

2026 United Nations Water Conference
FAO Inputs to Interactive Dialogue Concept Papers
Interactive Dialogue 1 Water for People

I. Challenges and emerging issues

Persistent water-related challenges - such as scarcity, pollution and floods, and inequitable access - to water, worsened by climate change and weak governance frameworks. Food security, as well as ensuring the human right to food, is highly dependent on water resources – a critical factor in any strategy for increased agricultural production.

II. Solutions

Transforming agrifood systems and the sustainable use of water are essential. Equally important is the fair and just allocation of water resources among different users. Together, these actions hold the key to solving major interconnected challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, food insecurity, and poverty.

FAO promotes inclusive water governance and capacity building for equitable water allocation, integrating rights-based approaches. The Global Dialogue on water tenure (one of FAO's water action agenda), strengthens responsible governance of water tenure to secure tenure rights and equitable access.

III. Recommendations and conclusions

The transformation of agrifood systems must be equitable, inclusive and gender responsive for maximum impact. Promoting resilience to shocks and stresses, including droughts and floods, is key for ensuring livelihoods. This can be translated with tangible measures on the field through [drought plans](#) as well as better integrating of water in national policies (for example through the FAO National Water Roadmaps initiative).

IV. Guiding questions (1000 words)

How to better consider the customary water rights for a fair water allocation for all?

What would be principles for responsible water allocation and governance?

Interactive Dialogue 2 Water for Prosperity

I. Introduction

The crucial role of water for agrifood systems transformation was identified as one of the five mission areas to address the water crisis by the Global Commission on Water Economics. Agriculture accounts for 72 percent of global freshwater withdrawals. However, only 13 percent of the Water Action Agenda submitted during the UN 2023 Water Conference related to agriculture. Without sustainable management of agricultural water use, achieving water security will not be possible.

II. Challenges and emerging issues

Past agricultural production met the needs of a rapidly growing population, but at a substantial environmental and social cost. Intensive agricultural practices and unsustainable use of chemicals increasingly lead to pollution and the depletion of land, soil and water resources. As demand for food is expected to increase in the coming years, so will demand for already limited water resources. Sustainable water resources management in agriculture is therefore key to ensure both water and food security.

III. Solutions

The transformation of agrifood systems, and the sustainable use of water for agrifood systems, hold the solutions to major interlinked challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, food insecurity, as well as poverty.

Sustainable transformation of agrifood systems also brings a water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus perspective with links to the right to food, circular economy (with the reuse of wastewater), environmental considerations (through nature-based solutions) and water pollution.

Such transformation is advanced through irrigation modernization and water-use efficiency through water-resilient food systems and digital tools, for example monitoring land and water productivity through remote sensing. Agriculture is the main sector reusing treated wastewater and is therefore an opportunity for a circular economy approach. In some countries, agriculture is also the main sector on which economic and social development and prosperity in rural areas are greatly dependent on.

Capacity development to improve and adapt agrifood systems, in particular in the context of increasing water scarcity, is required at country level for development of local solutions.

IV. Recommendations and conclusions

Scaling up the implementation and uptake of agrifood systems solutions through enabling policies, innovation and technologies is fundamental to reach smallholder farmers and producers. It encompasses transforming agrifood systems to be more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable to ensure food security and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

V. Guiding questions

How to upscale and promote faster transformation of sustainable agrifood systems?

What is the contribution of sustainable agrifood systems to the circular economy of water (with return flow and reuse of treated wastewater)? How can it be further improved?

What are the trade-offs to consider between solar-power irrigation and environmental sustainability of the hydrological cycle?

How can integrated and sustainable water resources management be better promoted and mainstreamed at policy level in countries?

Interactive Dialogue 3 Water for the Planet

I. Challenges and emerging issues

Agriculture is both a contributor and a solution to climate change. Agrifood systems rely on rural and natural areas. Land degradation, as well as water scarcity and pollution, accelerate biodiversity loss and climate vulnerability.

II. Solutions

Agrifood systems solutions are climate and biodiversity solutions. Agriculture is a nature-based solution, and as such is the main buffer both in case of drought and floods. Coping with water scarcity includes promotion of watershed restoration, soil health programs for better water retention, and climate-smart water management at landscape scale.

III. Recommendations and conclusions

Global biodiversity (The Biodiversity Plan), climate (Paris Agreement) and land degradation neutrality goals are unattainable without agrifood system solutions. Governments and donors should invest in large-scale ecosystem restoration linked to agrifood systems. Mapping out the need and potential of agricultural areas can guide decision-makers in planning investment in irrigation development.

IV. Guiding questions

What are the key principles to sustainable water allocation that meet human and environmental needs?

Interactive Dialogue 4 Water for Cooperation

I. Challenges and emerging issues

Fragmented transboundary water governance for both surface water and groundwater resources and lack of data sharing.

II. Solutions

Basin-level integrated water resources management and multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue, such as the global dialogue on water tenure, are needed to ease data sharing. AQUASTAT provides global water data for shared decision-making across borders and AQUALEX provides free access to national and international legal instruments on water management. The disaggregation of SDG 6.4.2 at river basin level provides informed evidence to overcome national competitions.

III. Recommendations and conclusions

Expansion of the voluntary guidelines on the governance of tenure of natural resources to water resources would support in developing principles for equitable water tenure arrangements and foster international collaboration

IV. Guiding questions

How to promote water data sharing as an initial step for greater cooperation in transboundary water rivers and aquifers?

Interactive Dialogue 5 Water in Multilateral Processes

I. Challenges and emerging issues

Slow progress on SDG 6 due to fragmented global water governance and weak accountability.

II. Solutions

Integration of land and water policies would facilitate alignment between the 2030 Agenda and climate commitments.

Greater inter-regional collaboration between UN-Water Members and partners, such as in the FAO led Water Scarcity Initiative (UNICEF, ESCAW, IWMI, ICARDA, etc.) would help in promoting water in multilateral processes. For example, the Water Scarcity Initiative aims at strengthening coordination and building partnerships to respond to water scarcity, on the premise that ensuring water and food security requires multi-sector and multi-stakeholder collaboration and joint decision-making.

III. Recommendations and conclusions

UN system and Member States should adopt binding commitments for water security in global frameworks, including post-2030 Agenda.

IV. Guiding questions

How will water be better mainstreamed and how will its cross-sectorial nature be reflected in frameworks beyond the 2030 Agenda?

Interactive Dialogue 6 Investments for Water

I. Challenges and emerging issues

Insufficient financing and investment for agrifood systems transformation, including water infrastructure and innovation in food systems: crop production, livestock farming, forestry, fishery and aquaculture, as well as nutrition, food transformation and market.

II. Solutions

FAO promotes blended finance and innovative technologies for irrigation modernization and digital water monitoring. Directing finance to agrifood systems and ensuring this finance effectively reaches agricultural communities is critical. Sustainable investments require coordinated collaboration between the public sector and the financial and private sectors.

III. Recommendations and conclusions

Development banks and private sector should scale up climate-resilient water investments globally. Public and private investment instruments that increase agricultural productivity contribute to inclusive development and preserve natural resources that need to be developed and put into practice.

IV. Guiding questions

How can the international community overcome the finance gap for SDG6? What opportunity do stakeholders from other sectors, such as agriculture, provide for this?