

2026 United Nations Water Conference

United Kingdom

Theme 6: Investments for Water: Finance, Technology and Innovation, and Capacity Building

1. Introduction

Recent household data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) confirms that SDG 6 water and sanitation targets will not be met at the current rate of progress. In many parts of the world, human rights to water and sanitation are being foregone. Half the world's population was experiencing water stress in 2020 – and the situation has become worse since then. In some areas, access to safely managed water and sanitation services is actually declining, with increases in service coverage being outpaced by population growth and increasing demands on scarce water resources. Climate change, environmental degradation and nature loss are accelerating growing water insecurity.

Accelerating progress to close this gap requires a step change in investments for water from all sources to support delivery of the SDGs, Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. But finance is only one part of the solution. As the Global Commission on the Economics of Water has clearly stated – we need a new, bold, economics for water. Sector performance has to be overhauled; new approaches and technologies have to be introduced; and silos which continue to impede cross-sector working and effective collaboration, in particular, between the water, climate, energy and agricultural sectors have to be dismantled. And to introduce and drive these changes will require sustained political leadership, leadership which is informed by relevant evidence and examples of best practice.

The 2026 UN Water Conference provides a singular opportunity to help translate commitments into practice, through each of its themes and by mobilizing partners in support of national leadership. In this context, the conference's sixth Interactive Dialogue, *'Investments for Water – Finance, Technology, Innovation and Capacity Building'* is particularly important.

2. Status and Trends

The 2025 JMP Household Report highlights what has been achieved and how much needs to be done in terms of SDG 6 targets 1 and 2: water supply and sanitation. Since 2015, 961m people have gained access to safely managed drinking water services, and 1.2 billion have gained access to safely managed sanitation. Despite this progress, one in four people still lack access to safe water, and two in five lack access to safe sanitation. The evidence is clear: SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 will be missed without a dramatic acceleration in progress¹.

The health outcomes of unsafe water and sanitation are profound. Poor access to WASH is directly responsible for 69% of the burden of disease for diarrhoea, a major contributor to child mortality in low-income countries². In 2019, poor WASH conditions caused at least 1.4 million deaths due to diarrhoeal disease, acute respiratory infections and undernutrition³.

¹ Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2024: special focus on inequalities. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2025.

² Burden of disease attributable to unsafe drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene, 2023 update. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023.

³ *ibid*

In urban areas, JMP data confirm that the number of people lacking access to safely managed water services is actually *increasing*, with population growth outpacing service delivery. In lower-middle income countries, the number lacking access to safely managed sanitation is also increasing. Based on current trends, progress on water and sanitation has to increase by eight-fold and six-fold respectively to achieve SDG 6 targets by 2030. In low and lower-middle income countries, and in fragile and conflict-affected settings, the situation even worse⁴.

Compared to water supply and sanitation, data on the status of other SDG water targets are less complete. The overall picture is one of demand for fresh water exceeding supply, the situation being driven by population growth, urbanization, climate change and weak governance. Globally, we face the prospect of a 40% shortfall in freshwater supply by 2030.⁵

In 2020, 4 billion people – half the world’s population, were already experiencing water stress⁶. This number is growing. Between 2000 and 2024, per capita renewable water resources decreased globally by 25%, and by 43% in low-income countries. By 2100, Africa is projected to see a 64% reduction in fresh-water availability per capita compared to what it is now⁷. In many countries, water scarcity is being intensified by rapid urbanization. Almost 70% of the global population will be living in cities by 2050, with urban water demand increasing by 80%⁸. The situation is particularly serious in fast-growing cities across Africa, where water is already scarce, and where the provision of water and sanitation services cannot keep up with population growth. ‘Day Zero’ events such as that which affected Cape Town between 2020 and 2022 will be increasingly frequent and will mostly affect the poor⁹.

The economic impacts of water scarcity are profound, not least on productivity. Globally, 78% of jobs have some level of water dependence¹⁰. Water-intensive sectors underpin 56% of jobs in low-income countries and 62% of jobs in sub-Saharan Africa¹¹. The value of water-related risks is estimated to be equivalent to 7-9% of global GDP.¹² Food systems are also highly dependent on water. Agriculture and food production accounts for 70% of all freshwater withdrawals and 90% of freshwater consumption¹³. Drought or flood events, increasingly severe due to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, have a significant impact on agricultural productivity.

⁴ Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2024: special focus on inequalities. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2025.

⁵ Global Commission on the Economics of Water, 2023: *Turning the Tide: a Call to Collective Action*. Available at: [Turning the Tide - Web \(low res\)](#)

⁶ Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781009325844

⁷ Zhang, Fan, and Christian-Borja-Vega. 2024. “Water for Shared Prosperity.” World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank

⁸ Flörke, Martina, Christof Schneider, and Robert I. McDonald. 2018. “Water Competition between Cities and Agriculture Driven by Climate Change and Urban Growth.” *Nature Sustainability* 1 (1): 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-017-0006-8>.

⁹ Bischoff-Mattson, Zachary, Gillian Maree, Coleen Vogel, Amanda Lynch, David Olivier, and Deon Terblanche. 2020. “Shape of a Water Crisis: Practitioner Perspectives on Urban Water Scarcity and ‘Day Zero’ in South Africa.” *Water Policy* 22 (2): 193–210.

¹⁰ Das, Maitreyi Bordia; Cyprian F Fisiy, and Rachel Kyte. 2013. *Inclusion matters: the foundation for shared prosperity* (English). New frontiers of social policy Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/114561468154469371/Inclusion-matters-the-foundation-for-shared-prosperity>

¹¹ Miguel, E., S. Satyanath, and E. Sergenti. 2004. “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach.” *Journal of Political Economy* 112: 725–<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/421174>; Petherick, A. 2012. “Enumerating Adaptation.” *Nature Climate Change* 2: 228–229. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate1472>.

¹² N. Ranger, J. Alvarez et al, 2023: *The Green Scorpion: the Macro-Criticality of Nature for Finance*. Available at: [INCAE-MacroCriticality of Nature-December2023.pdf](#)

¹³ *The State of the World’s Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture – Systems at breaking point*. Synthesis Report 2021. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Rome 2021.

Freshwater ecosystems are critical for mitigating climate change and building resilience to climate impacts. However, wildlife populations in freshwater ecosystems have declined by 85% since 1970, more than any other type of ecosystem.¹⁴

Hydropower, thermal, nuclear power, biofuel, biomass and water pumped storage systems all require considerable quantities of water. Transition to green energy and innovative technologies - green hydrogen, data farms, chip production all depend on water. Hydroelectric power accounts for 40% of the electricity generation in low-income countries, compared to a global average of 15%¹⁵.

Taking into account these inter-connections, the water crisis will have a profound impact on global development, prosperity and stability. Solving the crisis should be a political imperative. The following section considers why progress on such a fundamental issue is so slow.

3. Challenges and emerging issues

Accelerating progress on water and sanitation will require a huge increase in sector spending. WHO analysis indicates that the majority of sector spending results from household contributions, either through water payments or through self-supply. Together, household payments and other contributions are estimated to account for over 60% of all expenditure on water supply, sanitation and hygiene¹⁶. Whilst these payments are contingent on receiving a particular quality of service, in overall terms, the poor pay relatively more for water and sanitation services compared to the better off.

Discounting household contributions, the World Bank has estimated that global spend on water – including WASH, water resource management and water for agriculture, amounts to \$165 billion per year. Of this, the public sector contributes just over £140 billion, 85% of the total. This is equivalent to 0.5% of global GDP. By comparison, Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounts to under 7% of the total, though it is significantly more than this in some regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Contributions from the private sector account for less than 2% of the total. Key issues emerge from this and related analysis

- The proportion of global gross domestic product (GDP) spent on water (0.5%) is significantly smaller than other basic services. For human capital, which includes health and education, it is 60%; for the energy sector, it is 5%, and for transport it is 4%.
- The private sector's contribution to the sector (2%) is very small compared to comparable sectors. For the energy sector, it is 54%; for transport it is 39%. Factors that discourage private investment include high up-front costs, long return periods, and high risks associated with poor cost recovery and political interference, for example, on tariff setting.
- 63% of global water expenditure is spent on capital works; the balance covering recurrent costs, including staff salaries, energy and consumables. Between 7% and 3% of water expenditure is spent on maintenance. The 3% figure applies to the water supply and sanitation sub-sector. Water and sanitation infrastructure is often poorly maintained, resulting in prolonged periods of non-functionality and poor service quality.

¹⁴ World Wildlife Fund, ZSL, 2024: *Living Planet Report*. Available at: [Living Planet Report 2024](#)

¹⁵ Zhang, Fan, and Christian-Borja-Vega. 2024. "Water for Shared Prosperity." World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank

¹⁶ Strong systems and sound investments: evidence on and key insights into accelerating progress on sanitation, drinking-water and hygiene. The UN-Water global analysis and assessment of sanitation and drinking-water (GLAAS) 2022 report. Geneva: World Health Organization.

- Budget execution rates in the water sector averaged 72% between 2009 and 2020, significantly less than other sectors where the main cost driver is staffing. World Bank analysis points to time delays (often resulting from weak capacity and inefficient systems) as a major cause of low absorption rates.
- Funds received are not spent effectively either. The World Bank estimates that the cost efficiency of the average water utility is around 85%, leaving significant room for improvement.

To meet SDG targets for water supply and sanitation alone requires an additional \$141 billion per year between 2017 and 2030, on top of current expenditure. As a first step towards filling this gap, sector performance has to be overhauled. Improving budget utilization and reducing inefficiencies, including non-revenue water, would enable the sector to do much more with existing funds, both in terms of extending access and improving service quality. Better services which meet demand would help secure household payments. Better systems would attract a greater share of public funds and help secure private finance.

For many low-income households the situation is not so simple. Many poor people cannot afford the costs of receiving or sustaining a relatively high level of service, even if this is associated with significant health benefits, reduced health expenditure and time-saving. Subsidies could potentially help – but these tend to be poorly targeted to the point they are regressive, benefiting the better-off rather than the poorest households and distorting the market.

Meanwhile, tariffs are often highly vulnerable to political influence, to the extent that many water service providers are unable to cover capital and recurrent costs. As a result, the quality of the service they provide cannot be sustained, eroding people's willingness to pay. Ultimately, water operators become dependent on unreliable top-ups from government to prevent them from going to the wall, whilst a minimum level of service is maintained.

Accessing climate finance is associated with its own set of challenges. Procedures are exacting and cumbersome, rules and regulations change; time-lines are stretched. As a result, only 3% of the £650 billion pot of global climate finance goes to water related adaptation projects. Whilst climate funds such as the GCF are undergoing a package of reform to improve access, especially for low and lower-middle income countries, there is still much to do in this respect. The UK is working with other stakeholders on introducing reforms, with progress being made.

4. Opportunities

Based on this analysis, a number of broad opportunities to improve the situation can be identified. These are summarised below, before being developed into practical actions in the following section.

Water pricing: Establish a water pricing policy and related systems and structure based on its value to people and planet (related to sustainable withdrawals and actual production costs). This would encourage water demand management, including reuse, water conservation and pollution control, and establish a market that enables transfers between sub sectors (industry, agriculture, domestic), improving water use efficiency.

Effective regulation: water pricing should form part of a broader regulation system independent from government. Regulation would apply to different sub-sectors and to rural and urban settings and would cover quality standards and tariff structures, and the means to apply and maintain these.

Reduction of non-revenue water: establish incentives for operators to minimize non-revenue water (i.e. water that is produced but not paid for). This includes investing in related systems and technology, including leak detection and metering.

Building revenue streams to attract private capital: As well as reviewing water pricing, there is considerable scope to develop markets for the service value of water in the natural capital that underpins all economies, for example ecosystem functions, flood prevention and green water storage, and so provide returns to investors based on delivery of integrated and nature-based water infrastructure with multiple environmental and social benefits.

Tariff reform: Reform water tariffs based on the cost of supply and willingness and ability to pay for specific service levels; related institutional reforms should help protect tariffs from profiteering or political influence.

Subsidy reform: In parallel with tariff reform, reform subsidies, ensuring that these are well targeted to achieve specific outcomes (e.g. maintaining a minimum service level for the poorest households). Subsidies that benefit relatively well-off households rather than the poor should be phased out.

Systems strengthening: Associated with the previous measures, introduce a structured package of measures to strengthen or reform institutions and related capacity and systems, and to facilitate cross sector collaboration and coordination, based on an in-depth needs assessment and political economy analysis; monitor progress using a set of common indicators covering different aspects (building blocks) of the system.

Integrated planning: Integrate water-related risks and opportunities in national planning, including in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

Responsible supply chains: promote corporate stewardship, accountability and the fair, sustainable and resilient use of water resources in global trade and supply chains, including through assessing the embedded or 'virtual' water cost of products and services.

New technologies: Support the introduction of new approaches and technologies, from AI-driven flood forecasting (one example being the Jakarta Smart City initiative), performance-based contracting and green infrastructure to novel water treatment technologies, automated payment systems and predictive maintenance – the scope for innovation in the water sector is vast.

Guarantees: Provide guarantees covering major risks that may otherwise put off private investors. Guarantees should be provided after more systemic issues of performance have been addressed.

Project pipelines and matchmaking. Support the establishment of a series of bankable projects for investors to consider, using blended finance, local currency bonds, public private partnerships and other financial instruments to help secure private investment. Individual projects can be clustered to provide economies of scale and reduce risks if needed. This is contingent on broader reforms having first being implemented.

Political leadership. Engage political leaders and enlist support from champions to help build global ambition on water investment, introduce and sustain systems change and promote cross

sector collaboration and coordination, nationally, regionally and globally - including at the UN and across the three Rio Conventions.

5. Solutions

This section introduces a set of initiatives which are helping translate the opportunities set out above into actual practice. With others, these can be developed over the course of the next 12 months into case studies to inform the UN Water Conference and the Interactive Dialogue on 'Investments for Water'.

UK FCDO: WASH Systems for Health: Launched during the UN Water Conference in 2023 as part of the Water Action Agenda, the WASH Systems for Health programme is working in eight countries to strengthen government WASH systems and related capacity. Work is led by three NGO-led consortia and UNICEF, the latter working in fragile and conflict-affected settings. A key focus of this work is to develop and demonstrate models that professionalise water and sanitation service providers, for example, based on the Uptime model (see below). IRC WASH provides monitoring services and is engaged, with UNICEF and WHO, in the development of standard indicators for WASH systems that enable progress to be tracked.

Uptime Catalyst Facility - Performance-based contracts for service delivery: The Uptime Catalyst Facility offers an innovative approach to rural water services that is based on performance-based contracts based on three metrics – uptime – the proportion of time that infrastructure is working; water volume – the amount of water used, and local revenue – what users pay for the service. Metrics are monitored by a third party – here there is scope and appetite to use new technology to streamline monitoring, using smart systems and artificial intelligence to track performance. The Uptime model guarantees water benefits to users that pay a share of service costs, achieving 96% or more reliability. Demonstration programmes are currently operational in 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and South America, serving 5.2 million people, with similar approaches being trialed by other organisations elsewhere. Whilst a sustainable top-up is needed to achieve full cost recovery, the model is highly effective and scalable.

Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy Centre of Expertise (GCIEP): This Centre of Expertise offers technical support to governments for economic infrastructure, including water, sanitation and waste management. Focus areas include planning, governance and finance, project preparation, technical solutions and digital/data strategy development and regulatory reform. Related programmes are delivered in partnership with national governments and cities across a range of countries, including Ghana, Indonesia, Mozambique, Philippines, Vietnam and Zambia, with a focus on poor urban communities. The initiative is managed by a PwC-led Alliance that includes Mott MacDonald, Adam Smith International, Engineers Against poverty and MDY Legal.

World Bank Group - Multi-Phased Programmatic Approach (MPA): Initially proposed as the Water Security and Climate Adaptation Global Challenge Programme, the World Bank's MPA is a long term (10-15 year) strategy designed to strengthen water-related systems and capacity to develop creditworthy institutions and programmes which can secure private finance at scale. This includes a major focus on regulation, tariff reform and utility strengthening. MPAs are designed to bring together different arms of the World Bank Group to work with governments to do this, including the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. As part of the approach, the WB is establishing multi-

constituency platforms (or build on existing ones) that bring development partners together in support of national government to work on systems strengthening. One early example of an MPA is an 11-country initiative in East and Southern Africa that focusses on WASH. MPAs provide the World Bank with the means to deliver its new and highly ambitious water strategy.

UNICEF's Climate Shift: Established by UNICEF in 2020, the Climate Shift is a structured 9 step approach to strengthen national governments to develop climate resilient WASH systems and services. FCDO has supported UNICEF to implement the approach in 11 climate vulnerable countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East since 2021. Through the programme, UNICEF's government partners have helped transform their national WASH sectors with comprehensive risk assessments, real time data services, climate rationales, environmental and social safeguards and capacity building initiatives. This has led to the submission of project proposals to climate funds with a value of over \$1 billion, potentially benefiting up to 12 million people.

Kigali Water: Public Private Partnership (PPP): The Kigali Bulk Water PPP is a \$60.8m Build-Operate-Transfer project with a 27-year concession. It supplies treated water to Kigali, distributes 40,000m³ daily, boosting supply capacity by a third and serving an estimated 500,000 people. Launched in 2015 and operational in 2020, its success, driven by strong governance and strategic financing, offers replicable lessons for water PPPs across Africa. Private capital amounted to 33% from Kigali Water Limited, provided through the Africa Water Infrastructure Development Platform supported by Metito Utilities Limited and British International Investment, the UK's development bank. Development financing from AfDB made up the balance. Viability gap funding was also provided in the form of a \$6.25m grant that lowered tariffs and reduced associated risks. Project preparation was supported by the Private Infrastructure Development Group. Key success factors include government commitment, the government's PPP legal framework that boosted investor confidence, a clear scope of work, early stakeholder engagement and comprehensive risk mitigation.

Resilient Water Accelerator: The Resilient Water Accelerator aims to increase investment in water-related infrastructure and services to build climate resilience. The initiative brings private sector, policy makers and other stakeholders together at an early stage to analyse barriers to investment and develop workable solutions that are attractive to private investment and build water resilience. Investments will focus on landscape-based measures using water Nature-based Solutions wherever optimal, using business models that ensure a sufficient and guaranteed long-term return on investment. The work includes helping to identify and overcome the policy and regulatory barriers to investment and tackling political economy issues and trade-offs including water pricing, sharing water fairly and paying water stewards (e.g. farmers, foresters, indigenous people) to manage watersheds and their own green water. In addition to improving the enabling environment, this work will explore new markets for environmental services that provide returns to investors based on delivery of integrated and nature-based water infrastructure with multiple environmental and social benefits.

Fair Water Footprints (FWF): FWF brings together enterprise, government, and civil society to stimulate action and investment on water and climate risks in global supply chains. Through trade, policy, procedural reform, new knowledge, and incentives it sets out to reshape the political economy on water and establish water stewardship as a business norm, and so to drive sustainable, resilient, and inclusive growth. The FWF initiative works primarily through international supply chains and international trading relationships. It is led by CDP Worldwide (CDP), a not-for-profit charity that runs the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states, and regions to manage their environmental impacts. CDP is an international

organization founded in the UK in 2004 with offices and partners in 50 countries. Other partners are Water Witness International, an Edinburgh-based NGO operating in East Africa and Peru, Chatham House and the International Institute for Environment and Development.

Water Resilience Tracker for National Climate Planning: the Water Resilience Tracker provides technical assistance to governments to enable the design and implementation of inclusive, climate-resilient policies and plans which better recognise water's pivotal place in the response to climate change. It examines existing institutional structures and policies, identifies gaps, and provides strategic support to unlock cooperation, leadership, and access to climate finance. It is led by the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, who are partnered with the International Water Management Institute, Arup and Deltares.

Sanitation and Water for All: Heads of State Initiatives (HoSI): Established in 2022 and launched during the 2023 UN Water Conference, HoSI engages political leaders at the highest level to champion the water and sanitation sector – with Presidents and Prime Ministers driving reforms, setting ambitious targets, mobilizing funds and finance, leading collaboration, reviewing progress. Since 2024, four countries have established national compacts or equivalent mechanisms that include specific commitments that will transform progress. Progress is being made. For example, in South Sudan, President Kiir increased the national WASH budget thirteen-fold as part of HoSI. Other countries are being engaged by HoSI's core group (currently SWA, UNICEF, IRC-WASH, WaterAid, the Governments of the Netherlands and the UK, set to increase with government partners from the global south) to join the initiative.

Global Outlook Council for Water Investment: The Global Outlook Council (GOC) is a more recent development, proposed by President Ramaphosa of South Africa as a G20 Initiative during the Africa Union / Africa Water Investment Programme (AU-AIP) Summit in Cape Town in August 2025. In summary, the Council – primarily made up of current and former Heads of State, would encourage governments to focus efforts on water security and sanitation and help broker links with investors. Noting that the GOC shares characteristics with HoSI (and SWA's Global Leaders Council), there is scope to bring these initiatives together.

6. Recommendations and conclusions

Based on this analysis and the examples provided, a number of recommendations emerge:

1. Progress is contingent on political leadership and commitment, backed up with reliable, up-to-date evidence of the status of water services, the costs of action and inaction, and examples of best practice. Commitment is needed not least to introduce, drive and embed reform over a number of years. Development partners need to encourage and support this process, working together rather than in isolation.
2. Households make the largest contribution to water and sanitation services. As such they are a critical stakeholder – one whose priorities, capacity and engagement are frequently overlooked. Meeting their demand for water and sanitation with services they can afford is a priority. The importance of securing stakeholder engagement early is essential, and mechanisms to do this need to be developed, strengthened and sustained.
3. Regulation is needed to establish minimum service standards and an equitable tariff structure. Achieving this may take political resolve that challenges the status quo and existing power structures.
4. Linked to regulation, increasing sector performance is an imperative, observing that almost a quarter of sector allocations are not spent and internal efficiencies can be improved. Work

in this area results in more people gaining access to water-related services without any additional budget, building trust and confidence.

5. Professionalising service delivery results in improved services. Related approaches can respond to household demand and optimise user payments. Nevertheless, especially in more isolated rural areas, there may be a gap between what people can afford and the cost of maintaining a service. In these cases, a sustainable top up is needed for the model to work, whether this comes from other users in the form of a cross subsidy, or government itself.
6. Increased trust and confidence are needed to increase public allocations to the sector. Ministers of Finance need to be aware of the benefits that result from investing in water security, sanitation and hygiene – noting that these are external, resulting in improved health, education, prosperity, resilience and nature. Monetising benefits is a difficult but necessary step to win the financial argument.
7. Securing private finance for water and sanitation and the sustainable use of water resources is a long-term aim, underpinned by system strengthening and / or reform. Blended finance and guarantees can help derisk investments but should not be used in place of structural change. With investors looking for a solid return, their support should be directed accordingly – focusing on viable business models. Other areas may best be tackled using public funds.
8. Bridging knowledge and innovation gaps, prioritization building capacities and matching them with finance; Making knowledge and innovation a core part of how we work, building partnerships and taking pilots that function to scale.

In conclusion – there is no easy solution, no one answer. Instead, a carefully designed and well-structured set of interventions is needed over time – during which progress needs to be reviewed and approaches adapted. The collaboration of partners in support of government leadership underpins the whole process.

SDG 6 targets to achieve universal access to water and sanitation by 2030 look increasingly out of reach. Nevertheless, as much as possible should be done over the next five years to close the gap, whilst establishing the foundations of a longer-term systems-based approach to establish sustainable and resilient services.

7. Guiding questions

A genuine interactive dialogue depends on the extent and quality of engagement from a broad set of stakeholders, including governments, external support agencies including bilateral governments and development banks, NGOs, utility representatives, private sector representatives and financiers, research and learning organisations, representatives of water and sanitation users – including users who typically lack a voice in such meetings – women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and persons with disabilities. How can we ensure this breadth and depth of participation within a relatively short, structured dialogue?

Political leadership is fundamental to improving water security, sanitation and hygiene. Decisions involving structural change, reform and finance are often made beyond a sector ministry. How can we ensure the participation of high-level political stakeholders and key sectoral ministers and ministers of finance?

Whilst the conference largely focuses on translating commitments into actions, how can we ensure accountability and delivery, if possible building on existing mechanisms?