



2026 United Nations Water Conference

Interactive Dialogue Concept Papers

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Contribution to Interactive Dialogue: Water for Planet

I. Introduction (500 words)

Water is the foundation of planetary health, social well-being, and sustainable economic growth. Yet, the degradation of freshwater ecosystems is advancing at an alarming rate. Wetlands, rivers, and aquifers are disappearing faster than any other ecosystem, with over 85 percent of wetlands lost since 1970. The impacts are felt globally with declining water quality, reduced biodiversity, and mounting vulnerability to floods, droughts, and sea-level rise. The Water for Planet dialogue calls for an integrated response that unites climate, biodiversity, land, and water management under one framework to restore the natural systems that sustain life.

Recent evidence confirms that the current infrastructure paradigm is insufficient to meet these challenges. According to the World Bank's "Integrating Green and Gray Infrastructure" report (2019), traditional "gray" infrastructure alone cannot address the scale and complexity of today's water crises. Combining engineered systems with natural processes increases resilience and extends asset life while lowering costs. Similarly, UNIDO and IISD's report "Investment in Nature to Close the Infrastructure Gap" (2021) demonstrates that Nature-Based Infrastructure (NBI) can deliver equivalent or better performance at up to 50 percent lower cost, while generating multiple co-benefits such as water purification, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity enhancement.

Across regions, the evidence base for NBI continues to strengthen. The WRI "Nature-Based Solutions for Climate and Water Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa" (2024) study shows that hybrid approaches are already improving food and water security in climate-stressed regions, with 60 percent of multilateral investments now including NBI components. The IUCN's "Enhancing Water Sector Resilience through NBS in South Asia" (2025) review finds similar results, demonstrating how restored wetlands and reconnected floodplains reduce flood risk while supporting livelihoods. IISD's "Benefits and Performance of Natural Infrastructure for Water Management" (2025) further documents that NBI improves water quality, enhances resilience to droughts, and provides reliable, measurable services comparable to conventional systems.

The "Catalogue of Nature-Based Solutions for Infrastructure Projects" (IFC, 2024) reveals a growing interest from the private sector and development banks in NBI as part of broader biodiversity and climate-finance portfolios. Investors are beginning to recognize that natural systems deliver economic returns through avoided costs, improved water reliability, and increased resilience of supply chains.

Including NBI in the Water for Planet dialogue is therefore strategically essential. It provides a cross-cutting mechanism linking SDG 6 with SDGs 11, 13, 14, and 15. NBI also directly supports the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by restoring ecosystems that buffer climate impacts and sustain livelihoods.

By embedding NBI in policy, investment, and industrial planning, countries can deliver measurable benefits for both people and the planet. NBI demonstrates that restoring nature is not an environmental luxury but an economic necessity and a practical foundation for climate-resilient development.

Delivering on the Water for Planet vision requires collective action across all levels of society. UNIDO supports the Special Envoy's call for a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach, recognizing that governments, industries, academia, and civil society must work together to safeguard the planet's water systems. The Triple A principle, which focuses on advocacy to raise the profile of water as a shared global priority, alignment to harmonize climate, biodiversity, and infrastructure agendas, and acceleration to translate innovation into measurable impact, provides a practical framework for action. Countries can use Nature-Based Infrastructure as a unifying solution that delivers resilience, prosperity, and environmental integrity.

II. Status and trends (1000 words)

The global water crisis is increasingly shaped by the interlinked challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, and disaster risk. Water is the primary medium through which people experience climate impacts. Changing rainfall patterns, melting glaciers, and sea-level rise are intensifying droughts, floods, and saltwater intrusion. Over half of the world's major aquifers are being depleted faster than they can recharge, while freshwater ecosystems (wetlands, rivers, lakes, and aquifers) continue to degrade. DESA data show that more than 50 percent of countries report deterioration in water-related ecosystems, with river-flow declines in over 400 basins and surface-water losses in 364. Wetlands have declined by 85 percent since 1970, and freshwater species populations have fallen by 81 percent.

These trends confirm that Water for Planet must focus on restoring the natural systems that regulate the hydrological cycle and protect societies from growing risks. NBI offers a practical pathway to achieve this by combining ecological processes with engineered design. NBI directly supports climate adaptation and mitigation, enhances biodiversity and soil health, prevents desertification, and strengthens resilience from source to sea. It also complements traditional infrastructure by lowering maintenance costs, improving water quality, and reducing vulnerability to disasters. As countries seek coherent action across the climate, biodiversity, and desertification conventions, NBI provides a unifying operational mechanism that turns multiple global commitments into concrete, locally relevant investments in resilience.

1. From degradation to restoration

Since 1970, the world has lost more than one-third of its wetlands. This has reduced natural water storage, filtration, and flood control. River channelization and deforestation have increased



sedimentation and decreased groundwater recharge. Restoring degraded ecosystems provides measurable benefits. Mangrove restoration, for instance, protects coastal assets worth USD 80 billion every year and reduces storm damage for about 15 million people. Reconnected floodplains store large volumes of stormwater, delay peak flows, and relieve pressure on urban drainage systems.

2. Hybrid approaches gaining momentum

The World Bank's report "Integrating Green and Gray Infrastructure" report (2019) shows that hybrid systems, such as reforested watersheds above reservoirs or wetlands alongside treatment plants, extend infrastructure life and lower maintenance costs. In South and East Asia, IUCN and ADPC have documented projects where NBI-based flood defences deliver equal or better protection than traditional engineering at a lower overall cost.

3. Industrial and urban applications

Industries are increasingly adopting constructed wetlands and vegetated basins to treat wastewater and manage stormwater. UNIDO's pilot projects show that incorporating natural systems within industrial zones can meet regulatory standards more efficiently and with lower energy consumption. NBI can therefore enhance compliance, reduce operational costs, and improve corporate environmental performance.

4. Financial and policy recognition

Development banks and investors are beginning to recognize NBI as a legitimate investment class. Both the IFC and WRI note that, when backed by credible data and performance metrics, NBI projects can deliver investment-grade returns. Some countries now include NBI in their climate and biodiversity finance frameworks, but uptake remains limited because valuation methods, data, and technical capacity are still insufficient.



III. Challenges and emerging issues (2000 words): This section will highlight challenges and opportunities relating to the topics addressed in the interactive dialogue, particularly those that have emerged or become more urgent since the 2023 Water Conference. This section will also identify interlinkages and synergies between the relevant SDG 6 targets and other SDGs.

The urgency of aligning water, climate, and biodiversity action has never been greater. Since the 2023 UN Water Conference, climate extremes, ecosystem loss, and rising disaster costs have accelerated. Yet progress in building resilience remains uneven. Fragmented governance, limited finance, and inadequate valuation of ecosystem services continue to undermine implementation. DESA's latest assessments show that more than 90 percent of natural disasters are water-related, while 95 percent of infrastructure losses from 2010 to 2019 stemmed from floods and droughts. These figures reveal a clear truth: the world is investing heavily in rebuilding what nature could help prevent.

NBI offers a cost-effective means to close this resilience gap, but it still faces structural and institutional barriers. Despite growing global recognition of its benefits, NBI remains under-represented in national budgets, climate-finance pipelines, and urban or industrial planning frameworks. To realize the vision of Water for Planet, countries must address the systemic challenges that currently limit the integration of natural systems into water and infrastructure management.

Fragmented governance

Responsibilities for water, environment, and infrastructure planning often fall under separate institutions, creating policy silos that impede coordinated decision-making. Ministries of water, energy, agriculture, and industry frequently operate with separate strategies and data systems. This fragmentation results in overlapping mandates and inefficient resource allocation. Integrated governance models are needed that link river-basin planning with land-use, industrial, and urban development strategies. NBI can act as a practical entry point for such integration because it connects hydrology, ecology, and infrastructure through measurable outcomes.

Financing and valuation gaps

Many NBI projects struggle to attract funding because their benefits—flood protection, groundwater recharge, water purification, carbon storage, and biodiversity gains—are shared across multiple stakeholders and accrue over time. These collective benefits do not fit easily into existing financial models focused on short-term returns. Moreover, public accounting systems rarely recognize the economic value of natural assets. Without standardized valuation methods, ecosystem restoration is often excluded from cost-benefit analyses. Establishing natural-capital accounting frameworks and integrating ecosystem services into public investment criteria would help correct this imbalance.

Limited data and monitoring

A consistent obstacle to scaling NBI is the lack of performance data. Few projects quantify avoided losses, resilience benefits, or ecosystem improvements, which prevents comparison and replication.

Monitoring remains uneven across countries, and data on ecosystem condition are often fragmented or outdated. Developing digital platforms and shared indicators for NBI performance—including hydrological, economic, and social metrics—would enable governments and investors to make evidence-based decisions and measure long-term impact.

Climate uncertainty and competing pressures

Increasing variability in rainfall, temperature, and sea level is testing the limits of both natural and built infrastructure. The compounding effects of droughts, floods, and salinization place additional strain on already stressed systems. Climate uncertainty requires adaptive design and performance monitoring that consider multiple scenarios over time. NBI provides flexibility and redundancy, allowing systems to evolve naturally and continue delivering benefits under changing conditions. However, national infrastructure standards often do not account for dynamic or living systems, creating a regulatory mismatch that discourages innovation.

Social inclusion

Without inclusive planning, restoration and conservation projects risk reinforcing inequalities. Marginalized groups are often the most affected by water scarcity, pollution, and floods, yet the least represented in planning processes. Gender-responsive and community-based approaches are vital to ensure that NBI benefits are equitably shared. Evidence from UNIDO and partners shows that projects with active local stewardship have higher survival rates of restored ecosystems and stronger long-term maintenance. Empowering women and youth through capacity building, green entrepreneurship, and decision-making roles strengthens both social cohesion and environmental outcomes.

Policy and institutional inertia

Despite clear evidence of cost savings and co-benefits, conventional infrastructure paradigms dominate. Engineering standards, procurement procedures, and environmental-impact frameworks often favour hard infrastructure over hybrid approaches. Introducing NBI into these frameworks requires reforming procurement criteria, adjusting design standards, and demonstrating reliability through pilots. Institutional change will also depend on training engineers, planners, and financiers to recognize nature as infrastructure.

Interlinkages across the Sustainable Development Goals

Water for Planet reinforces the central role of SDG 6.6 on protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems while directly contributing to SDGs 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17. NBI exemplifies how integrated solutions can generate multiple co-benefits:

- Supports SDG 13 by enabling adaptation and mitigation through carbon sequestration and reduced disaster losses.
- Contributes to SDG 14 by reducing nutrient and sediment runoff, improving coastal and marine health.
- Advances SDG 15 by restoring degraded catchments and combating desertification.
- Enhances SDG 9 by modernizing industrial systems with circular and resilient water solutions.



- Promotes SDG 11 by integrating green corridors, permeable surfaces, and urban wetlands into city planning; and
- Operationalizes SDG 17 by connecting governments, private sector, and civil society in collaborative water-ecosystem management.

Addressing these challenges will determine whether countries can move from isolated pilot projects to large-scale, system-wide adoption of NBI. Overcoming these barriers will not only enhance climate and disaster resilience but also unlock the environmental and economic dividends of a truly water-secure planet.

IV. Solutions (2000 words): This section will offer action-oriented, innovative, and pragmatic solutions to challenges. It will shine a spotlight on impactful initiatives, programs and projects from around the world that can be scaled up and/or transferred to other contexts. Potential partnerships among Member States and with other stakeholders will feature prominently.

The urgency of the global water crisis calls for action-oriented, scalable, and inclusive solutions that can deliver measurable benefits for people, the planet, and prosperity. Since the 2023 UN Water Conference, countries have made progress in adopting integrated water resources management and resilience strategies. However, translating these strategies into tangible results still requires bridging the divide between environmental restoration and infrastructure investment.

NBI provides a practical pathway to achieve this. It enhances the resilience of water systems, supports biodiversity, reduces pollution, and strengthens livelihoods. It complements conventional engineering by integrating natural processes into water, energy, and industrial systems. The approach embodies the call to connect climate, biodiversity, desertification, and disaster risk reduction agendas through coherent, cross-sectoral solutions that can be measured, financed, and scaled.

NBI transforms how countries plan, finance, and manage water resources by turning restoration into infrastructure, and ecosystems into assets that deliver services essential for climate and economic stability. The following action areas illustrate how countries, cities, industries, and communities can operationalize this approach.

1. Integrate NBI into national planning and policy

To move from pilot projects to systemic change, governments can integrate NBI within water, climate, and infrastructure strategies. This alignment helps ensure that investments in water management simultaneously address adaptation, biodiversity, and land degradation objectives.

Action pathways

- Include NBI within national adaptation plans, nationally determined contributions, and biodiversity strategies.
- Develop national guidelines, design standards, and performance indicators for NBI.
- Require NBI feasibility assessments as part of major public infrastructure planning and environmental-impact processes.
- Establish inter-ministerial coordination platforms linking water, environment, and finance ministries for cross-sectoral investment decisions.

2. Mobilize finance and de-risk investment

Scaling NBI requires expanding access to finance and creating incentives for private participation. Traditional financial models often fail to capture the long-term and shared benefits of NBI. Blended finance, green bonds, and outcome-based instruments can close this gap.

Action pathways

- Launch blue, green, or hybrid bonds that link returns to verified ecosystem outcomes.
- Integrate NBI into climate and disaster-risk investment portfolios.
- Support payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes that reward landholders for maintaining natural assets.
- Establish public-private investment platforms to attract private capital through risk-sharing mechanisms and concessional finance.

These mechanisms can be further strengthened through the creation of standardized valuation tools and natural capital accounting frameworks that quantify avoided costs, resilience gains, and co-benefits across sectors.

3. Build institutional and technical capacity

Long-term success depends on strengthening the capacity of institutions, engineers, and communities to design, implement, and monitor NBI. Professional education, technical assistance, and south-south cooperation can accelerate adoption.

Action pathways

- Create national centres of excellence on NBI to coordinate research, training, and policy advice.
- Include NBI in university curricula for civil engineering, water management, and environmental planning.
- Establish demonstration sites and knowledge hubs to share lessons on design, maintenance, and performance evaluation.
- Facilitate south-south and global cooperation to exchange best practices and build regional expertise.

4. Harness digital innovation

Digital tools and data analytics can greatly improve how NBI projects are planned and monitored. Combining satellite data, artificial intelligence, and digital twins enables better forecasting, adaptive management, and accountability.

Action pathways

- Deploy digital twin systems to model hydrological dynamics and optimize hybrid infrastructure design



- Use open-source data platforms and citizen science for real-time monitoring of water quality, sedimentation, and vegetation cover.
- Develop performance dashboards that track NBI contributions to SDGs and disaster-risk reduction indicators.
- Leverage remote sensing for early-warning systems and long-term ecosystem performance verification.

5. Ensure social inclusion and equity

Effective NBI implementation depends on community ownership and equitable benefit sharing. Women, youth, and indigenous peoples are central actors in ecosystem restoration and local water management. Their participation ensures that projects reflect local priorities and build lasting resilience.

Action pathways

- Involve local communities in all phases of NBI design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Empower women-led enterprises to participate in green jobs related to restoration and water stewardship.
- Use participatory planning to align NBI with local needs and knowledge systems.
- Incorporate gender and social inclusion indicators into performance and financing frameworks.

Inclusive participation enhances legitimacy and ensures that resilience gains are equitably distributed.

6. Foster partnerships across sectors

NBI implementation requires collaboration across government, industry, academia, and civil society. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can leverage resources, data, and innovation to scale up successful models.

Action pathways

- Establish national and regional NBI partnerships that coordinate policy, finance, and science.
- Facilitate basin-level investment compacts that connect upstream restoration with downstream water users.
- Promote city-industry partnerships for urban greening, stormwater management, and industrial water reuse.
- Encourage collaboration between international organizations, development banks, and private investors to build a global NBI pipeline.

Through these partnerships, NBI can become the backbone of a coordinated global effort to strengthen climate and water resilience.

7. Mainstream source-to-sea and transboundary cooperation

NBI provides a natural framework for managing water resources along the source-to-sea continuum. It enhances upstream–downstream cooperation by addressing pollution, sedimentation, and habitat connectivity.

Action pathways

- Integrate NBI into transboundary basin management frameworks and river commissions.
- Support regional cooperation for sediment and pollution control using nature-based measures.
- Promote restoration of wetlands, deltas, and mangroves that connect freshwater and marine ecosystems.
- Embed NBI in integrated water resources management (IWRM) and transboundary early-warning systems.

These approaches align directly with the emphasis on holistic, basin-wide management and cross-sectoral coherence between water, climate, biodiversity, and land-use policies.

8. Align policy and investment frameworks

Institutional reform and enabling policy environments are necessary for scaling NBI. Governments can align fiscal, environmental, and industrial policies to promote green and resilient infrastructure.

Action pathways

- Introduce tax incentives and subsidies for ecosystem restoration and circular water management.
- Revise procurement and design standards to include NBI eligibility.
- Include NBI within infrastructure stimulus programs and green recovery packages.
- Integrate ecosystem-service valuation into public expenditure reviews.

Aligning policy and finance frameworks ensures that NBI becomes a standard component of water and infrastructure investment, not an exception.

9. Leverage NBI for resilience and disaster-risk reduction

NBI can reduce vulnerability to disasters while generating long-term economic and environmental benefits. Restored forests, wetlands, and riparian buffers absorb stormwater, stabilize soils, and lower recovery costs.

Action pathways

- Integrate NBI into national disaster-risk reduction and climate adaptation strategies.
- combine NBI with engineered systems in flood, drought, and coastal protection plans.
- Develop financing mechanisms that reward risk reduction through ecosystem restoration.
- Encourage regional partnerships to share knowledge on nature-based flood and drought management.



NBI not only safeguards lives and infrastructure but also helps countries meet global climate and biodiversity targets while stimulating local economies through restoration-based employment.

V. Recommendations and conclusions (2000 words)

The evidence presented throughout this paper demonstrates that Nature-Based Infrastructure is a powerful and practical mechanism to advance the Water for Planet agenda. NBI links climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable industrial development in one coherent framework. To transform these opportunities into global action, a set of mutually reinforcing recommendations can guide countries, institutions, and partners toward measurable progress.

First, governments should institutionalize NBI as an integral part of national infrastructure and climate strategies. This requires embedding NBI within planning and investment frameworks rather than treating it as a stand-alone environmental activity. Water ministries, finance authorities, and planning agencies should coordinate to ensure that natural assets are recognized as essential infrastructure that provides public value. This institutionalization can be achieved by including NBI within national adaptation plans, nationally determined contributions, biodiversity strategies, and disaster-risk reduction frameworks.

Second, public and private finance must converge around shared objectives. To close the financing gap, countries and development partners should create mechanisms that combine concessional and commercial capital for NBI projects. Green and blue bonds, climate resilience funds, and payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes can support this transition. Integrating natural capital accounting into national statistics and investment appraisals will help governments quantify avoided costs and co-benefits, improving access to both domestic and international financing. Development banks and insurers can further contribute by creating outcome-based finance models that reward verified risk reduction and ecosystem restoration.

Third, the private sector should be encouraged to embed NBI within its operations and value chains. Companies can incorporate wetlands, riparian buffers, and sustainable landscapes into water stewardship and pollution-control efforts. By aligning industrial investments with NBI principles, businesses can reduce regulatory risk, enhance resource efficiency, and contribute to national adaptation goals. Public-private partnerships can accelerate this shift by providing joint financing, technical expertise, and data transparency. UNIDO's work demonstrates that industries adopting circular and nature-positive water management can achieve higher efficiency while strengthening community resilience.

Fourth, countries should strengthen scientific, institutional, and technical capacity to design and monitor NBI. Engineers, economists, and policymakers require access to training, data, and tools that allow them to plan and evaluate NBI on equal footing with traditional infrastructure. Establishing national centres of excellence, expanding vocational training programs, and fostering south-south cooperation will ensure that expertise is widely shared and tailored to regional contexts. Digital technologies such as remote



sensing, artificial intelligence, and digital twins can further enhance monitoring and adaptive management.

Fifth, NBI must be aligned with global policy processes to promote coherence and maximize impact. Integrating NBI across the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification will help countries realize multiple targets through single investments. Water-related reporting under the SDGs should include indicators that capture NBI’s contribution to adaptation, mitigation, and ecosystem restoration.

Sixth, partnerships are essential to scale and sustain action. The establishment of a Water for Planet Partnership Platform could connect governments, industries, investors, civil society, and scientific organizations. Such a platform would promote knowledge exchange, coordinate financing, and harmonize monitoring frameworks. It would also provide a forum for sharing best practices on integrating NBI within basin-level management, urban planning, and industrial operations.

Finally, inclusion and equity should remain central to every initiative. NBI thrives where local ownership is strong. Women, youth, and indigenous communities must be active participants in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of projects. Their involvement ensures that benefits are distributed fairly and that local knowledge informs design and maintenance. Inclusive governance also enhances transparency and trust among stakeholders.

In conclusion, investing in NBI represents a shift from crisis response to long-term resilience building. By valuing ecosystems as infrastructure, societies can reduce disaster losses, safeguard biodiversity, and foster economic opportunity. For UNIDO and its partners, Water for Planet is not only a call to protect the natural foundations of life but also an invitation to innovate, finance, and collaborate for a future where environmental integrity and prosperity advance together.



VI. Guiding questions (1000 words)

1. How can countries integrate NBI into national adaptation plans, biodiversity strategies, and infrastructure investment frameworks to deliver both environmental and economic benefits?
2. What governance models can improve coordination among institutions responsible for water, climate, biodiversity, land management, and industry, ensuring coherent implementation of the Water for Planet agenda?
3. How can countries create valuation and accounting systems that recognize natural assets as infrastructure and capture the long-term economic and social benefits of NBI?
4. Which financing mechanisms, including green and blue bonds, blended finance, or results-based instruments, can most effectively mobilize capital for NBI implementation at scale?
5. What incentives can encourage private companies to adopt NBI within industrial operations, value chains, and corporate water stewardship initiatives?
6. How can innovations in data analytics, remote sensing, and open digital platforms improve the measurement of NBI performance and its contribution to climate adaptation and disaster-risk reduction?
7. What collaboration is needed between scientific institutions and policy makers to develop standardized indicators that track NBI's impact on water quality, ecosystem health, and climate resilience?
8. In what ways can NBI strengthen cooperation from source to sea, ensuring that upstream restoration contributes to downstream and coastal resilience?
9. How can gender equality, youth participation, and inclusion of vulnerable groups be ensured in NBI planning, governance, and implementation?
10. What role can education, technical training, and community engagement play in building national and local capacities for the design, management, and long-term maintenance of NBI?
11. How can international cooperation align NBI with the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification?
12. What policies or tools can help integrate NBI into urban water resilience and industrial modernization strategies that reduce pollution and improve resource efficiency?
13. How can countries monitor and communicate NBI's contribution to both climate mitigation and adaptation, including carbon storage, biodiversity recovery, and improved water security?
14. What partnerships among governments, development banks, investors, and civil society are needed to accelerate NBI adoption and ensure long-term sustainability?
15. How can experiences from successful hybrid infrastructure projects guide future models of sustainable development that connect economic growth with ecological restoration?



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Contribution to Interactive Dialogue: Water for Prosperity

I. Introduction (500 words)

Water is not only a fundamental human right but also a cornerstone of economic productivity, social stability, and environmental resilience. The way societies value, manage, and invest in water will determine their capacity to achieve sustainable prosperity. As climate change accelerates and resource pressures intensify, unlocking the full economic and social value of water (through efficiency, reuse, innovation, and equitable governance) has become an urgent global priority.

Today, water underpins approximately 40% of global food production, 75% of industrial output, and nearly all energy generation. Yet the systems that govern its use are fragmented and undervalue its true worth. According to the World Bank (2025), global reuse across all applications represents only 12% of municipal withdrawals and 3% of industrial use, despite clear evidence that reuse and efficiency can significantly reduce costs, enhance resilience, and enable growth. In water-stressed economies, water-related losses are already constraining GDP growth by up to 6% per year, while the financial risks of inaction through stranded assets, disrupted supply chains, and rising tariffs are escalating across sectors.

The concept of Water for Prosperity reframes water not as a passive input but as an active enabler of inclusive and sustainable development. By valuing water appropriately and embedding it within the water-energy-food-climate nexus, countries can stimulate green industrialization, create jobs, and enhance community well-being. The nexus approach ensures that gains in one sector, such as improved agricultural productivity or renewable energy generation, do not come at the expense of water security or ecosystem integrity. It also promotes nature-based and circular solutions that decouple economic growth from water demand.

Recent advances in corporate water stewardship and science-based targets for freshwater illustrate how private sector leadership can drive basin-level improvements and align investments with global sustainability goals. Industrial and municipal cooperation on reuse, digital efficiency, and circular water systems is transforming water from a linear, once-through resource into a regenerative economic asset. These approaches embody integrated water resources management (IWRM) in action, bridging policies, technologies, and finance across the public and private spheres.

The 2026 United Nations Water Conference provides a pivotal opportunity to scale these innovations and partnerships. Building on the momentum from the 2023 Conference and the Water Action Agenda, this dialogue will explore how valuing water across its full economic, social, and ecological dimensions can accelerate progress toward SDG 6 and the broader 2030 Agenda. It will highlight practical pathways (policy reform, financial innovation, digitalization, and nature-based infrastructure) that enable water-



use efficiency and circularity across industries, agriculture, and cities. Above all, it will call for a new social contract on water: one that links equity and prosperity, ensures no one is left behind, and positions water stewardship at the heart of sustainable economic transformation.

Delivering on the vision of Water for Prosperity requires collective leadership across government, industry, finance, academia, and civil society. UNIDO supports the Special Envoy's call for a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach that unites these actors in shaping and implementing water solutions. The Triple A principle, which emphasizes advocacy, alignment, and acceleration, provides a practical framework for action. Advocacy raises the profile of water as a shared global priority. Alignment brings coherence between climate, industrial, and water strategies. Acceleration turns innovation into implementation through partnerships, technology, and finance. By combining these elements, countries can unlock the full value of water as a driver of inclusive growth and sustainable prosperity.

II. Status and trends (1000 words)

Across the globe, the relationship between water and prosperity is being reshaped by accelerating climate impacts, rapid urbanization, and growing industrial demand. Water has emerged as both a constraint and a catalyst for sustainable growth. For decades, economic models treated water as an abundant and low-cost resource, leading to inefficiencies, inequities, and widespread degradation. The emerging global trend is a transition toward recognizing water as a strategic economic asset that is central to food security, energy reliability, industrial competitiveness, and social well-being.

1. The economic and industrial weight of water

Industry is now the largest single consumer of abstracted freshwater in many high- and middle-income countries, accounting for over 50% of total withdrawals in OECD economies and up to 75% in advanced manufacturing hubs. As economies industrialize, the share of water used in production, cooling, cleaning, and energy conversion rises exponentially. According to the World Bank (2025), daily industrial and municipal discharges exceed 1 billion cubic meters of used water globally, most of which remains untreated or underutilized. Only 3% of industrial and potable water is currently reused, representing a missed economic opportunity estimated at USD 340 billion in untapped investment potential by 2040.

This trend highlights both vulnerability and opportunity. The “High and Dry” report (CDP, 2022) revealed that 69% of listed equities are already exposed to water-related risks that could significantly alter their business models, while 33% of financial institutions are not yet assessing exposure to such risks. These inefficiencies manifest in stranded assets, disrupted supply chains, and reduced productivity. Conversely, where companies invest in water efficiency and reuse, the returns are measurable: lower operational costs, increased resilience, and stronger market credibility under Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks.

2. The global shift toward reuse, circularity, and efficiency

The concept of water reuse is moving from the margins of sustainability discourse to the mainstream of economic strategy. Cities and industries are beginning to treat used water as “new water”, a renewable



resource that, when purified and repurposed, strengthens water security and reduces environmental burdens. The World Bank and IFC (2025) estimate that global reuse capacity could increase eightfold by 2040 with the right policy, pricing, and financing structures. This shift mirrors the rapid cost decline observed in renewable energy markets: as reuse technologies scale, unit treatment costs can fall by 30-40%, making it increasingly competitive with long-distance transfers.

In the industrial context, sectors such as food and beverage, semiconductors, textiles, and beauty and personal care are leading this transition. The Corporate Water Leaders Network (2024-2025) documents how companies like L'Oréal, Beiersdorf, and Unilever are achieving “water loop” factories, where process water is reused multiple times with zero discharge. These models are being replicated across industrial parks and eco-industrial zones, demonstrating that circular water systems can enhance competitiveness while protecting basins.

Beyond advanced treatment systems, innovation must also harness indigenous and locally developed knowledge that has supported water security for generations. Integrating traditional water-harvesting methods, nature-based storage, and low-energy purification techniques with modern science and digital tools can yield resilient, cost-effective, and context-appropriate solutions. Such hybrid innovations strengthen national self-reliance, foster community participation, and reduce dependence on energy-intensive technologies, building long-term capacity for sustainable water management.

3. Tariffs, regulation, and valuation of water

Water tariffs are increasingly reflecting the real cost of service delivery, scarcity, and pollution. The Global Water Tariff Survey (GWI, 2025) shows that average tariffs rose by 6.2% worldwide from 2024 to 2025, with Europe leading the increase due to regulatory reforms and climate adaptation investments. France, for example, introduced seasonal tariffs and industrial surcharges applying the “polluter pays” principle, incentivizing efficiency and wastewater reduction. These pricing signals mark a significant shift toward valuing water as an economic good while maintaining affordability for households.

However, global discrepancies persist. In many emerging economies, underpriced water and weak enforcement undermine investment in efficiency and infrastructure renewal. Bridging this gap requires innovative financial mechanisms that align pricing, policy, and performance, such as blended finance, sustainability-linked loans, and Wastewater Reuse Certificates (WRCs). The Finance Water Action Pathway (2023) calls for financial institutions to integrate double materiality assessing both the impact of water on finance and finance on water, within their investment and lending frameworks.

4. Linking water efficiency with carbon and energy goals

Water use, energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions are deeply interconnected. The GWI white paper Mapping Water's Carbon Footprint (2022) estimated that 4.7% of total global emissions originate from water and wastewater infrastructure, with methane alone accounting for 37% of these emissions. In many utilities, wastewater treatment is the largest single energy consumer, and inefficient processes release potent greenhouse gases such as nitrous oxide. By contrast, adopting energy-efficient pumps, anaerobic digestion, and digital optimization can reduce emissions while generating renewable energy



from sludge and methane recovery. This integration of water–energy–carbon management is a defining feature of next-generation circular economy strategies.

Industry-led decarbonization efforts now view water reuse and efficiency as key climate solutions. The transition from “linear” to “circular” water systems directly supports net-zero commitments, reduces operating emissions, and strengthens the business case for water stewardship. Aligning water and climate targets, through initiatives such as Science-Based Targets for Nature (SBTN), enables companies to quantify their dependencies and impacts on freshwater ecosystems and set measurable, time-bound goals for improvement.

5. Social and equity dimensions of water prosperity

The economic benefits of valuing water are inextricably linked to social inclusion. Water scarcity and pollution disproportionately affect low-income communities, smallholder farmers, and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Inclusive water governance anchored in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) creates opportunities for shared prosperity by ensuring that efficiency gains translate into improved livelihoods, health, and employment.

In many developing contexts, industrial and agricultural users compete for the same limited resources. Integrated basin management frameworks are therefore essential to balance competing demands and ensure equitable allocation. By linking industrial water stewardship with community water access, public–private partnerships can generate co-benefits in employment, capacity development, and local economic diversification. Nature-based infrastructure (e.g., wetlands restoration, constructed biofilters) offers additional value by providing ecosystem services that enhance both water quality and resilience.

6. Emerging trends and opportunities

Several structural trends define the next decade of water and prosperity:

- Digital transformation - Smart metering, AI-driven leak detection, and digital twins are improving efficiency and transparency across water networks.
- Programmatic reuse models - Countries such as Singapore and India are establishing Scaling ReWater or “ReWater Parks” programs that replicate successful reuse projects at scale.
- Standardized disclosure and corporate transparency - Frameworks such as CDP Water Security and GRI 303 are aligning corporate reporting with basin-level indicators.
- Cross-sector financing platforms - Multilateral institutions are developing blended finance vehicles to mobilize private investment for water reuse, wastewater treatment, and industrial efficiency.
- Integration of nature-based and circular solutions - Hybrid approaches combine grey and green infrastructure to deliver cost-effective, adaptive water management.

Together, these shifts illustrate a global movement toward treating water as a catalyst for economic renewal rather than a constraint. The convergence of water, energy, and food systems offers new opportunities to generate jobs, enhance climate resilience, and foster inclusive growth, especially in



emerging economies where sustainable industrialization is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. Challenges and emerging issues (2000 words): This section will highlight challenges and opportunities relating to the topics addressed in the interactive dialogue, particularly those that have emerged or become more urgent since the 2023 Water Conference. This section will also identify interlinkages and synergies between the relevant SDG 6 targets and other SDGs.

The path toward water-driven prosperity is not linear. Despite mounting evidence that water reuse, efficiency, and circularity generate economic, environmental, and social value, progress remains uneven and fragmented. A convergence of systemic, institutional, financial, and behavioural barriers continues to prevent countries and industries from fully realizing the potential of integrated and sustainable water resource management. These challenges are compounded by emerging risks linked to climate change, global trade dynamics, and shifting societal expectations regarding resource use and corporate accountability.

1. Underpricing and undervaluation of water

Water remains one of the world's most undervalued resources. In most economies, the cost of abstraction, treatment, and disposal does not reflect the true economic, social, and environmental value of water. This chronic undervaluation distorts incentives for efficiency and innovation. The 2025 Global Water Tariff Survey revealed that although global tariffs rose by 6.2% in the past year, the majority of increases were still below the level required to sustain long-term investment or account for climate adaptation costs.

Low and inconsistent pricing across sectors, particularly where industrial tariffs are cross-subsidized by domestic users, undermines the financial viability of utilities and deters private investment in reuse and wastewater infrastructure. In some regions, water remains cheaper than the energy used to pump it, leading to wasteful practices such as once-through cooling and open-circuit industrial systems. This disconnect between price and value also hinders financial institutions from properly assessing the risk-return profile of water-related investments.

The lack of standardized methods to account for water's full economic cost, including ecosystem services, pollution externalities, and scarcity premiums, further compounds the problem. Without coherent valuation frameworks, water continues to be treated as a cost to minimize rather than an asset to manage strategically.

2. Fragmented governance and policy incoherence

Water governance often suffers from fragmentation across administrative boundaries, sectors, and institutions. Agriculture, industry, and urban systems frequently operate under separate regulatory regimes, with limited coordination between ministries responsible for water, energy, environment, and



finance. This siloed structure constrains the uptake of IWRM and hinders the systemic linkages necessary for cross-sectoral solutions.

Moreover, weak enforcement of abstraction and discharge regulations remains pervasive. Even where water quality standards exist, compliance monitoring is sporadic due to limited technical capacity and inadequate funding for enforcement agencies. The absence of clear water rights or basin allocation mechanisms leads to conflict among users, particularly during droughts. This regulatory uncertainty deters investment, as industries hesitate to commit capital without assurance of long-term water security.

In transboundary basins, overlapping jurisdictions and competing development priorities complicate resource allocation. Despite successful examples of cooperative frameworks (such as river basin commissions or shared monitoring networks) many regions lack institutional mechanisms to align industrial development, agriculture, and ecosystem protection under a common governance framework.

3. Financing gaps and risk perceptions

Globally, financing for water remains far below the level required to achieve SDG 6 and climate adaptation targets. The World Bank (2025) estimates an annual investment gap of USD 670 billion for water-related infrastructure and services. While international climate and development funds increasingly reference water security, actual allocations to water efficiency, reuse, and circular economy projects remain limited.

Financial institutions often perceive water investments as high-risk due to unclear revenue streams, long payback periods, and regulatory uncertainty. As the Finance Water Action Pathway (2023) notes, one-third of listed financial institutions do not yet assess exposure to water risks within their portfolios. This results in a “finance paradox” - although water insecurity threatens economic stability, few investors possess the tools or incentives to actively finance solutions.

Public utilities, especially in low- and middle-income countries, face credit constraints and limited cost recovery, impeding their ability to attract private capital. Innovative instruments (such as blended finance, green and blue bonds, and sustainability-linked loans) are emerging, but their uptake remains nascent. Moreover, there is insufficient data to quantify water-related returns on investment, particularly for non-traditional projects like nature-based infrastructure (NBI) or industrial symbiosis systems, where financial benefits accrue over longer horizons.

4. Industrial inefficiency and limited adoption of circular water systems

Industries are under increasing pressure to decouple production growth from water use, yet progress remains slow. Despite breakthroughs in water-efficient technologies, many facilities still rely on linear “take-make-dispose” models, where freshwater is abstracted, used once, and discharged. The Scaling Water Reuse in Industry (2025) report underscores that globally, only 8% of industrial and domestic withdrawals are currently treated and reused - a stark indicator of the scale of the challenge.

Barriers include high capital costs, lack of technical expertise, inadequate regulatory incentives, and social perceptions surrounding the use of recycled water. In some cases, standards designed for drinking



water quality are applied indiscriminately to industrial processes, inflating treatment costs and discouraging reuse. Smaller enterprises face disproportionate barriers due to limited technical and financial capacity, even though collectively they represent a large share of industrial water use.

The Corporate Water Leaders Initiative (2024-2025) found that while leading multinational companies are setting contextual water targets, these remain concentrated in a handful of sectors and regions. In contrast, supply chains (particularly in emerging markets) lag behind in adopting stewardship principles. This imbalance risks creating “water inequities” where progress by large corporations masks systemic inefficiencies among smaller producers.

5. The water-energy-carbon paradox

Water and energy are tightly intertwined: nearly all forms of energy production require water, and water treatment and distribution are energy-intensive. Yet policy and planning frameworks rarely integrate these dimensions effectively. According to GWI’s Mapping Water’s Carbon Footprint (2022), water and wastewater infrastructure account for 4.7% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with methane (37%) and nitrous oxide (11%) representing major contributors.

Utilities and private sector face a “water-energy-carbon paradox” - reducing water use can increase energy intensity, while optimizing energy efficiency can compromise water quality or treatment reliability. Balancing these trade-offs requires advanced data analytics, flexible regulatory approaches, and integrated resource planning. However, many countries still separate water and energy regulation, leading to inconsistent incentives and missed opportunities for co-optimization.

Decarbonizing the water sector is thus not only an environmental imperative but also a financial one. Inefficient water systems are vulnerable to carbon pricing mechanisms and could become stranded assets in a low-carbon economy. Coordinated action is needed to align water reuse, renewable energy, and emissions reduction strategies within broader national development frameworks.

6. Climate change and water-related risks

Climate change intensifies all existing water challenges. Increased frequency of droughts, floods, and heatwaves disrupts hydrological cycles, damages infrastructure, and heightens competition for scarce resources. The World Bank warns that water stress could cost some regions up to 6% of GDP by 2050, reinforcing cycles of poverty and instability. Industrial hubs and agricultural zones are particularly vulnerable, as declining water availability leads to production shutdowns, job losses, and social unrest.

Sea-level rise and salinization threaten coastal aquifers and water-intensive manufacturing zones, while changing rainfall patterns alter hydropower reliability and agricultural productivity. The compounded effect is a systemic risk to national economies and global supply chains. For financial institutions, this translates into escalating credit and insurance risks, yet most existing risk models still fail to account for water-related variables.

The interaction between water and migration further complicates the socio-economic landscape. As livelihoods decline in water-stressed regions, migration pressures can exacerbate urban water demand



and strain public services. Addressing these cascading impacts requires integrated adaptation strategies that combine nature-based solutions, resilient infrastructure, and basin-level cooperation.

7. Data, disclosure, and accountability gaps

Effective water governance relies on accurate, transparent, and accessible data. Yet globally, information on water use, pollution, and reuse remains fragmented, inconsistent, and often outdated. Many utilities lack digital systems for real-time monitoring, while industries hesitate to disclose water performance data due to competitive or reputational concerns.

The Corporate Water Stewardship and Science-Based Targets framework emphasizes interoperability of data across platforms (e.g. CDP Water Security, GRI 303, and SBTN). However, harmonized metrics for basin-level outcomes are still under development. Without standardized reporting, it is difficult to track progress or compare performance across sectors and geographies.

This opacity also limits the effectiveness of financial disclosures. Investors increasingly demand water-related data to assess exposure to transition and physical risks, yet reporting remains voluntary and uneven. Strengthening transparency through mandatory disclosure requirements, digital water accounting, and open-data platforms will be essential for building investor confidence and driving accountability.

8. Social inequality and water justice

Water insecurity is both a cause and a consequence of inequality. Marginalized communities often bear the brunt of industrial and agricultural water use through pollution, depletion of local sources, and exclusion from decision-making. Inadequate access to safe water and sanitation undermines health, productivity, and gender equality.

In many industrial corridors, economic gains are not equitably distributed: local communities experience the externalities of water extraction and contamination without sharing in the benefits of employment or infrastructure investment. Addressing this imbalance requires inclusive governance mechanisms that integrate rights-based and gender-responsive approaches into water management.

Empowering women, youth, and indigenous peoples as active participants in water governance strengthens both legitimacy and effectiveness. When designed inclusively, water stewardship initiatives can catalyze social cohesion, improve health outcomes, and foster shared prosperity - transforming water from a source of contention into a platform for collaboration.

9. Emerging governance frontiers - digital, nature-based, and transboundary integration

As the global water economy evolves, new governance frontiers are emerging around digitalization, nature-based infrastructure, and transboundary cooperation. Digital water technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for efficiency, predictive maintenance, and transparency, yet raise questions about data ownership, cybersecurity, and equitable access to innovation.

Similarly, nature-based infrastructure (NBI) is gaining recognition for its cost-effectiveness and multi-benefit potential. However, integrating NBI into national planning and financial systems remains challenging due to limited valuation methodologies and lack of performance benchmarks.

At the transboundary level, water governance increasingly intersects with trade, energy, and migration policies. Strengthening cross-border cooperation is essential to avoid conflict and harness shared resources for mutual prosperity. The 2026 UN Water Conference offers a platform to advance regional compacts and shared investment mechanisms that operationalize water diplomacy as an enabler of peace and economic stability.

10. Interlinkages and Synergies with other Sustainable Development Goals

Achieving Water for Prosperity is inseparable from progress across the entire 2030 Agenda. Water connects climate, energy, food, industry, health, and equity, acting as both a stress multiplier when mismanaged and a prosperity multiplier when governed wisely.

- [SDG 2 \(Zero Hunger\)](#)
Efficient irrigation, wastewater reuse, and nutrient recovery reduce pressure on freshwater withdrawals while increasing agricultural productivity. Nexus planning ensures that food security does not compromise ecosystem flows.
- [SDG 3 \(Good Health and Well-Being\)](#)
Cleaner water and reduced industrial effluents directly lower disease burdens and healthcare costs, strengthening workforce productivity and community well-being.
- [SDG 7 \(Affordable and Clean Energy\)](#)
Energy-efficient pumping, and wastewater-to-energy systems create a virtuous cycle of resource savings and emissions reduction, central to decarbonizing utilities and industries.
- [SDG 8 \(Decent Work and Economic Growth\)](#)
Investment in water infrastructure, reuse technologies, and green industries stimulates job creation. Every USD 1 invested in water efficiency yields economic returns of USD 4-7 through avoided losses and productivity gains.
- [SDG 9 \(Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure\)](#)
Circular water management underpins industrial modernization and competitiveness, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises adopting resource efficiency and cleaner production.
- [SDG 12 \(Responsible Consumption and Production\)](#)
Water efficiency and circular-economy practices drive sustainable supply chains, while transparent disclosure strengthens accountability.
- [SDG 13 \(Climate Action\)](#)
Adaptive water governance and nature-based solutions enhance resilience to floods, droughts, and heat stress, contributing simultaneously to mitigation and adaptation objectives.
- [SDG 14 and 15 \(Life Below Water and Life on Land\)](#)
Reducing industrial and agricultural runoff protects aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, supports biodiversity, and safeguards blue-carbon sinks vital for climate regulation.



- [SDG 17 \(Partnerships for the Goals\)](#)

Water serves as an entry point for integrated partnerships among governments, financial institutions, industry, and civil society. Cross-sector coalitions mobilize finance, technology, and knowledge sharing at scale.

Together, these interlinkages confirm that water is not a stand-alone issue but the connective tissue of sustainable development. Progress on SDG 6 catalyses advancement across nearly every other SDG target, transforming water stewardship into a central pillar of shared prosperity and resilience.

Conclusion

The challenges confronting water for prosperity are multidimensional but interlinked. They stem from systemic undervaluation, fragmented governance, financing and data gaps, industrial inefficiency, and climate-induced volatility. Yet, within each challenge lies an opportunity - to reform pricing and incentives, integrate water into financial systems, accelerate reuse and circularity, and promote inclusive governance.

Addressing these issues requires reimagining water not only as a human right or environmental resource but as a strategic enabler of economic transformation and shared prosperity. By closing the loop between water, energy, and food systems, societies can transition from scarcity-driven competition to resilience-based collaboration, ensuring that the prosperity of one sector does not come at the expense of another.



- IV. **Solutions** (2000 words): This section will offer action-oriented, innovative, and pragmatic solutions to challenges. It will shine a spotlight on impactful initiatives, programs and projects from around the world that can be scaled up and/or transferred to other contexts. Potential partnerships among Member States and with other stakeholders will feature prominently.

Achieving water security and prosperity requires not only recognizing the value of water but embedding that value into every aspect of economic and industrial decision-making. The following solutions demonstrate how policy, finance, industry, and innovation can converge to transform water from a constraint into a driver of inclusive and sustainable growth. They reflect the momentum since the 2023 United Nations Water Conference and the evolution of science-based, cross-sectoral action.

1. Establishing national frameworks that value and account for water

Valuing water is the cornerstone of prosperity. Governments can move beyond narrow tariff reforms toward comprehensive valuation frameworks that account for the economic, social, and ecological services water provides. Building on the CDP (2022), High and Dry report findings, countries can integrate water risks into national accounting systems and fiscal planning. By assigning value to natural assets and ecosystem services, finance ministries gain a clearer understanding of the economic cost of degradation and the returns on investment in water efficiency and restoration.

Action pathways

- Integrate System of Environmental Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA-Water) into national budgets and planning tools.
- Introduce progressive water tariffs that encourage efficiency while protecting vulnerable users.
- Establish water markets or allocation systems in regions where scarcity requires reallocation among users, with strong safeguards for equity and ecosystem flows.
- Develop performance-based public funding mechanisms that reward municipalities and industries for achieving water reuse or loss-reduction targets.

Such reforms not only improve fiscal discipline but also attract investment by clarifying the financial value of efficiency gains, reduced losses, and circular water flows.

2. Mainstreaming the water-energy-food-climate nexus into policy and investment

Integrated planning ensures that prosperity is not achieved at the expense of environmental or social sustainability. Nexus-based solutions (highlighted in UN Global Compact (2020), Water Action Pathway 1.0) can generate co-benefits for climate adaptation, food security, and clean energy.

Key opportunities

- Energy-efficient water treatment using renewable power, reducing both emissions and operating costs.



- Water-smart agriculture that leverages treated wastewater for irrigation and nutrient recovery, exemplified by Israel's and Spain's agricultural reuse models.
- Industrial symbiosis in which energy and water flows between facilities are optimized. For example, waste heat from manufacturing reused for wastewater pre-treatment.
- Embedding climate-risk screening in infrastructure finance and corporate investment to ensure resilience and avoid stranded assets.

3. Accelerating industrial water reuse and circular economy transitions

Industry accounts for nearly 19 percent of global freshwater withdrawals, yet most industrial wastewater remains untreated or underutilized. According to the World Bank (2025), Industrial Water Use analysis and the Scaling Reuse in Industry report, scaling reuse could reduce industrial withdrawals by up to 50 percent in water-stressed regions by 2030.

Scalable solutions will require innovation that bridges high technology with place-based and indigenous knowledge. Co-creation with local research institutions, communities, and traditional water managers can generate adaptive technologies tailored to local hydro-ecological and cultural contexts. These approaches often deliver greater efficiency, affordability, and social acceptance than centralized or energy-intensive alternatives, while catalysing local entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems.

Mining, a sector traditionally associated with high water intensity, is now demonstrating how circular transformation can drive inclusive growth. UNIDO's Global Alliance for Responsible and Green Minerals envisions a systemic shift by 2030 toward zero-liquid-discharge mining and shared water infrastructure, anchored in transparent water accounting and collaboration with local communities and utilities. This approach illustrates how industrial water-use efficiency can simultaneously advance SDG 6 and catalyse progress across SDGs 8, 9, 12, and 13 by reducing freshwater withdrawals, cutting pollution, and enhancing social resilience in mining regions.

Action pathways

- Adopt national or regional "reuse mandates" requiring large industrial users to incorporate treated wastewater in operations.
- Support eco-industrial parks (EIPs) that integrate shared treatment and reuse infrastructure, an approach pioneered by UNIDO in Viet Nam, Turkey, and Egypt.
- Encourage zero liquid discharge (ZLD) technologies where feasible, supported by regulatory flexibility and cost-sharing schemes.
- Incentivize industrial wastewater-to-energy projects using anaerobic digestion to reduce both water and carbon footprints, as recommended in GWI's Mapping Water's Carbon Footprint (2022).
- Strengthen corporate disclosure of water reuse and circularity indicators through reporting standards like CDP and the Science-Based Targets Network (SBTN).

4. Mobilizing blended finance and private-sector investment



Finance is the hinge between aspiration and implementation. The Corporate Water Leaders and Tariff Survey 2025 reports underscore that economic regulation and innovative finance mechanisms are key to bridging the SDG 6 investment gap.

Action pathways

- Expand blended finance models that use concessional funds to de-risk private investment in water reuse, efficiency, and circular economy infrastructure.
- Introduce blue bonds and sustainability-linked loans tied to measurable water outcomes, such as reductions in withdrawals or pollutant loads.
- Establish public-private guarantee facilities to enhance the creditworthiness of utilities and water-service providers.
- Align industrial water investment with climate-finance frameworks, including the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, and national adaptation plans.
- Promote corporate water stewardship partnerships where industries co-finance shared treatment, recharge, and restoration projects with local governments.
- Replicate and scale The WaterEquity model, which demonstrates how catalytic capital can de-risk and accelerate investment in water and sanitation access across emerging markets. Since 2016, it has deployed over USD 440 million across 22 countries, reaching 7 million people (90% through microloans and 10% via enterprise lending). Its funds blend public and private finance, with impact-linked performance monitoring and reinvestment of returns into new WASH initiatives. This approach shows how impact-driven asset management can translate investor capital into scalable water access while targeting both financial and social returns.

5. Advancing science-based targets and corporate water stewardship

The emergence of the Science-Based Targets for Freshwater framework, as detailed in Corporate Water Stewardship and Science-Based Targets, offers a structured pathway for aligning corporate action with basin-level sustainability. Companies can set context-based targets that reflect local water availability and quality constraints, helping balance economic growth with ecological integrity.

Action pathways

- Encourage national adoption of voluntary SBT frameworks as part of corporate sustainability reporting.
- Link corporate water performance to fiscal incentives, tax relief, or preferential access to green finance.
- Establish basin stewardship platforms where industries, farmers, and municipalities co-develop shared water management goals.
- Develop data-sharing mechanisms to connect corporate monitoring with national SDG reporting and basin management systems.

This approach aligns private incentives with public objectives, helping to internalize environmental costs and build trust between sectors.



6. Harnessing digital innovation for water efficiency and transparency

Digitalization enables real-time monitoring, predictive maintenance, and optimized resource use. The GWI (2022) Mapping Water's Carbon Footprint report and UNIDO's digital water pilots demonstrate how sensors, AI analytics, and digital twins improve decision-making across industrial and urban systems.

Action pathways

- Deploy digital twins and smart metering to monitor leakage, consumption, and quality in real time.
- Integrate AI-driven analytics to forecast demand, detect anomalies, and optimize treatment processes.
- Support open-data platforms that consolidate public and private water data, enabling evidence-based planning.
- Train national agencies and SMEs in digital water management and cybersecurity to ensure reliability and trust.

Digital water systems create transparency and efficiency simultaneously, essential preconditions for valuing and managing water as an economic asset.

7. Promoting inclusive and gender-responsive water governance

Prosperity must be inclusive. Gender and social equity are not peripheral but central to effective water governance. Women and youth are key actors in innovation, community mobilization, and service delivery, yet remain underrepresented in decision-making.

According to WaterEquity's 2024 data, 96% of household borrowers for water and sanitation microloans were women. These loans not only improve health and hygiene but directly enhance women's agency and productivity (94% reported improved quality of life, and 69% reported reduced stress in managing water needs).

This evidence highlights that gender-responsive water investments yield measurable social and economic dividends, validating the need for dedicated women-led financing mechanisms in national programs.

Action pathways

- Strengthen gender mainstreaming in national water policies and budgeting.
- Support women-led enterprises in water services, reuse, and digital monitoring.
- Create youth innovation funds to scale start-ups focused on water efficiency and climate adaptation.
- Enhance community participation in monitoring water use, tariff reforms, and local investment decisions.

8. Strengthening institutional capacity and regional cooperation



Integrated and transboundary water management is only as strong as the institutions that govern it. Capacity development (technical, managerial, and financial), remains a prerequisite for sustaining reforms.

Action pathways

- Build national water stewardship hubs that connect government, academia, and industry.
- Support South–South cooperation and peer learning through regional economic communities and basin organizations.
- Enhance training programs for regulators and service providers on tariff setting, contract design, and PPP negotiation.
- Leverage UN inter-agency mechanisms, including UN-Water, for joint capacity-building and knowledge sharing.

Stronger institutions create predictable environments that attract investment and ensure accountability.

9. Building resilience through nature-based and hybrid infrastructure

Combining grey and green infrastructure offers dual benefits: cost efficiency and ecosystem regeneration. The GWI (2024), Water Circularity in the BPC Industry study highlights that integrating wetlands, green buffers, and urban stormwater capture can reduce treatment costs while enhancing biodiversity.

Action pathways

- Incorporate nature-based infrastructure (NBI) (wetlands, buffer zones, and green corridors) into industrial and municipal water systems.
- Quantify ecosystem services and include them in cost–benefit analyses and investment appraisals.
- Align NBI with carbon and biodiversity credit markets to attract blended finance.
- Partner with communities in restoration and maintenance for long-term sustainability.

These hybrid solutions align with circular economy principles by using natural systems to treat, store, and replenish water resources while creating green jobs.

10. Scaling through partnerships and global platforms

Partnerships remain the most powerful vehicle for accelerating solutions. The Corporate Water Leaders report emphasizes collective action and the importance of aligning public and private actors around basin-level goals.

Key partnership mechanisms

- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for circular water infrastructure.



- Blended finance facilities that pool donor, government, and corporate capital for reuse and resilience projects.
- Regional innovation platforms connecting research institutions, start-ups, and industries to co-develop water-smart technologies.
- Global alliances-such as the Water Resilience Coalition, CEO Water Mandate, etc. that enable replication and scaling across regions.

By leveraging these partnerships, Member States can turn commitments into investment pipelines and strengthen the enabling conditions for inclusive, water-driven prosperity.

Conclusion

Solutions exist and are proven. The challenge lies in scaling and integrating them. Valuing water, enabling innovation, mobilizing finance, and ensuring inclusivity are not parallel agendas, they are interdependent levers of prosperity. By linking policy coherence, industrial transformation, and local empowerment, countries can turn the water crisis into a catalyst for economic renewal.

The Water for Prosperity dialogue offers a pivotal opportunity to elevate these solutions, mobilize new partnerships, and ensure that water becomes a foundation of shared growth, resilience, and human dignity.

V. Recommendations and conclusions (2000 words)

The *Water for Prosperity* dialogue recognizes that sustainable growth cannot occur without secure, equitably managed, and efficiently used water resources. Prosperity is not achieved by abundance alone but through the ability of societies to value, govern, and share water wisely. The following recommendations outline the practical steps needed to embed this understanding into national policies, industrial systems, and global partnerships.

1. Adopt national water-valuation and accounting frameworks

Governments should institutionalize the economic, social, and environmental valuation of water within fiscal and planning systems.

Water's contribution to GDP, employment, and ecosystem health must be visible to ministries of finance, planning, and industry.

Integrating the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA-Water) into national budgets and sector strategies can help quantify the returns on investment in efficiency, reuse, and restoration.

Way forward

- Establish inter-ministerial working groups on water valuation.
- Develop national “water accounts” updated annually.
- Publish valuation results to guide tariff setting and investment prioritization.



2. Accelerate integrated and cross-sectoral governance

Fragmentation across ministries remains a major barrier. Establishing national water councils or cross-sectoral coordination platforms can align decisions on water, energy, food, and industry.

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) should evolve from principle to practice through basin-level planning, transparent data systems, and stakeholder participation.

Way forward

- Mandate basin-scale planning that includes industrial and municipal users.
- Link IWRM implementation to national climate-adaptation and economic plans.
- Strengthen regulatory coherence between water abstraction, pollution, and land-use permits.

3. Create enabling policy and regulatory environments for reuse and circularity

Governments can mainstream reuse by setting clear water-quality standards, discharge limits, and incentives for treated wastewater.

Circular-water policies should encourage industry to view wastewater as a resource and to invest in water-efficient technologies.

Way forward

- Establish national targets for water reuse (e.g., 20-30%).
- Provide fiscal incentives for circular-water infrastructure in industrial parks.
- Integrate reuse requirements into environmental-impact assessments and industrial permits.

4. Mobilize blended finance and risk-sharing mechanisms

To close the water-investment gap, financial innovation must match technical ambition. Blended-finance structures combining concessional, commercial, and philanthropic capital can de-risk investments in water reuse, efficiency, and ecosystem restoration.

Guarantee facilities and outcome-based finance instruments should reward verified water and pollution-reduction results.

Way forward

- Establish national or regional Water Finance Facilities pooling public and private resources.
- Issue blue bonds or sustainability-linked loans tied to measurable water-performance indicators.
- Integrate water metrics into climate-finance taxonomies and green-bond frameworks.

5. Engage the private sector through stewardship and disclosure

Corporate water stewardship aligns business success with basin sustainability.

Governments and development partners should promote adoption of the Science-Based Targets for Freshwater (SBT-F) and strengthen disclosure through platforms such as CDP Water Security.



Industries that measure and manage their water impacts contribute directly to national SDG 6 targets.

Way forward

- Incorporate water-stewardship commitments into national voluntary sustainability standards.
- Link fiscal incentives or preferential procurement to verified water-efficiency performance.
- Encourage industrial associations to establish basin-level collective-action platforms.

6. Invest in digital transformation and data transparency

Digital tools enable precision management, cost reduction, and accountability. Smart metering, real-time quality monitoring, and digital twins allow operators to optimize supply, detect losses, and forecast demand. Public digital platforms integrating government, corporate, and community data can enhance trust and evidence-based decision-making.

Way forward

- Develop national “Digital Water Strategies.”
- Support start-ups and SMEs providing AI-driven water-efficiency solutions.
- Require open-data publication of key indicators such as withdrawals, reuse, losses, and pollution levels.

7. Build capacity and empower institutions

No reform endures without capable institutions. Governments should invest in regulatory training, technical assistance, and peer-learning networks.

Water agencies, municipalities, and industrial regulators need expertise in tariff design, contract negotiation, and circular-water technology.

Way forward

- Establish national water-leadership academies in collaboration with universities and UN agencies.
- Facilitate South–South knowledge exchanges on tariff reform and reuse models.
- Embed water-efficiency modules in vocational and engineering curricula.

8. Promote gender equality, youth participation, and community inclusion

Inclusive water governance enhances legitimacy and outcomes. Women’s participation in decision-making and youth leadership in innovation are essential to sustaining reforms.

Community-based monitoring can improve transparency and ensure benefits reach those most affected by water stress.

Way forward

- Mandate gender-responsive budgeting in water and climate programs.
- Support youth innovation labs and start-ups addressing water efficiency and reuse.



- Strengthen partnerships with women's cooperatives and local organizations in water stewardship initiatives.

9. Leverage nature-based and hybrid infrastructure for resilience

Green infrastructure such as wetlands, buffer zones, green roofs, and others delivers cost-effective solutions while restoring ecosystems.

Hybrid systems combining grey and green approaches enhance climate resilience and reduce treatment costs.

Way forward

- Incorporate nature-based infrastructure into national adaptation and urban-planning frameworks.
- Develop metrics for valuing ecosystem services in cost–benefit analyses.
- Develop restoration programs that quantify and value ecosystem services, exploring opportunities for verified carbon, biodiversity, or water benefit credits as the market and regulatory conditions mature, thereby attracting responsible private investment without compromising ecological integrity.
- Replicate and scale good examples such as the Water & Climate Resilience Fund (WCR Fund) (WaterEquity, 2024), a pioneering model targeting climate-resilient water and sanitation infrastructure in emerging markets.

10. Scale impact through partnerships and global cooperation

Water prosperity demands collective action. Member States, UN entities, development banks, and industry must align efforts through shared platforms.

Coalitions like the Water Resilience Coalition are anchoring investments and serve as a good example. WaterEquity's latest funds are anchored by members of the Water Resilience Coalition (Starbucks, Ecolab, Gap, Reckitt, DuPont) showing how private-sector leadership can align with global goals. This partnership model translates corporate water stewardship commitments into real-world investment pipelines, linking corporate accountability to SDG 6 outcomes.

Way forward

- Formalize multi-stakeholder partnerships with defined governance structures and monitoring plans.
- Use the 2026 UN Water Conference to launch a Water for Prosperity Partnership Platform linking governments, finance, and private sector.
- Ensure each partnership sets measurable outcomes (volumes reused, pollution reduced, people benefiting).

Cross-Cutting implementation Principles



UNIDO would like to suggest five implementation principles that should be included in projects, programmes, or initiatives that seek to achieve water for prosperity by 2030, and beyond. These include:

- a. [Science-based and data-driven.](#)
All decisions should be guided by context-specific data, measurable indicators, and inclusive innovation that combines advanced technologies with indigenous and local knowledge systems.
- b. [Economically sound.](#)
Valuing water ensures efficient allocation and sustainable financing.
- c. [Socially inclusive.](#)
Equity, gender, and human-rights principles must guide design and implementation.
- d. [Environmentally regenerative.](#)
Solutions should restore, not merely conserve, ecosystems.
- e. [Institutionally coherent.](#)
Policies and regulations must be aligned across sectors and scales.

Conclusion

The Water for Prosperity agenda transforms how societies perceive and manage water from an undervalued input to a strategic asset for sustainable growth.

Through coherent policy, innovative finance, industrial transformation, private sector inclusion, and inclusive partnerships, water becomes both a driver and a dividend of prosperity.

The recommendations outlined above provide Member States and partners with a roadmap to operationalize this vision:

- Governments embed valuation and governance reforms;
- Financial institutions mobilize capital through risk-sharing and performance-based instruments;
- Private sector adopts stewardship, circularity, and science-based targets;
- Communities participate in decision-making and benefit equitably from outcomes.

If implemented collectively, these actions can transform global water management from reactive crisis response to proactive prosperity building, ensuring that by 2030, every drop of water contributes not only to survival but to shared economic and social progress.



VI. Guiding questions (1000 words)

Purpose of these questions

These guiding questions are intended to inspire contributions from Member States, intergovernmental organizations, financial institutions, private sector leaders, academia, and civil society. They encourage concrete commitments, knowledge exchange, and new partnerships that recognize water as both a human right and an engine of prosperity. Through this dialogue, participants are invited to chart a collective course toward a world where efficient, equitable, and circular water use drives inclusive growth and safeguards the planet's most vital resource.

A. Valuing Water for Inclusive Growth

Water's true worth extends beyond price. It underpins employment, health, food security, industrial productivity, and ecosystem stability. Yet most economies still undervalue water, resulting in waste, inequity, and underinvestment. Re-examining valuation can catalyse systemic change.

Guiding questions

- How can countries design water-valuation systems that reflect economic, social, and ecological value while ensuring affordability and equity?
- What lessons can be drawn from regions that have successfully introduced progressive water tariffs or incentive-based pricing without harming vulnerable groups?
- How can “polluter pays” and “user pays” principles be operationalized in practice to encourage efficiency and internalize environmental costs?
- In what ways can economic valuation of ecosystem services, such as wetlands and aquifer recharge, be embedded in national accounting and investment planning?
- How can governments and development banks measure and communicate the economic returns of investing in water reuse, circularity, and efficiency to attract private capital?

B. Advancing the Water-Energy-Food-Climate Nexus

The nexus lens recognizes that water security underpins energy reliability, food systems, and climate adaptation. Integrated approaches can unlock co-benefits but also expose trade-offs between competing uses.

Guiding questions

- How can countries and regions establish institutional mechanisms to coordinate water, energy, agriculture, and climate policies across ministries and levels of government?
- What examples exist of joint investment frameworks or financing platforms that support nexus-based solutions at scale?
- How can digital innovation, such as real-time data platforms, digital twins, and predictive analytics, help optimize water, energy, and food systems simultaneously?



- What are effective ways to manage trade-offs between water efficiency and energy consumption, particularly in water reuse?
- How can the nexus approach contribute to just transitions in food and energy systems, ensuring that vulnerable communities benefit from technological and financial innovations?

C. Integrated and Sustainable Water Resource Management

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) provides the governance framework for balancing competing demands, maintaining ecological flows, and sustaining economic development. Yet its implementation often remains fragmented.

Guiding questions

- What governance and legal reforms are most needed to make IWRM operational at basin and transboundary levels?
- How can countries strengthen the role of basin organizations, river commissions, and local water user associations in balancing industrial, agricultural, and domestic needs?
- What models exist for linking industrial development planning and spatial zoning to basin-level water budgets and ecosystem capacity?
- How can IWRM frameworks incorporate climate risk assessment, early-warning systems, and nature-based infrastructure to enhance resilience?
- In transboundary basins, how can regional cooperation on shared water resources translate into joint prosperity, for example through shared investments, data systems, or benefit-sharing agreements?

D. Financing Water for Prosperity

A core constraint to progress is the financing gap for water infrastructure, innovation, and capacity development. Mobilizing blended finance, private investment, and green capital is essential to achieve scale.

Guiding questions

- How can governments and multilateral institutions reduce the perceived risks of investing in water efficiency, reuse, and wastewater treatment?
- What financing models including blended finance, sustainability-linked bonds, and results-based contracts, have proven effective for water projects and could be replicated?
- How can water investments be integrated into national climate finance strategies and nationally determined contributions?
- What role can financial regulators, stock exchanges, and credit-rating agencies play in mainstreaming water-related disclosure and risk assessment?
- How can development partners help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) access affordable finance for circular and resource-efficient water technologies?

E. The Role of the Private Sector in Water for Prosperity



Private enterprises from large manufacturers to SMEs have a unique capacity to transform how water is valued and managed. When empowered by coherent policy and finance, they can pioneer reuse technologies, develop basin partnerships, and create shared value through job creation, cleaner production, and innovation. However, barriers such as limited incentives, inconsistent regulations, and lack of risk-sharing mechanisms often discourage industrial water reuse and stewardship. The dialogue offers an opportunity to define how business can act as a partner in prosperity, not merely a water user.

Guiding questions

- How can governments and development partners create enabling environments including fiscal incentives, standards, and risk-sharing facilities that encourage industries to invest in water reuse, efficiency, and circularity?
- What mechanisms can align corporate water stewardship initiatives with national SDG 6 strategies and basin-level IWRM plans?
- How can SMEs be supported to adopt cleaner production and digital water-efficiency solutions through access to finance, training, and supply-chain incentives?
- What role can industrial parks, eco-industrial clusters, and public–private partnerships play in scaling circular water infrastructure?
- How can investors and financial institutions reward companies that set and achieve science-based targets for freshwater, linking water performance to credit ratings, ESG metrics, or loan conditions?
- How can industry-community partnerships ensure that corporate water use delivers local co-benefits, including improved access, jobs, and ecosystem restoration?

F. Innovation, Partnerships, and Social Equity

Achieving prosperity through water requires innovation and inclusion. The private sector, civil society, academia, and communities must co-create solutions that are both technologically viable and socially just.

Guiding questions

- How can partnerships among governments, industry, and research institutions accelerate technology transfer for water reuse, digital monitoring, and low-carbon treatment systems?
- What policy tools can incentivize industrial symbiosis, where waste or used water from one facility becomes a resource for another?
- How can education and capacity-building initiatives ensure that women, youth, and marginalized groups are active participants and beneficiaries of water innovation?
- In what ways can corporate water stewardship and science-based targets for freshwater contribute to national water goals and basin resilience?
- How can public communication and behavioural-change strategies overcome social resistance to recycled water and promote public trust in circular water systems?



- How can international organizations foster a global knowledge platform to exchange best practices on valuing water, scaling reuse, and linking water stewardship to economic competitiveness?

G. Toward a Shared Vision for Water-Driven Prosperity

The dialogue aims to identify practical pathways to ensure that every drop of water contributes to shared prosperity. The ultimate goal is to embed water security as a foundation for sustainable industrialization, resilient livelihoods, and healthy ecosystems.

Cross-cutting reflection questions

- What key actions can governments, private sector, and financial institutions commit to in order to make “water for prosperity” a reality by 2030 and beyond?
- How can the outcomes of this dialogue feed into global frameworks such as the SDG 6 acceleration agenda, climate COP processes, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration to create lasting impact?
- What monitoring indicators and accountability mechanisms are needed to track the social, economic, and environmental benefits of valuing water?
- How can the international community move from pilot projects to systemic transformation, ensuring that prosperity from water is equitable, resilient, and sustainable?

VII. Suggested panel composition and rationale

To ensure that the Interactive Dialogue on “Water for Prosperity” leads to concrete outcomes, the panel should be designed to connect policy leadership, financial innovation, private sector transformation, and community inclusion. A balanced group of speakers representing governments, international organizations, the private sector, finance, and civil society will enable participants to leave with tangible pathways to implement solutions that link water, economy, and social well-being, ensuring that the discussion remains globally relevant and locally actionable.

Government Leadership

The dialogue should include at least two government representatives, one from a developing country and one from a developed or emerging economy, who have demonstrated leadership in linking water management to inclusive growth. For example, a Minister of Water or Environment from a country advancing integrated water resource management, or a Minister of Industry or Planning from a nation embedding water efficiency and circular economy principles into industrial policy. Their participation will illustrate how public policy and institutional reform can create enabling environments for water reuse, valuation, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

These government perspectives will ground the dialogue in real-world experience, showing how coherent regulation, data systems, and tariff reforms can unlock investment and accelerate progress toward SDG 6. They will also provide valuable insights into how national governments are aligning water governance with climate resilience, food security, and industrial competitiveness.



UN Leadership

Given UNIDO's role as the UN system's lead agency on inclusive and sustainable industrial development, the participation of the Director General of UNIDO would be both strategic and impactful. The DG can highlight how valuing water through resource efficiency, circular economy, and industrial innovation directly supports economic transformation and job creation in developing countries. UNIDO's experience in implementing water stewardship projects provides practical evidence that industry can be part of the solution when supported by the right policy, technology, and financing mechanisms.

Alongside UNIDO, the Principle from FAO could emphasize the water-food-energy nexus and agricultural reuse, while UNDP's Principle might address governance, capacity-building, and integration into national development planning.

Together, this constellation of UN leadership will ensure a cohesive narrative linking prosperity, sustainability, and equity.

Finance and Investment Community

Financing water for prosperity requires reimagining how capital is deployed and risk is managed. A representative from a multilateral development bank, such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, could articulate how innovative financing structures bridging the investment gap.

In addition, participation from a specialized water finance platform or impact investor would help demonstrate how financial institutions are integrating water risks and opportunities into decision-making. Their interventions can provide Member States with replicable examples of how to attract and de-risk private investment for circular and sustainable water management.

Potential high-level speaker: Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, IMF; Ms. Mafalda Duarte, CEO, Green Climate Fund.

Why: High-level women finance leaders to link macroeconomic stability, resilience, and climate-aligned water investment.

Private Sector

To translate discussion into implementation, strong representation from the private sector is essential. CEOs or sustainability leaders from global companies (such as Unilever, Danone, L'Oréal, or AB InBev) could share concrete examples of how corporate water stewardship, reuse technologies, and science-based targets for freshwater are transforming business models and supporting basin-level resilience.

Equally important would be the inclusion of an industrial technology or circular solutions company, such as Veolia, Xylem, or Grundfos, to illustrate how innovation in monitoring, digitalization, and low-carbon water treatment can be scaled through public-private partnerships.

Finally, a representative from a small or medium-sized enterprise or eco-industrial park operator from a developing country could provide an on-the-ground perspective on challenges and opportunities in



adopting resource-efficient cleaner production. Together, these voices will demonstrate how private sector of all sizes can move from water users to water stewards, creating shared value through productivity, job creation, and environmental protection.

Potential high-level speaker: Ms. Rebecca Marmot, Chief Sustainability Officer, Unilever; Mr. Patrick Decker, President & CEO, Xylem Inc.

Why: Ms. Marmot demonstrates corporate water stewardship and science-based targets in manufacturing and supply chains. Mr. Decker would bring the innovation frontier in digital water technologies and water-energy efficiency.

Civil Society, Youth, and Community Representatives

To ensure inclusivity and legitimacy, the panel should feature a civil society leader or youth representative advocating for equitable access, gender-responsive governance, and community-based innovation. Representatives can illustrate how community participation strengthens social cohesion and accountability.

Their perspective is critical in reminding all stakeholders that prosperity derived from water must be shared equitably and that local actors are indispensable in sustaining change on the ground.

Potential high-level speaker: Ms. Licypriya Kangujam, Founder, Child Movement for Climate; Ms. Autumn Peltier, Indigenous youth water-rights advocate from Canada; Ms. Anita Soina, Kenyan environmental & water security activist and current Global Youth Champion for the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership.

Why: Female youth advocates linking intergenerational justice and water security should be represented in this panel.

Scientific and Knowledge Partners

Science and knowledge institutions are vital to ensuring that Water for Prosperity is guided by evidence, not aspiration. A leading expert from the Tufts University Water Diplomacy Program, the University of Amsterdam's Water Services Governance Group, or the School of Public Policy and Governance in India could bring forward innovative perspectives on linking science, governance, and diplomacy in managing shared water resources. These institutions combine technical excellence with policy relevance, offering insights into measuring water-related risks, institutional design, and the social and economic dimensions of water valuation.

Their contributions would help bridge data and governance gaps and support Member States in developing coherent monitoring and accountability frameworks that connect basin-level outcomes with national policies. Including such expertise ensures the dialogue remains grounded in measurable progress, equity, and replicable methodologies that reflect diverse regional experiences and governance realities.

Potential high-level speaker: Prof. Shafiqul Islam, Director, Water Diplomacy Program, Tufts University; Prof. Vishal Narain, School of Public Policy & Governance, India.



Why: Prof. Islam contributes a systems-thinking and negotiation-science perspective, translating complex hydrological challenges into actionable diplomatic and governance solutions through his pioneering work on water diplomacy. Prof. Narain complements this with deep expertise in the political economy of water, institutional design, and equity in resource management, offering grounded insights from the Global South on how water governance can foster inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

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