

HLPF 2026 | OFFICIAL SIDE EVENT

STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN UN WATER CONFERENCES BEYOND 2026



OUTCOME REPORT

High-Level Political Forum 2026 Side Event: **From Dakar to Abu Dhabi and Beyond: Strengthening Future Stakeholder Engagement in UN Water Processes**

BACKGROUND

Meaningful and inclusive stakeholder participation is essential to addressing the growing global water crisis and strengthening global water governance. Against this background, the side event under Interactive Dialogue E “Water in Multilateral Processes” (ID E) of the 2026 UN Water Conference examined how stakeholder engagement can be better integrated into the Conference process and into potential future intergovernmental processes on water.

The 2026 UN Water Conference co-hosts and UN DESA highlighted the successful stakeholder engagement at the Dakar High-Level Preparatory Meeting in January 2026 and stressed that an inclusive preparatory process and conference are essential for impactful outcomes of the conference, which will take place from 8-10 Dec in Abu Dhabi. Self-organized working groups aligned with the six Interactive Dialogues, co-facilitated by stakeholder networks and supported by rapporteurs from underrepresented constituencies, developed joint inputs, facilitated discussions, and delivered coordinated statements at the High-Level Preparatory Meeting. This gave stakeholders a genuine seat at the table from agenda-setting to high-level dialogue and was widely seen as a potential model for future UN Water Conferences and beyond.

The discussions at the HLPF Side Event “From Dakar to Abu Dhabi and Beyond” showed that the Dakar experience should not remain a “one-off” success. Drawing on lessons from the Peoples Social Platform of the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation, the Sendai Framework Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, UNCCD constituencies, Indigenous Peoples’ participation models, and gender-responsive engagement approaches, participants identified both persistent barriers and concrete building blocks for stronger engagement. The findings below therefore point to the need to move from consultation towards impactful participation through a permanent, inclusive, accountable, and institutionally embedded stakeholder mechanism that enables stakeholders and rights-holders not only to participate, but to meaningfully influence global water governance.

Disclaimer: The findings and recommendations presented in this document reflect the discussions and views expressed by participants during the side event. They are provided for information purposes only and do not necessarily represent the positions of the session co-organizers or the co-chairs of Interactive Dialogue E, “Water in Multilateral Processes”. Responsibility for the content rests solely with the authors of this report.



KEY FINDINGS

1. Current Challenges

- **Ad hoc engagement:** Stakeholder participation remains concentrated around conferences, with limited continuity before and after major events.
- **Weak transparency:** Many stakeholders do not know how outcomes are negotiated, how preparatory documents are developed, or where opportunities for engagement exist.
- **Representation gaps:** Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, local communities, and other rights-holders are not consistently included through institutionalized and transparent mechanisms that enable meaningful influence over decision-making.
- **Accessibility barriers:** Accreditation requirements, travel constraints, language barriers, and reliance on online consultations can exclude many stakeholders, particularly rural and Indigenous communities.
- **Lacking incentives:** Especially private sector actors often lack a clear value proposition for engaging in the water sector, as well as the incentives, enabling frameworks, and partnership opportunities needed to support participation, investment, and implementation.
- **Insufficient resources and capacity:** Participation often depends on voluntary efforts, while many stakeholders lack resources and knowledge of UN processes needed to engage effectively.
- **Limited influence:** Stakeholders are often consulted too late in processes and lack clear pathways to shape negotiations, outcomes, and implementation.
- **Weak accountability and learning:** Few mechanisms exist to track how stakeholder recommendations influence agenda-setting, negotiations, decisions, implementation or follow-up, limiting transparency, accountability and institutional learning.

2. Key Recommendations to Member States

1. **Mandate:** Mandate a permanent, institutionally embedded mechanism within the UN water architecture, with clear responsibilities across conference cycles.
2. **Governance & Coordination:** Create a hybrid governance model combining self-organized constituencies with professional UN-level coordination, transparent roles, and clear accountability.

3. **Inclusion:** Ensure meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, youth, women, local communities, Global South stakeholders, and other underrepresented groups through transparent selection, safeguards, stakeholder mapping, and rights-holder recognition.
4. **Participation:** Institutionalize continuous engagement before, during, and after conferences through global, regional, national, digital, and in-person processes that enable co-creation, not only consultation.
5. **Influence:** Create transparent pathways showing how stakeholder inputs shape agenda-setting, negotiations, outcomes, implementation, and review.
6. **Accountability:** Track commitments, recommendations, implementation, and feedback through agreed indicators, periodic reporting, and learning loops to demonstrate how stakeholder engagement strengthens multilateral outcomes.
7. **Financing:** Establish predictable pooled or trust-fund financing for coordination, constituency engagement, participation, consultations, and capacity strengthening, especially for underrepresented groups and sectors.

Please note: More detailed recommendations based on the discussion can be found in the appendix below.

3. Conclusion

Participants called for a shift from ad hoc and conference-centred consultation towards a permanent, transparent, and adequately resourced stakeholder engagement mechanism that enables diverse stakeholders and rights-holders to influence agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation, and accountability processes across global, regional, and national levels. The mechanism should combine formal recognition, representative constituencies, dedicated and reliable financing, and clear pathways for stakeholder inputs to shape agendas, influence decisions, strengthen implementation, and support continuous accountability and learning.

4. Next Steps

The findings will be shared with the co-chairs and co-organizers of the side event, Germany and Mexico, to inform the work under ID E on “Water in Multilateral Processes”. **The Online Consultation under the Interactive Dialogue “Water in Multilateral Processes” will be open until 9 August 2026 and provides the opportunity for stakeholders to submit further input to the discussions.** Your input will help inform the Co-Chairs’ work on strengthening inclusive stakeholder engagement in a future UN Water Governance. Please keep in mind that only one submission per organisation/member state will be allowed.

Stakeholders will also continue to convene among themselves to discuss the findings further and develop a Stakeholder Declaration towards Abu Dhabi, setting out their shared interests and expectations regarding meaningful stakeholder participation in the Conference and beyond.

PARTICIPATE IN THE VIRTUAL CONSULTATION



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Annex 1: Event Agenda

	Item	Contributors
1	Opening	• Enrique Delgado Ríos, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations • Dr. Mohamed C.B.C Diatta, Sherpa for the 2026 UN Water Conference, Republic of Senegal • Naiara da Costa Chaves, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN DESA
2	Ignition Inputs	• Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Water & Sanitation • Tania Martinez-Cruz, Indigenous Peoples Operations Analyst Global Environmental Facility • Polina Nesterenko, Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, Youth & Children Focal Point • Shahrukh Nasim Khan, UNCCD Youth Caucus • Kathryn E Pharr, Independent Consultant on Gender Inclusion
3	Roundtables	Table 1: Governance, Mandate & Financing Table 2: Representation, Inclusion & Legitimacy Table 3: Influence, Participation & Co-Creation Table 4: Accountability, Learning & Implementation
4	Reporting Back by Table Hosts	• Johannes Rueck, Coordinator, German WASH Network • Elizabeth A. Koch, Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network • Ingrid Timboe, Deputy Executive Director and Senior Policy Lead, Alliance for Global Water Adaptation AGWA • James Dumpert, Finance and Accountability Coordinator, Sanitation and Water for All
5	Key Take Aways	• Sebastian Lang – Coordinator, International Water Policy, Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMUV), Germany
6	Closing Remarks	• Shaima Gargash, Director of Energy and Sustainability Affairs, UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Annex 1:

Detailed Recommendations for a Future Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism developed during the event

1. Mandate and Institutionalization

- Mandate a permanent, institutionally embedded mechanism within the UN water architecture, with clear responsibilities across conference cycle.
- Establish clear responsibility for maintaining stakeholder engagement across regular UN Water Conferences to ensure continuity beyond changes in conference hosts and political leadership.
- Adopt clear Terms of Reference and defined roles.

2. Governance and Coordination

- Create a hybrid governance model combining self-organized constituencies with professional UN-level coordination. (e.g. a strengthened UN Water).
- Define transparent roles, decision-making, accountability, and liaison with Member States and UN entities.
- Support independent, self-organized stakeholder constituencies and connect them through an inter-constituency coordination group.
- Ensure regular convening, information-sharing, consultation processes, and liaison with Member States and UN entities.
- Clarify the value proposition of water and stakeholder engagement for implementation, investment, innovation, and accountability.

3. Representation and Inclusion

- Organize participation through self-organized constituencies with transparent selection of representatives and minimum safeguards for inclusion (accessibility, regional balance, hybrid participation, interpretation, travel support, etc).
- Support capacity building and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, youth, women, local communities, Global South stakeholders, and other underrepresented groups.
- Use regular stakeholder mapping and existing rights-holder mechanisms, including UNPFII, to close representation gaps.

4. Participation and Co-Creation

- Institutionalize continuous engagement before, during, and after conferences through global, regional, national, digital, and in-person processes
- Strengthen national consultation processes as key entry points for rights holders influencing global outcomes.
- Move from consultation towards co-creation, shared agenda-setting, and sustained partnership throughout policy development, implementation and review.

5. Influence

- Create formal, transparent pathways linking stakeholder recommendations to agenda-setting, member-state led negotiations, all segments of UN Water Conferences and conference outcomes, implementation, and review.
 - Increase transparency around negotiations, drafting processes, timelines, and opportunities for engagement.
 - Clearly demonstrate how stakeholder recommendations have been considered and acted upon.
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- Strengthen public outreach and visibility so that rights holders can see how their perspectives are reflected in multilateral processes and translated into tangible results.

6. Accountability

- Establish mechanisms to track stakeholder commitments, recommendations, implementation, and follow-up over time.
- Develop agreed indicators and periodic reporting to assess whether stakeholder engagement is becoming more representative, influential, and effective.
- Create transparent feedback loops between stakeholders, governments, and UN entities, supported by learning, review, and continuous improvement.
- Recognise regulators as a distinct accountability constituency, drawing on their independent mandate, enforcement powers and published performance data to hold service providers accountable between political cycles.

7. Sustainable Financing

- Establish a predictable pooled or trust fund to finance global coordination, constituency engagement, participation in in-person events, consultations, and capacity strengthening, especially for underrepresented groups and sectors.
- Support stakeholder coordination and engagement throughout the process and not only ad-hoc participation at conference events.

Annex 3:

Lessons from other Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism

1. **Sendai Stakeholder Engagement** – presented by Polina Nesterenko, Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, Youth & Children Focal Point

Key Enabler: Organisation is key. SEM's 14 constituencies and working groups coordinate before, during, and after each forum. Each constituency selects a representative; the advisory board aligns their perspectives into collective positions — so any SEM representative who has the floor can speak for the entire group.

Key Challenge: Availability, Recognition, and Inclusion. Voluntary roles create structural barriers. Stakeholders often brought in only at the final stages of processes, leaving a sense of tokenistic participation. Institutions must engage the mechanism throughout — and where funding is needed, help enable at least one participant to attend.

Main Recommendation: Build stakeholder engagement into the water governance architecture from day one: (i) a clear ToR defining mandates, roles, and rotation; (ii) a formal constituency structure; (iii) genuine collaboration between groups and institutions — because when we are recognised as peers, we go further.

2. **Inclusion of Indigenous People** – presented by Tania Martinez-Cruz, Indigenous Peoples Operations Analyst Global Environmental Facility

Key Enabler: Direct funding paired with self-determined priorities turns Indigenous Peoples from participants into decision-makers.

Key Challenge: Water has no convention or guaranteed mechanism (unlike CBD, BBNJ); Indigenous Peoples participation remains limited in the Water Action Decade

Main Recommendation: A Water legacy fund for Indigenous Peoples' direct access, taking examples such as the GEF-7 ICI, with a standing self-selected seat, built with the Indigenous leaders

(e.g. Indigenous Peoples Major Group, the International Indian Treaty Council, Land is Life, UNPFII and others).

3. UN CCD Stakeholder Engagement– presented by Shahrukh Nasim Khan, UNCCD Youth Caucus

Key Enabler: A formal COP mandate – the Youth Caucus (COP14) and Youth Engagement Strategy (Decision 5/COP.15) give youth standing, legitimacy and secretariat support.

Key Challenge: Participation runs on unstable, voluntary funding – limiting who can attend, especially Global South youth, and making inter-COP work ad hoc.

Main Recommendation: Institutionalize self-organized constituencies – including youth – in the post-Abu Dhabi water process, with a formal mandate, dedicated funding and defined channels into negotiations.

4. Gender Inclusion in the Rio-Conventions – presented by Kathryn Pharr Independent Consultant on Gender Inclusion

Key Enabler: Integrate inclusive perspectives from the earliest stages of brainstorming and design and provide targeted capacity-building support so that underrepresented stakeholders can effectively engage with the system, understand its limitations, and contribute insights that benefit all.

Key Challenge: Participation often remains tokenistic. Lack of funding for capacity building and sustained stakeholder engagement across all stages of the process.

Main Recommendation: Plan ahead and provide funding, support capacity building for voices that need to be included so that their participation in early stages and design phases is valued and incorporated.

This HLPF Side Event was jointly organized by
ANew, the German WASH Network, Germany, Mexico, and UN DESA

This report has been compiled by the German WASH Network Secretariat

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