



Stockholm International Water Institute

[www.sivi.org](http://www.sivi.org)

Dani Gaillard, Senior Advisor, [Danielle.gaillard@sivi.org](mailto:Danielle.gaillard@sivi.org)

### Chapeau

Multifaceted challenges call for a multitude of integrated and cross-sectoral solutions for a just transition of societies towards a sustainable future for all. **Only by addressing SDGs holistically and simultaneously can we achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and build resilient and equitable societies to successfully meet current and future challenges.**

Likewise, global processes that address sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, and biodiversity targets (e.g. SDGs, Paris Climate Agreement, Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and others) must better link to each other to leverage progress on a continual basis.

Due to the transformative ambition of the SDGs, achieving its targets is inherently a collective action problem, one that needs to incentivize joint action by individuals and organizations, governments and non-state actors, in the pursuit of a common goal where individual gain is dependent on collective gain through cooperation.

Cooperation and coordination across sectors are no longer a luxury but an imperative. The triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and the environmental impacts of pollution cannot be addressed without cross-sectoral coordination. Holistic management approaches across health, food, water, energy, oceans, climate, finance, and other sectors are required to reach the ambition of the entire 2030 Agenda. It is, therefore, essential that collective action spaces that address issues holistically and inspire innovation are created to enable these communities to come together to learn from each other about how to overcome jointly the challenges they encounter. This will lead to more robust decisions, policies, and investments, effectively bridging silos and fostering cross-sectoral cooperation.

Water connects all the Sustainable Development Goals and enables co-benefits to be optimized. The International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028, calls for inclusive, holistic, and cross-sectoral water management to be placed at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Climate Action Agendas. To this end, we maintain the need for an integrated cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder approach, where water-related solutions accelerate the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

The **Water Action Agenda** ([Water Action Agenda | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#)) can be a key element for supporting the transformation towards a more just and equitable world where everyone’s basic needs and rights are met without compromising the livelihoods of future generations. The Water Action Agenda, with over 800 commitments from regional, national and local governments, UN agencies and all other stakeholders including the private and non-profit sectors, is a clear outcome of the **UN 2023 Water Conference** convened by the UN General Assembly (resolution 75/212 and whose outcomes are recorded in resolution [A/77/L.106](#))

## Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

Water-related climate and ecological disasters threaten the world, with unprecedented droughts, floods, and wildfires having devastating impacts on rural and urban livelihoods, ecosystems, infrastructure, industries and entire societies. Conflicts provide further risks, causing human suffering, food shortages, and spikes in energy prices and the cost of living. Meanwhile, dirty water and unsafe sanitation are leading causes of death and preventable disease in many low-income countries. This represents huge economic losses on a global scale, not only from direct loss and damages incurred by water-related disasters, but also by hampering food security and productivity, incurring massive health care expenditures, and impeding access to education and gender equality that would lead to improved livelihoods.

Climate change is also serving as a risk multiplier, particularly since already unstable regions tend to be disproportionately impacted by water scarcity, water-related disasters, and food insecurity. Water is fundamental to all aspects of climate action, both mitigation and adaptation. All pathways to net zero require massive transformations of every sector of society, such as food and energy, which must take into consideration sustainable and reliable access to freshwater. To achieve the fast, just, and profound transitions we need, every sector of society must understand how they impact and are impacted by access to water. Water must therefore be at the heart of all climate strategies and be adequately prioritized and financed.

Ensuring that people have access to clean water and safely managed sanitation is necessary to combat diseases, improve nutrition, increase school enrolment rates, and tackle gender discrimination. Investments in WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) have a high social and economic return on investment. Every dollar invested represents a four dollar return in benefits to society. Positive change in this sector depends on improved water governance, namely well-functioning systems and decision-making processes for sustainable and resilient services. This stretches far beyond infrastructure investment as it requires institutional capacity, correct and relevant knowledge, multi-partnership engagements in policy making transparency, and

accountability. Decision-making about WASH and water management must be inclusive and incorporate gender, youth, indigenous, and vulnerable people's perspectives. To this end:

- Countries must commit to providing tangible progress on leaving no one behind, delivering **safe water and sanitation services to all**, prioritizing rural areas and informal settlements.
- Countries should incorporate the **recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation** in their national legislation and put in place mechanisms for the realization of the rights.
- Countries should **double their public expenditure for WASH** in the next three years, balancing the investment in infrastructure with the support of sustainable service delivery models.
- Countries should **increase investment in governance and accountability** as a means to accelerate progress, reduce inefficiencies and corruption, incorporate all people's needs, and develop sustainable and resilient services.
- Multilateral agencies must **increase the financial and technical support to the least developed countries and fragile settings** where the need to accelerate progress is dire.

## Chapter II. International peace and security

Promoting cooperation of shared waters is a strong catalyst for peace and conflict prevention since it can provide support to governments, basin organizations, and all relevant stakeholders with tailored capacity development and dialogue support for trust building. By working together at various scales, communities united by a common interest can increase their long-term resilience in an era of growing water stress, degradation of natural resources, a volatile economic environment, and rising global temperatures. For this, it is essential to support inclusive transboundary processes with knowledge development, including research on water cooperation, water diplomacy, and water governance.

Another essential component for international peace and security is the inclusion of youth and women in global, national and local processes, especially when it comes to diplomacy over shared water resources. Recognizing that women's and youth's participation at all scales of peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes is essential for the development and sustainability of agreements, multi-track water diplomacy should be encouraged and facilitated through dedicated mechanisms, such as the Women in Water Diplomacy network, hosted by the Stockholm International Water Institute.

**We, therefore, recognize the peacebuilding and conflict resolution power of coordinated management of shared waters**, and its impact on human, national, and global security. We commit to trans-sectorial water cooperation for equitable and inclusive socio-economic development, including all underrepresented populations and taking future generations into account.

## Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

Innovation is broader than technology and **includes innovations in governance, finance, culture and working with nature**. Locally-led innovation is critical to building inclusive systems by empowering local communities and marginalized groups. Good governance, finance, culture and partnerships are necessary to develop, bring to market and scale innovations.

Whilst innovation and new technological opportunities can be used for better access to data – such as measuring, mapping, and forecasting– the spread of misinformation and disinformation can also have negative effects that could escalate crises. Further research is needed on geopolitical security perspectives including the impacts, aims, uses, risks and opportunities related to, and the actors involved in the use of AI.

Earth observation satellites and other programmes offer the potential to monitor events and resources around the world and can provide objective information that could be used by decision makers when discussing, for example, water management, especially in politically unstable situations, in order to reduce further tensions and conflicts. External actors can play a role in supporting fragile and conflict-affected countries with capacity development to advance their adaptation and absorption capabilities.

Mechanisms for sharing real time data can play a positive role in designing early warning systems. Additional financial means are needed in order to implement new technologies, especially in areas that are not challenged by geopolitical tensions.

#### Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

The UN 2023 Water Conference contributed to amplifying youth voices, encouraging intergenerational dialogue and youth perspectives to ensure that water-related policies and initiatives are responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people and future generations. The following were key messages that the youth delegates shared at the UN 2023 Water Conference:

- Access to water and adequate sanitation must be respected and fulfilled as basic human rights, especially for young women and girls.
- It is imperative to make financing available to youth for community-based water solutions, promoting transparency and accountability.
- It is essential to ensure adequate education and training for youth, especially young women, to acquire knowledge and skills.
- It is imperative to include youth in water-related mechanisms, negotiations and solutions.
- It is suggested to establish an inclusive and permanent body within the UN to address water issues and to appoint a UN Youth Envoy for Water.

All stakeholders are encouraged to cooperate with youth and integrate youth perspectives (rather than '*siloing*' youth) as equal partners within global processes.

#### Chapter V. Transforming global governance

**At the heart of a just and sustainable transition for all is good water governance.** It is the blue thread that enables accelerated implementation and improved impact towards achieving the

2030 Agenda. A sustainable future cannot be conceived without acknowledging the foundational concept of water governance, which depends on the ability to fairly allocate water resources for multiple purposes (health, energy, agriculture, nature...), to prevent conflict and mitigate the disastrous impacts of climate change on people and the planet. It has social, economic, political, security, and environmental dimensions, all of which must be carefully considered, included and addressed, from scoping to decision-making.

How societies choose to govern their water resources and services has a profound impact on people's livelihoods and the sustainability of water resources, as well as on freshwater ecosystems and sustainable economic development. Ultimately, access to water and its sound management, from source to sea, is a matter of survival and resilience and can help to break the circle of poverty, inequality, and insecurity, especially for women and youth. This means the bridging of institutional and legislative silos across all sectors and borders and the entire water cycle. It also means that strategies are implemented with the participation of all stakeholders especially woman, youth and local and indigenous communities.

We acknowledge the need for a holistic, combined, and properly participative management of water and landscapes, from source to sea, that includes understanding stakeholders' needs and ambitions in terms of natural resources, water, food, land uses, and energy, and, therefore, engage in collaboration with nature to restore and protect fresh and saline water-based ecosystems as habitats to biodiversity.

While a **UN-wide water strategy** is being developed to deliver on the UN 2023 Water Conference outcomes and Water Action Agenda, we anxiously await the nomination of a **UN Special Envoy for Water and Sanitation** to ensure that water issues are consistently championed in a holistic way at the global level and prioritized within national political agendas as a fundamental enabler for the acceleration of the achievement of the SDGs.