering coastal ecosystems, and strengthened resilience against droughts and floods ([ADB, 2016](#)).

Recommendations:

- Accelerate progress and investments in resilient WASH infrastructure, prioritizing rural, underserved, and climate-vulnerable communities to close access gaps and protect public health.
- Strengthen accountability and financing mechanisms to ensure that planned WASH measures for vulnerable groups, women, and girls are fully implemented rather than remaining at the policy stage.
- Promote meaningful participation of women in water governance and management, ensuring their representation in decision-making processes at all levels.
- Enhance resilience of coastal areas and Small Island Developing States by protecting and restoring freshwater aquifers, developing alternative water sources, and addressing gender-specific health risks from water salinization.

2) Water for Prosperity

Trends and Challenges:

As the region grows, so does its water consumption: By 2050, Asia and the Pacific's water consumption is predicted to increase by 55%, which is double as much compared to the predicted global average of 20-25% ([Kuna et al., 2023](#); [ADB, 2022](#)). Already, seven out of the ten most groundwater-extracting countries are located in Asia and the Pacific, and in many parts of the region reliance on groundwater extraction has become unsustainable, leading to overextraction ([UNESCO, 2022](#)). Yet, management of water, food, energy, and other sectors still often remains siloed, causing competition over water resources and inefficient water allocation. Faced with the effects of climate change and rising water demand, water-use efficiency and cross-sectoral coordination must be a key priority for countries in the region.

Asia and the Pacific faces high water scarcity: Many countries across the Asia-Pacific region are witnessing increasing water scarcity ([UNESCO, 2024](#); [WRI, 2023](#)). This fits a historical trend, as the region's population living under high or extremely high water scarcity grew from 1.1 billion to over 2.6 billion between 1975 and 2010 ([FAO/AWP, 2023](#)). South Asia, which is home to over 2 billion people ([World Population Review, 2025](#)), is the second most water stressed region in the world, with 74% of the population being exposed to extremely high water stress ([WRI, 2023](#)). However, other subregions of Asia such as Central Asia or East and Southeast Asia are also under continued water-stress, and many parts of the Asia-Pacific region which were once considered water-rich now increasingly seeing localized water stress ([ESCAP, 2024](#), [UNCCD, 2025](#)). The year 2025 has also seen unprecedented water crisis in countries like Afghanistan and Iran. Across the Hindu-Kush and the Himalayas, local and rural populations often rely on springs for their main water supply, but they are also drying up at an alarming rates ([Thapa et al., 2023](#); [Wangchuk et al., 2018](#), [NITI Aayog, 2021](#)).

Food systems are under increasing stress: Worldwide, around 70% of all freshwater is consumed by agriculture ([UNESCO, 2024](#)). In Asia and the Pacific, this average stands at 80% ([ADB, 2020](#)) and reaches above 90% in multiple countries ([FAO Aquastat, n.d](#)). Already, many of the countries in which agriculture has an above-average share of GDP also face high or extremely high water stress ([UNESCO, 2024](#)) and Central, South, and Southeast Asia's agricultural activity will be heavily influenced by changing precipitation patterns, rising temperatures, and increases in the frequency and severity of droughts ([IPCC, 2023](#), [ESCAP & ASEAN, 2021](#)). Similarly, Asia's irrigation-dependent food baskets in Northwest India and North China are also two of the world's top-three hotspots in terms of water-related risks to food production ([UNESCO, 2024](#)).

Increase in energy demand will increase demand for water: Asia and the Pacific accounts for 60% of the global electricity demand, which is expected to double by 2050([IPCC, 2023](#)). The rise of artificial intelligence and its energy needs are expected to put an even higher stress on the region's water resources ([Yu/Nikkei Asia, 2024](#)).. As the region records drier and warmer winter

months, hydroelectric plants decrease their saving capacities. At the same time, hotter summer months lead to an increase in energy demand for the cooling of homes and industries, resulting in the already limited saving capacities of hydroelectric plants being fully consumed earlier in the year and leaving countries at risk of energy shortages ([IPCC, 2023](#)). Faced with such high demands, the impacts of climate change and competition for water use on hydropower in the region need to be addressed. Changing seasonal variability of river flow, and an increase of extreme weather events and disasters such as cloudbursts, floods, landslides, or glacial lake outburst floods can heavily impede hydropower production, severely damage or destroy infrastructure, and risk human lives, as seen across various countries in the region such as India, Nepal, and China ([Molden et al., 2022](#), [IPCC, 2023](#)). Lastly, a decrease in precipitation and a rise in temperature can also increase the dependencies of countries on energy-intensive or unsustainable methods to cover water supply, such as desalination or underground water pumping ([IPCC, 2023](#)).

Water pollution remains a widespread issue across Asia and the Pacific ([ADB, 2020](#)): The effects of water pollution are not only maintained in freshwater resources. Out of the top-10 rivers in the world contributing to marine plastic occurrence, eight are located within Asia ([Schmidt et al., 2017](#)). Besides levels of wastewater treatment performing below the global average in the Asia-Pacific region, much of the region's activities on wastewater treatment also remain undocumented due to lack of reporting ([UN-Habitat and WHO, 2024](#)).

Urban water challenges persist: Currently, 2.2 billion people live in cities in the Asia-Pacific region. By 2050, this number is set to increase by 1.2 billion. The large increase in urbanization has put an enormous strain on the region's water resources. As infrastructure development cannot keep pace with urbanization rates, urban centers face water loss and pollution due to a lack of adequate infrastructure and wastewater treatment plants, whilst many communities remain underserved. Due to the strong increase in water demand, groundwater resources in many cities across the region face overexploitation, causing water scarcity and land subsidence. In cities in low-lying or coastal areas, this not only causes saltwater intrusion but also puts them at further exposure to sea level rise ([ESCAP, 2025](#)).

Key stakeholders are often missing during IWRM processes: Even though over 80% of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region have established a river basin organization to manage water resources, less than 1% of countries have carried out stakeholder mapping and only one third of countries surveyed have implemented formal or informal mechanisms to engage stakeholders on water-related topics ([UNESCO, 2024](#); [OECD, 2021](#)). Furthermore, the Asia-Pacific region is home to many indigenous communities which are not only stewards of sustainable water management, but also holders of traditional knowledge containing effective solutions to local problems. Yet, they regularly remain underserved, are often excluded from policy shaping and management processes, or face a lack of legal protection, as only 20% of the countries with river basin organizations included provisions to protect indigenous and traditional rights ([UNESCO, 2024](#); [Jiménez et al., 2014](#)).

Good Practices and Solutions:

Integrating water in forest management: The Imabari City Forest in Japan has played a crucial role in safeguarding the city's water resources by stabilizing river flows, reducing flood and drought risks, and improving water quality through careful forest management focused on watershed protection. The city's investments in reforestation, maintenance, and legal protection of the forest have created a resilient landscape that supplies reliable clean water to local communities and industries, demonstrating how sustained forest stewardship can deliver vital hydrological benefits and support urban and agricultural needs. ([FAO & CIFOR-ICRAF, 2025](#))

Dumai's Journey to Clean Water in Indonesia: Households and businesses in Dumai, Riau Province, faced high costs and unreliable access to clean water, with families spending up to USD 64 per month on unsafe alternatives. To address this, the World Bank supported the local utility Perumdam Tirta Dumai Bersemai in upgrading its filtration and distribution systems, channeling investment into affordable and sustainable water infrastructure. By 2024, Dumai's utility expanded from having 200 customers to nearly 10,000, transformed from lossmaking to financially sustainable, and created new jobs by recruiting additional staff. Residents now pay USD 16 per month for safe piped water, saving money, improving health, and freeing time for family and livelihoods ([World Bank, 2025](#)).

Recommendations:

- Strengthen cross-sectoral water governance and coordination to ensure efficient, equitable allocation of limited water resources across agriculture, energy, and urban sectors under increasing climate stress.
- Accelerate adoption of circular water systems, including reuse, recycling, and resource recovery, to reduce dependence on freshwater extraction and enhance resilience. The international community and finance mechanisms should particularly support LLDCs, LDCs, SIDS, and countries facing acute water shortages in this regard.
- Simultaneously, expand wastewater treatment and pollution control measures to prevent ecosystem degradation, reduce marine litter originating from riverine sources, and protect human health.
- Promote climate-resilient agricultural and irrigation practices that improve water productivity and safeguard food security amid intensifying droughts and variable rainfall.
- Integrate water efficiency and low-water-intensity approaches in energy production to reduce pressure on freshwater resources and build a more sustainable water–energy nexus.
- Improve urban water infrastructure and management to reduce losses, prevent groundwater depletion, and enhance resilience in rapidly growing and coastal cities facing saltwater intrusion.

- Invest in inclusive, basin-scale water management that actively engages local and indigenous communities and leverages traditional knowledge for sustainable water stewardship.

3) Water for Planet

Trends and Challenges:

Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, with water-related natural hazards being the most dominant: In 2023 alone, over 80% of the region's 140 recorded climate hazard events were floods and storms, affecting more than 46 million people and causing widespread loss of life, economic damage and disruptions to water, food, and energy security ([WMO, 2024a](#); [WMO, 2024b](#)). In 2021, among water-related disasters floods caused the largest amount of fatalities and economic strain, while droughts affected the highest number of individuals. The year 2021 also recorded a 63% surge in damages from droughts when compared to the 2001-2020 average. In the same year, there was an increase of 23% in flood-induced damages and a sharp 147% escalation in those resulting from landslides ([WMO, 2022](#)). As climate change intensifies and with Asia warming faster than the global average, the occurrence of extreme weather events is expected to increase ([IPCC, 2023](#)), putting the Asia-Pacific region at exceptional risks of water-related disasters.

Ecosystems across the Asia-Pacific region are under stress: Forested areas, especially the rainforests of Southeast Asia, are under increased risks of forest fires and habitat fragmentation due to changing precipitation patterns ([IPCC, 2022](#)). Peatlands and wetlands, which not only house multiple species but can also function as carbon sinks and filters for organic pollution, are under threat through warming temperatures, land-use change, drying and subsequent wildfires ([ADB, 2024](#)). The diminishing of forests and wetlands also poses an additional risk to humans as their presence stabilize hillslopes during high precipitation events, serve as fluvial or coastal floodplains, or assist groundwater recharge during floodings.

Asia's Third Pole region faces particular climate challenges: The Third Pole region sustains almost 2 billion people in Asia with freshwater, with glaciers acting as an important source and regulator of waterflows. However, glaciers across the region are melting at increasing rates. In the Hindu Kush Himalaya, glaciers have been melting 65% faster in 2011-2020 compared to the previous decade ([ICIMOD, 2023](#)). Due to melting glaciers, there has also been a rise in the number of glacial lakes since the 1990s. As glaciers continue to melt, there is a growing danger of glacial lake outburst floods occurring, threatening people, wildlife, infrastructure, and settlements ([Adler et al., 2022](#)). Glacial melting is also further accelerated by the deposition of black carbon particles (from incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, and the combustion of biomass, including forest fires) on their surfaces ([Mani, 2021](#)). In the long run, the retreat of glaciers will disrupt food, water and energy security, have a devastating impact on ecosystems

and livelihoods, and cause an increase in risk of conflicts and migration ([Mani, 2021](#); [Caretta et al., 2021](#)).

Desertification and land degradation: Desertification remains a challenge in the Asia-Pacific region. Besides well-known examples such as the disappearance of the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan or Lake Urmia in the Islamic Republic of Iran ([ESCAP, 2023](#)), vast areas across Central Asia and Northeast Asia are challenged with desertification and land degradation due to rising temperature and increasingly drier conditions ([Zhao et al., 2024](#); [ESCAP, 2024](#)).

Good Practices and Solutions:

River Restoration in India: In 2014, the government of India launched the Namami Gange Programme as a flagship mission to restore and rejuvenate the Ganga river and its tributaries. The ongoing programme is India's largest integrated river basin effort and combines tackling pollution abatement, further develop and implement industrial waste regulation, expand sewage treatment, and conserve the rivers ecology through leveraging multi-sector interventions and new technologies ([Ministry of Jal Shakti, 2025](#); [India Science, Technology and Innovation Portal, n.d](#)). This feeds into the National River Conservation Plan (NRCP), India's primary policy for supporting states and union territories in river pollution abatement through financial and technical assistance. The Plan's recent drive targets 13 major rivers by supporting wastewater infrastructure, afforestation, soil erosion control, groundwater recharge, and ecotourism ([Ministry of Jal Shakti, 2022](#)).

Flood Early Warning System in the Ratu River Basin: The Ratu River Basin between Nepal and India hosted a community-based flood early warning system developed by ICIMOD to ensure timely flood information for upstream and downstream communities across borders. The system linked local caretakers monitoring river levels with Community Disaster Management Committees that coordinate alerts and evacuation ([Shrestha & Sherchan, 2018](#)). During the August 2017 floods, upstream warnings enabled downstream communities to evacuate safely, saving 169 lives in Nepal alone and alerting communities in neighboring areas in India eight hours in advance. The early-warning system has protected around 64,000 people and significantly reduced flood-related deaths in the area ([Molden et al, 2017](#)).

Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project: The MIWRM Project promotes sustainable, transboundary water governance across the Mekong River Basin. The project facilitated regular meetings and technical exchanges among member countries of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam), promoting shared understanding and coordinated water management. Over 30 monitoring stations were installed or upgraded across the Lower Mekong Basin ([MRC, n.d.](#)).

Recommendations:

- Accelerate protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystems, such as rivers, wetlands, and peatlands, to safeguard biodiversity, improve water quality, and enhance resilience to floods and droughts.
- Expand nature-based solutions and hybrid infrastructure for flood control, carbon storage, and groundwater recharge, especially in vulnerable subregions.
- Strengthen pollution controls and wastewater treatment standards to reduce contamination, conserve water resources, and protect aquatic life.
- Foster regional cooperation and data sharing on glacier melt, drought risk, and cross-border water management, with particular focus on the Third Pole, SIDS, and other at-risk subregions or countries.
- Scale up investment in early warning systems, community-based warning systems, and resilient infrastructure to reduce the impacts of floods, storms, droughts, and landslides, especially in high-risk and vulnerable areas.
- Explore opportunities for integrating ecosystem-based adaptation into national DRR strategies, climate mitigation and adaptation plans, or national biodiversity and action plans.

4) Water for Cooperation

Trends and Challenges:

Cooperation is falling behind in transboundary waters: Water cooperation in Asia and the Pacific is gaining strategic relevance as countries confront rising water stress, climate vulnerability, and shared resource challenges. In the Asia-Pacific region, about 57 transboundary river basins cover 39% of the continent's land area, which are crucial for regional livelihoods, food security, and ecosystems. However, of the 25 countries in Central, Eastern, Southern, and South-Eastern Asia which share at least one river, lake, or aquifer basin, only 2 have over 90% of their shared basins covered by operational cooperative arrangements. ([UNESCO, 2023](#); [UNECE & UNESCO, 2021](#), [FAO & AWP, 2023](#)).

Several critical challenges and emerging issues hinder the advancement of transboundary water cooperation: Key among these is the lack of joint mechanisms for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, despite increasing climate variability impacting shared basins and communities. This gap undermines collective resilience efforts crucial for coping with floods, droughts, and other climate-induced hazards. Furthermore, evolving geopolitical tensions, climate vulnerability, and environmental degradation complicate cooperation efforts. The region faces increasing risks to water security and peace if cooperative frameworks do not keep pace with these pressures ([OECD, 2021](#); [UNESCO, 2023](#); [UNECE & UNESCO, 2021](#); [FAO & AWP, 2023](#)).

Limited data and information gaps across transboundary basins remain a barrier to effective cooperation: Limited data sharing and monitoring capacities does not only obstruct transparent and science-based decision-making but also impedes valuable trust-building among riparian states. The absence of enhanced and harmonized basin-wide information systems also hinders the development of effective applications, such as early warning systems ([IWMI, 2021](#)).

Transboundary governance and policy coordination remain siloed: Institutional, legal, and financial capacities to manage shared water resources in alignment with national integrated water resources management (IWRM) processes are still insufficient. Weak coordination between national and basin-level authorities and misaligned sectoral policies constrain comprehensive basin governance. Declining and poorly targeted official development assistance (ODA) further restricts the ability to develop and maintain robust water infrastructure and reliable services, especially in transboundary contexts ([OECD 2023](#)).

Human capacities and bottom-up stakeholder engagement is falling short: Local-level governance and community participation are often undermined by inadequate human, technical, and financial resources, limiting the inclusiveness and sustainability of cooperation efforts on the ground ([GWP SEA 2023](#)). Furthermore, both local governments and populations can easily be overlooked in transboundary water resources planning, which limits the knowledge base of policies and decisions and subsequently their general acceptance and effectiveness ([IUCN, 2024](#)).

Good Practices and Solutions:

The Third Pole Regional Climate Centre Network (TPRCC-Network): The TPRCC-Network was established to increase cooperation between climate centers of Third Pole countries and international organizations to meet the region's needs for scientific services, collaboration and capacity building on climate and cryosphere matters. Led by the World Meteorological Organization, and with ESCAP, ICIMOD, Third Pole Environment, Global Cryosphere Watch, GEWEX, and the Mountain Research Initiative being key partners, the demonstration phase was launched in June 2024. The network supports early warning systems and impact assessments, issuing joint seasonal publications that integrate observations, trends, and forecasts of temperature, precipitation, snow cover, and extreme events ([WMO, 2024](#)).

Central Asian Regional Glaciological Centre: Established in 2023, the UNESCO Category 2 center promotes transboundary cooperation on glacier monitoring and has signed an MoU with Central Asian national and other hydrometeorological agencies. The aim is to strengthen regional cooperation and technical capacity for glacier and cryosphere monitoring in Central Asia through coordinated research, data sharing, and capacity development and to outline collaboration on joint studies, training, awareness-raising for policymakers, and closer links with other research efforts and institutions ([UNESCO, 2024](#)).

Transboundary water cooperation in Central Asia: Blue Peace Central Asia was the foundational phase of an initiative aimed at transforming water from being a source of potential conflict into a catalyst for cooperation among the five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It facilitated multi-level dialogues among water experts, policymakers, and civil society, promoted shared understanding of water challenges, and improved glacier monitoring in the region ([Blue Peace Central Asia, n.d.](#)).

Recent accession to international conventions on water: In 2025, Bangladesh became the first country in South and South-West Asia to join the United Nations Water Convention, and in 2024, Kazakhstan joined the United Nations Watercourses Convention. Together with Nepal and Timor-Leste having reported on SDG indicator 6.5.2 for the first time in 2024, the region is witnessing new countries supporting international frameworks and data collection on transboundary water cooperation ([UNECE, UNESCO & UN-Water, 2024](#)).

Recommendations:

- Strengthen basin organizations and regional forums to foster trust, transparency, and joint decision-making together with monitoring frameworks and peer-review mechanisms to track progress on transboundary cooperation commitments.
- Mainstream water cooperation into national development plans, IWRM, climate adaptation strategies, and sectoral investment frameworks.
- Strengthen data exchange and open access to hydrological, climate, and socio-economic data together with expanded scientific collaboration and capacity building for evidence-based policymaking.
- Mobilize diverse financing streams by integrating water cooperation into climate finance, development aid, and private sector investment. Instruments such as green bonds, climate-resilient infrastructure funds, public-private partnerships, and results-based financing can support transboundary water initiatives.
- Establish multi-stakeholder platforms that allow bottom-up inputs into transboundary water management from local communities and populations.

5) Water in Multilateral Processes

Trends and Challenges:

The Asia-Pacific region is not on track to achieving SDG 6 by 2030: For some indicators, the region has also made little progress since 2015, most notably, on maintaining a permanent water body extent (6.6.1), safely managed drinking water services (6.1.1), safely treated wastewater (6.3.1) and water-use efficiency (6.4.1). There has been more advancements in relation to addressing water stress (6.4.2) and IWRM (6.5.1), yet progress remains moderate.

The region hosts key events related to water, such as the conferences of the Dushanbe Water Process which support the implementation of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” (2018-2028), demonstrating collective commitment. Going forward, it would be vital for the region to further translate the commitments into actions.

The absence of a treaty on plastic pollution hinders acceleration on curbing water pollution: As of November 2025, the Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee is still in its fifth session in its attempt to formulate a final treaty text on plastic pollution, after a consensus has not been reached in late 2024 ([UNEP, n.d.](#)). However, eight out of the top-10 rivers in the world contributing to marine plastic occurrence are located within Asia ([Schmidt et al., 2017](#)). In light of this, a treaty which would curb or regulate plastic pollution would therefore not only help the region’s freshwater resources to become less polluted with plastic, but also the world’s oceans.

Good Practices and Solutions:

High Level International Conference on Glaciers Preservation 2025: In May 2025 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the government of the Republic of Tajikistan hosted the High-Level International Conference on Glaciers Preservation – the first of its kind. As many people around the globe and in Asia rely on glaciers for a steady water supply, it aimed at advancing scientific research and monitoring to better understand glacier dynamics, mitigate the socio-economic consequences of glacier retreat, and promote integrated adaptation strategies ([ICGP, n.d.](#)), resulting in the adoption of the Dushanbe Glaciers Declaration.

9th Pacific Water and Wastewater Ministers Meeting: In August 2025, under the auspices of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Water & Wastewater Association met in Honiara, Solomon Islands for the 9th Pacific Water and Wastewater Ministers Meeting. The communiqué of the annual meeting concluded with a strong call reaffirming the commitment of tackling water scarcity and climate challenges across the region, and that safe, reliable and sustainable access to water and sanitation is fundamental. The regional group furthermore committed to utilizing global processes and platforms such as the 2026 UN Water Conference in order to push for advancements in water and sanitation and elevate the voices of the Pacific to the global stage ([Pacific Community, 2025](#); [Solomon Islands Government, 2025](#)).

Recommendations:

- SDG Progress must be accelerated and hurdles to progress must be identified. Synergies with other SDGs or support through international conventions can be key to accelerating progress both for SDG 6 and beyond.
- The international community should start shaping a strong, consistent post-2030 framework for water. The vulnerability and need for further action on water in Asia and the Pacific makes a strong post-2030 agenda on water essential for the region. Even though the Water

Action Decade and adjacent frameworks such as the Dushanbe Water Process have brought forth commitments on taking action, consistency and follow-up action need to be ensured.

6) Investments for Water

Trends and Challenges:

Investments in water are not on par with water demand: The Asia-Pacific region is undergoing significant changes in water investment driven by growing demand, urbanization, and climate pressures. Industrial water use is projected to increase by 65 percent, domestic use by 30 percent, and agricultural use by 5 percent by 2030 ([AIIB, 2019](#)). Whilst investment flows into the water sector have increased, they remain insufficient to meet the vast infrastructure and service needs. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), developing countries globally face a staggering USD 4 trillion shortfall in sustainable development investments, with water infrastructure among the most underfunded sectors ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)). In the Asia-Pacific region, estimates for needed investments in water and sanitation range between roughly USD 50 to almost USD 200 billion per year ([ADB, 2022](#); [OECD, 2021](#)).

Investments have become more aligned with climate change: Climate risks such as droughts and floods are increasingly factored into water investments, driving demand for resilient infrastructure and adaptive management strategies aligned with sustainable development goals. Yet, with the advancement of climate change, there is a new level of urgency in scaling up such aligned investments and systematically integrate them into planning and financing strategies ([AIIB, 2019](#)).

Not everyone profits from technological advancements: Technological innovation using geospatial information systems or AI are advancing resource monitoring and management, but adoption remains uneven as rural and marginalized communities face barriers to access such new technologies ([ESCAP, 2024](#); [FAO, 2019](#)).

Good Practices and Solutions:

Blue Peace Bonds as an innovative financing mechanism: River basin organizations often lack access to financial capital. To address this, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) launched the Blue Peace Financing Initiative, enabling non-state entities to issue Blue Peace Bonds. These bonds transform basin-wide policy frameworks into multisectoral investment plans that attract capital for development and improve institutional creditworthiness ([UNCDF, 2025](#)). The first Blue Peace Bond, issued by the Gambia River Basin Development Organization in 2023, mobilized up to USD 2 billion to

implement its Master and Joint Investment Plan ([UNCDF, 2023](#)), setting an example of an innovative finance mechanism for transboundary water governance.

Recommendations:

- Attract private sector investment by improving project bankability, offering credit guarantees, and ensuing transparent cost-recovery mechanisms. Public-private partnerships should be scaled to leverage commercial finance for water infrastructure.
- Improve governance and institutional capacity at national and sub-national levels through technical assistance, digital monitoring systems, and performance-based management. Strong governance is essential to reduce inefficiencies and build investor confidence.
- Strengthening national leadership and policy frameworks to prioritize water in development agendas, align with climate adaptation goals, and integrate water planning across sectors such as agriculture, energy, and urban development.
- Use financial incentives and blended finance models to reduce risk investments and mobilize capital. Instruments such as climate bonds, results-based financing, and debt-for-climate swaps can support sustainable water projects.
- Invest in nature-based solutions including watershed restoration, wetland protection, and green infrastructure. These approaches enhance resilience, reduce long-term costs, and deliver co-benefits for biodiversity and livelihoods.
- Enhance collaboration between donors, development banks, and private institutions to provide grants, concessional loans, and technical support for water service delivery, especially in vulnerable and underserved communities.