Illustrative Elements for Member State Consultations on the Future of Water Governance

An IUCN Contribution

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Purpose of this paper:

This paper presents illustrative substantive and implementation elements that Member States may wish to consider in developing a voluntary, non-legally binding and action-oriented global framework for water. It does not prejudge the name, legal status, institutional form or negotiated content of any future process or framework.

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Executive Summary

Water insecurity is increasingly a systemic constraint on sustainable development, climate resilience, food and energy security, public health, ecosystem integrity and stability. Important legal, policy and institutional instruments already exist, but the multilateral water landscape remains fragmented and lacks a continuous mechanism for political direction, implementation support, finance alignment, learning and review.

The 2026 and 2028 United Nations Water Conferences, especially the Interactive Dialogue E on Water in Multilateral Processes create a timely opportunity for Member States to establish a durable, voluntary and action-oriented framework.

This paper translates IUCN's earlier proposal for a global framework for water governance and action into an illustrative content architecture for Member State reflection and consideration. It draws principally on a non-binding and implementation-oriented logic, while adapting relevant lessons from other multilateral processes. It proposes four substantive outcomes and two enabling components:

Substantive Outcomes	Enabling Components
1. Water and sanitation for all	1. Coherent multilateral governance, science, data and participation
2. Water security and sustainable use	
3. Healthy freshwater ecosystems and resilience	2. Finance, capacity and implementation support
4. Cooperation and peaceful management of shared waters	

Implementation would be nationally led and adapted to national circumstances. The Framework would support voluntary national water strategies, compacts or implementation plans; basin and aquifer arrangements; regional platforms; policy guidance and peer learning; finance and project preparation; and a light but credible review and learning cycle that uses existing reporting systems wherever possible.

Core Design Proposition:

Institutional form should follow agreed function and political mandate. Any future framework should add what is missing, and not renegotiate what already exists.

It should first establish the outcomes, implementation functions and review needs that Member States consider necessary. Member States can then determine how existing institutions should be strengthened or complemented to deliver those functions.

Any future framework, or our suggestions for inclusions in a future framework do not imply a need for: a new international treaty, a new international organization, reopening existing water conventions, uniform global water-allocation rules, mandatory national water-pricing models; duplicative reporting systems; or displacement of existing national, basin, regional or treaty-based institutions.

1 Status, Relationship and Intended Use

This document is an illustrative elements paper. It is intended to inform Member State consultations and to complement IUCN's policy brief and technical note on sequencing and institutional options.

As the momentum on water continues to grow we see several member states putting forward concrete suggestions for the future of water governance. The 2026 UN-Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report "Ten Years of SDG 6 and the Path to 2030+" concludes that the period from 2026 to 2028 represents a strategic window for deciding water's institutional future at the UN, and identifies the 2026 and 2028 UN Water Conferences as the two political moments best placed to build consensus toward a future General Assembly mandate on water governance beyond the end of the Water Action Decade and the 2030 Agenda. Rather than treating institutional reform as a separate track, the report frames these two conferences as the natural staging points for that decision. Its central forward-looking recommendation is that Member States should establish a future intergovernmental process for water within the UN system for the post-2030 period, paired with stronger UN system-wide support — in particular by strengthening the coordination role of UN-Water, building on the existing architecture of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, the Integrated Monitoring Initiative (IMI-SDG6), the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water. The report is explicit that this call responds to a structural gap rather than a lack of political attention: it credits SDG 6 with having decisively raised water's profile on national and international agendas over the past decade, but finds that institutional coordination, financing and governance have not kept pace, and that closing that gap will require deliberate, sustained intergovernmental follow-through rather than reliance on periodic conferences alone.

At World Water Week in Stockholm in August 2026, the co-chairs of ID E Germany and Mexico outlined the results of an inclusive and lengthy preparatory consultation process they have undertaken for ID E as a vision for a future “house for water” - an intergovernmental process on water, mandated by a follow up resolution of the 2026 UN Water Conference. The process could for instance include regular UN water conferences with negotiated outcome documents, efforts to mainstream water implemented through a Flagship initiative providing a roadmap for the Rio Conventions, an initiative to improve donor coordination as well as efforts to strengthen UN water and enhance implementation of the UN system wide strategy on water.

On the 2nd of September the UN General Assembly adopted the modalities resolution for the 2028 UN Water Conference (79/323). It confirms that the Conference will be held in Dushanbe from 4 to 6 May 2028 and, importantly, that it shall adopt by consensus a single, non-binding, action-oriented, intergovernmental, negotiated outcome document that serves as the "Dushanbe Water Framework". Two co-facilitators, one from a developing and one from a developed country, appointed by the President of the General Assembly, will conduct open, Member State-driven consultations on that text, to conclude by April 2028, with a one-day high-level meeting in New York in 2027 to support preparations. The resolution, however, does not outline what function the Framework is expected to fill, or what the content of such a Framework could be.

The SDG6 synthesis report, the vision of the ID E Co-chairs and the proposed Dushanbe framework include many aligned elements. This paper is designed to add substantive depth to the discussion by setting out possible outcomes, principles, implementation functions and review arrangements. It should not be read as a competing process or as a pre-negotiated text. The immediate task is therefore not to predetermine institutional form, but to consider what functions the future Framework should perform and what outcomes it should support.

This document is not exhaustive across the entire range of water challenges and topics that SDG6 attempts to cover, or all the new emerging issues relevant for water. The paper is guided by IUCN's mission to *influence, encourage and assist societies to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable*. We recognise that there will be other topics and elements that any future process will need to consider, and we welcome proposals from other agencies to support Member State consultations.

2 Rationale: the gap a process should address

Despite water's central role across sustainable development, the multilateral system lacks a continuous and coherent process for sustaining political direction, supporting implementation, aligning finance, and reviewing progress on water beyond 2030. Water-related commitments are distributed across the 2030 Agenda, human-rights instruments, the Rio Conventions, the Sendai Framework, the Ramsar Convention, global water conventions, and other sectoral processes. These instruments remain essential, but they address different dimensions of the water agenda and are not consistently connected to national, basin, and local delivery.

This document builds on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular the water and sanitation targets under Sustainable Development Goal 6. It reaffirms and seeks to accelerate implementation of existing internationally agreed water and sanitation commitments, and indicates illustrative, non-binding targets beyond 2030. SDG 6 was never designed to function as a governance framework — it is a set of targets for water and sanitation outcomes, with no accompanying architecture for how States cooperate, share transboundary resources, allocate finance, or resolve conflict over water as it becomes scarcer and more contested. The absence of that architecture is not a gap that a successor set of targets will automatically fill; targets measure outcomes, they do not create the cooperative machinery needed to reach them. As such – agreeing on a framework for water ahead of the negotiations of the Beyond 2030 would complement those negotiations and allow for the water framework to be integrated into the future development agenda, similarly to how the Paris Agreement and other international agreements have been in Resolution 70/1.

The central challenge the framework should seek to address is the gap between international ambition and implementation. Countries face difficult choices over allocation, affordability, infrastructure, pollution, agricultural and energy policy, ecosystem protection, drought, floods and transboundary risk. International cooperation is most useful when it helps governments make these choices, coordinate sectors, justify reforms, learn from experience, and mobilise implementation support.

A future framework should therefore provide four connected functions:

- Political continuity: regular Member State dialogue and direction beyond time-bound conference and development cycles.
- Implementation support: stronger links between global outcomes and national, basin, aquifer, subnational and local delivery.
- Policy and practice cooperation: practical guidance, peer learning and exchange on difficult governance and implementation challenges.
- Finance, monitoring and accountability: better alignment of finance and a light but credible review system focused on delivery.

3 Vision, purpose and scope

Vision

A water-secure world in which the human rights to water and sanitation are realised, water is managed sustainably and equitably while maintaining the ecological integrity and resilience of freshwater systems that are protected and restored, and water supports cooperation, resilience, prosperity and peace.

Purpose

The purpose of the framework would be to accelerate water action; strengthen policy coherence and implementation across sectors and levels; support science, data, finance and institutional capacity; and sustain political attention, review and learning beyond 2030.

Scope

The framework would encompass the whole global water cycle and the natural systems that shape water security: freshwater resources, groundwater, wastewater and sanitation, water-related ecosystems, water-related disaster risk, transboundary waters, and the policy, institutional and financial systems that shape water outcomes. It would be voluntary and non-legally binding, implemented in accordance with national circumstances, capacities and priorities, and fully consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and existing international law.

4 Guiding Principles

Human rights and leaving no one behind: Full realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation, and the human right to a clean and healthy environment with priority to persons left furthest behind.

Sovereignty and cooperation: Respect for the sovereignty of States over natural resources, together with applicable duties of cooperation, equitable and reasonable use and prevention of significant transboundary harm.

Equitable transitions and benefit sharing: Changes in water allocation, pricing, infrastructure, ecosystem restoration and regulation should assess distributional impacts, protect vulnerable groups and create transparent mechanisms for sharing costs and benefits.

Basin, aquifer and source-to-sea governance: Integrated management across connected surface water, groundwater, land, freshwater and coastal systems.

Ecological integrity: Recognition of freshwater ecosystems as natural infrastructure essential to water security, biodiversity, resilience and disaster risk reduction.

Recognising the value of water and aligning incentives: Decisions on water should recognise its social, cultural, economic and ecological values and address incentives that encourage waste, pollution or unsustainable abstraction, while protecting affordability, equity and the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Equity and inclusion: Intergenerational equity, gender et and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth and other stakeholders.

Evidence and diverse knowledge: Decision-making informed by science, shared data, local experience and Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

Policy coherence: Alignment across water, climate, biodiversity, land, ocean, food, energy, health, urban development, finance and disaster risk reduction.

Differentiated capacities and solidarity: Support for developing countries, especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries facing acute water stress or fragility.

Subsidiarity and multi-level governance: Decisions and implementation are located at the most effective level, with clear connections between global commitments, national institutions, basin bodies, local authorities and water users.

Efficiency and additionality: Use of existing institutions, data and reporting arrangements wherever possible, adding new mechanisms only where they fill a demonstrated gap.

5 Proposed architecture

The six Interactive Dialogues of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference provide a useful and enduring bridge into the Framework, but they should not necessarily be treated as six equivalent permanent goals. The following architecture distinguishes substantive water outcomes from the enabling conditions required to achieve them.

2026 Interactive Dialogue	Proposed Framework Element	Function
A. Water for People	Outcome 1	Human rights, services, health and equity
B. Water for Prosperity	Outcome 2	Water security, allocation, efficiency and sustainable use
C. Water for Planet	Outcome 3	Freshwater ecosystems, climate resilience and risk reduction
D. Water for Cooperation	Outcome 4	Operational cooperation for shared waters
E. Water in Multilateral Processes	Enabling Component 5	Political continuity, coherence, science, data and participation
F. Investments for Water	Enabling Component 6	Finance, capacity and implementation support

Quantitative targets and indicators would ultimately be determined by Member States. Existing internationally agreed targets should be used wherever appropriate, with new targets considered only where they address a demonstrated governance or implementation gap.

Outcome 1. Water and sanitation for all

The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation are fully realized for all through equitable, affordable, safely managed and climate-resilient services, with priority to the most vulnerable.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

1.1 Achieve universal and equitable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all, including in schools, health-care facilities, informal settlements and humanitarian settings, with services designed in a gender-responsive and inclusive manner (SDG targets 6.1, 6.2).

1.2 Substantially reduce illness and mortality associated with unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene, including the disproportionate health burden borne by women and girls (SDG targets 6.1, 6.2, 6.3).

1.3 Enhance the resilience of countries and communities to water-related shocks, recognizing that women and girls are often most affected by water scarcity and disruption and are frequently excluded from decision-making on water resource management and disaster response (SDG targets 6.4, 6.5, 6.b).

1.4 Recognize and progressively secure minimum water provisions for a dignified life for all, especially for persons in vulnerable situations (SDG target 6.1; also underpinned by the UN-recognized human right to water and sanitation, A/RES/64/292 and A/HRC/RES/15/9).

Indicative Implementation Measures

- Costed national and subnational plans for universal, safely managed and climate-resilient services.
- Transparent service standards, independent or functionally autonomous regulation, public information and accessible remedy mechanisms, designed to be accessible for all, especially those in vulnerable situations.
- Targeted support for rural areas, informal settlements, schools, health facilities, displaced populations and marginalised groups, with particular attention to the compounded barriers faced by women and girls within these groups, including safety, privacy and mobility constraints that shape their access to services.
- Integration of source protection, catchment management and ecosystem condition into drinking-water and sanitation planning.
- Strengthen affordability, accountability and resilience safeguards so that inability to pay, climate shocks or institutional failure do not exclude people from essential services, recognizing that women disproportionately absorb the burden of service gaps through unpaid labour, foregone income and safety risk when services fail.
- Cooperation among health, water, finance, urban, education and humanitarian institutions to ensure WASH is treated as a health priority: water, sanitation and hygiene services in healthcare facilities are universally available, WASH workforce capacity and financing are built up, with National political leadership, including support for frontline WASH and health workforces, which is predominantly female, incl. sex disaggregated WASH and health data to inform decision-making, financing, workforce, data and innovation priorities, as identified in the 2023 UN Water Conference Water for Health dialogue.

Outcome 2. Water security and sustainable use

Water is allocated, managed, valued and used sustainably and equitably across sectors, supporting basic human needs, economic and social development, food and energy security and the integrity of freshwater systems. Recognising the multiple social, cultural, economic and ecological values of water can improve allocation, investment, and policy decisions.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

2.1 Sustainable allocation: withdrawals and consumption progressively brought within sustainable basin and aquifer limits, including the water requirements of ecosystems, while improving water-use efficiency and productivity across sectors (GBF Targets 10, 11; SDG targets 6.4, 6.6).

2.2 Water quality and pollution: substantially reduce pollution and untreated wastewater and improve water quality across surface water and groundwater (GBF Target 7; SDG target 6.3).

2.3 Efficiency, productive, reuse and circularity: improve water-use efficiency and productivity and expand appropriate reuse and circular systems across sectors (GBF Targets 10, 16; SDG targets 6.3, 6.4).

2.4 Integrated governance and resilience: strengthen basin and aquifer governance, integrated water resources management, including transparent allocation, drought preparedness and coordination across agriculture, energy, industry, urban development and ecosystems (GBF Targets 1, 14, 22; SDG targets 6.5, 6.b).

Indicative Implementation Measures

- Transparent allocation and permitting systems that protect basic human needs and environmental flows.
- Implement policies for pricing water closer to its true value, including appropriately targeting subsidies for poor and vulnerable communities will help reduce social pressures.
- Demand management, leakage reduction, efficient irrigation and industrial water productivity.
- Reform of policies and incentives that drive unsustainable abstraction or pollution, with attention to distributional impacts.
- Consideration of water risks, dependencies and ecosystem values in planning, budgeting, investment appraisal and procurement.
- National and basin drought-management arrangements that define triggers, priorities and contingency measures before crises occur.

Outcome 3. Healthy freshwater ecosystems and resilience

Freshwater ecosystems and the processes that sustain the hydrological cycle are protected, sustainably managed and restored as foundations of biodiversity, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction and human well-being.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

3.1 Protect ecological function, maintain environmental flows, connectivity, water quality, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, headwaters, recharge zones, wetlands and other critical freshwater systems (GBF Targets 1, 2, 3, 11; SDG targets 6.3, 6.6).

3.2 Restore degraded systems. Accelerate restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems in alignment with existing internationally agreed biodiversity and wetlands commitments (GBF Target 2; SDG target 6.6; KMGBF, Freshwater Challenge, Convention on Wetlands).

3.3 Use ecosystems as resilience infrastructure, integrate freshwater ecosystems and Nature-based Solutions into climate adaptation, drought, flood and investment planning alongside appropriately designed built infrastructure (GBF Targets 8, 11; SDG targets 6.6, 6.a; also SDG 13.1).

3.4 Recognise and manage interactions across the full hydrological cycle, including surface water, groundwater, soil moisture, vegetation and, where relevant, the cryosphere and land-atmosphere processes (GBF Targets 1, 11; SDG target 6.5).

Indicative Implementation Measures

- Freshwater ecosystem inventories, condition assessments and restoration priorities embedded in national and basin planning.
- Legal, policy or management measures to protect critical ecosystems, recharge zones, headwaters and free-flowing river stretches.
- Systematic consideration of Nature-based Solutions and ecosystem-based approaches alongside appropriate built infrastructure.
- Groundwater strategies covering mapping, monitoring, abstraction governance, quality, recharge and ecosystem dependencies.
- Source-to-sea approaches that reduce nutrient, chemical and plastic pollution and protect downstream coastal and marine systems.

Outcome 4. Cooperation and peaceful management of shared waters

Shared rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands and connected ecosystems are managed through operational, inclusive and adaptive cooperation that supports stability, resilience, equitable benefit and peace.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

4.1 Increase the proportion of transboundary basins and aquifers covered by **operational cooperation arrangements**, strengthen the degree of integrated water resources management implementation at national level, using Sustainable Development Goal indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 and complementary measures of cooperation quality (SDG target 6.5 — indicators 6.5.1, 6.5.2 as stated; GBF Targets 1, 21).

4.2 Encourage wider accession to and effective implementation of relevant global and regional water conventions and agreements, as appropriate to national circumstances, while supporting diverse legal and institutional arrangements that make cooperation operational (SDG targets 6.5, 6.a; GBF Targets 14, 20).

4.3 Strengthen joint bodies, data exchange and notification including new technologies, joint monitoring, climate adaptation, dispute prevention and benefit-sharing, incorporating multi-level governance perspectives (SDG targets 6.5, 6.a; GBF Targets 8, 20, 21).

4.4 Strengthen cooperation on groundwater and other under-governed systems such as springs and karsts (SDG targets 6.5, 6.6; GBF Targets 1, 3).

4.5 Protect water infrastructure, civilian access to water and freshwater ecosystems in situations of armed conflict in accordance with applicable international law.[1]

What "operational" Cooperation means:

Operational cooperation over shared waters is typically supported by some combination of:

- joint institutions or agreed coordination mechanisms;
- regular data and information exchange;
- joint planning or management arrangements;
- procedures for notification, consultation and dispute prevention; and
- sustainable institutional and financial capacity.

1 No target-level match in either framework — SDG6 and the GBF are both silent on conflict protection. This sits instead in international humanitarian law: the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions (notably Article 54, protection of objects indispensable to civilian survival, including water installations) and the ILC's 2022 Draft Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts.

Indicative Implementation Measures

- Agreements, protocols or other arrangements appropriate to the political and institutional context of each basin or aquifer.
- Joint bodies with adequate mandates, technical capacity, predictable core finance and links to national implementation institutions.
- Shared data, monitoring, forecasting, early warning and agreed procedures for notification and consultation on planned measures.
- Benefit-sharing and joint investment planning that identify who gains, who bears costs and how cooperation can produce equitable outcomes.
- Multi-level governance linkages connecting joint bodies, ministries, technical agencies, subnational authorities, communities and water users.
- Meaningful participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, civil society and relevant sectors in cooperation processes.

Enabling Component 5. Coherent multilateral governance, science, data and participation

Water is sustained as a political priority through continuous Member State dialogue, stronger UN-system coordination, authoritative science and data, structured stakeholder participation and coherent links with other multilateral processes.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

5.1 Sustain regular intergovernmental consideration of water beyond 2028, including periodic United Nations water conferences or forums and an intersessional mechanism for implementation review policy cooperation and follow-up., aligned with the follow up process for Beyond 2030.

5.2 Establish or strengthen an authoritative, independent and policy-relevant science and assessment function for water, building wherever possible on existing institutions, datasets and scientific networks.

5.3 Integrate water more coherently across the successor arrangements to the 2030 Agenda, the Rio Conventions, the Sendai Framework, the Ramsar Convention, food systems, oceans, health and the international financial architecture.

Indicative Implementation Measures

- Regular political meetings that provide direction, review implementation and authorise an intersessional work programme.
- A strengthened UN coordination and support function, with institutional form determined by Member States after agreement on functions.
- A structured stakeholder mechanism operating between conferences and connected to national, regional and basin processes.
- Interoperable data systems and common standards, with the principle of open access where appropriate and consistent with national law and legitimate security concerns.
- Policy-relevant assessments that combine hydrological, ecological, economic, social and governance evidence.
- Use existing SDG 6 monitoring, including indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2, together with relevant reporting under other internationally agreed frameworks and conventions, as primary inputs to Framework review, avoiding duplicative reporting wherever possible.
- National coordination arrangements that connect water positions and reporting across relevant multilateral processes, including by encouraging national water priorities and risk assessments to be reflected, where relevant, in Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, land-degradation and drought strategies, national disaster-risk strategies, and food, energy, urban and public investment planning — without directing those processes themselves, but improving coherence across national commitments.

Enabling Component 6. Finance, capacity and implementation support

Public, multilateral, philanthropic and responsible private finance is mobilised and aligned with agreed water outcomes, while countries and basins receive the institutional, technical and project-preparation support required to implement them. Any Framework should improve the quality, predictability and alignment of finance as well as its volume.

Water needs finance in different forms:

Member States should consider a coordinated water finance mechanism, facility or financing architecture capable of aligning existing sources, identifying gaps, supporting project preparation and mobilising additional resources. Water needs and financing instruments come in different forms, and a finance mechanism should be able to align each with an appropriate source:

- public-good functions, requiring public or concessional finance;
- revenue-generating infrastructure and services, where tariffs and commercial finance may have a role;
- ecosystem and resilience investments, which may draw on public, climate, biodiversity, philanthropic or blended finance; and
- transboundary institutions, which require predictable core finance rather than project-by-project grants.

Illustrative objectives and areas for possible target development:

6.1 Substantially increase the volume, effectiveness, accessibility and alignment of domestic and international finance for water, sanitation, freshwater ecosystems and climate-resilient water governance.

6.2 Strengthen project and programme preparation, national and basin investment pipelines, institutional capacity and access to concessional finance for countries and communities facing the largest implementation gaps.

6.3 Improve the consistency of public and private financial flows with water security and freshwater resilience, including through appropriate risk assessment, safeguards, disclosure and incentive reform.

Indicative Implementation Measures

- National water financing strategies linking policy priorities, public budgets, tariffs, transfers, concessional finance and responsible private investment.
- Predictable finance for core governance functions, basin institutions, monitoring, regulation and capacity that do not generate commercial revenues.
- Project-preparation and technical-assistance facilities for utilities, local authorities, basin organisations and ecosystem-restoration programmes.
- Improved access to climate, biodiversity, development and humanitarian finance, with attention to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and fragile contexts.
- Responsible use of blended finance, guarantees and risk-sharing where projects have clear public value, appropriate revenue structures and robust social and environmental safeguards.
- Reform or redirection of incentives that undermine water security and freshwater ecosystems, implemented in a just and equitable manner.

6 National, basin and local implementation

Implementation would remain nationally led. Participating States could choose the national instrument most suited to their circumstances, including a national water strategy, compact, implementation plan, reform roadmap or integrated investment plan. Voluntary national implementation instruments could set out priorities, responsibilities, financing needs, indicators and timelines, and could be updated periodically in line with national planning cycles. They should connect national policy with basin and aquifer institutions, subnational authorities, utilities, communities, rights-holders and water-dependent sectors.

Core implementation functions:

- A designated senior coordination function, using existing institutional arrangements wherever appropriate, with sufficient authority to convene relevant ministries and institutions.
- A cross-government platform covering water, finance, planning, agriculture, energy, health, environment, urban development and disaster management.
- Alignment of national priorities with basin and aquifer plans, including transboundary arrangements where relevant.
- Costed implementation and financing pathways, including capacity, data, governance and project-preparation needs.
- Meaningful participation and access to information throughout policy design, implementation and review.
- Links to national budget, investment, climate, biodiversity, disaster-risk and development-planning processes.

7 Policy cooperation, peer learning and implementation support

A central function should be to help governments address difficult water-policy and implementation choices. Between political conferences, Member States could agree a demand-led work programme that produces practical guidance, peer exchange and technical support on priority issues.

Possible areas for policy and practice cooperation include:

- Water allocation and drought governance under scarcity.
- Groundwater regulation and transboundary aquifer cooperation.
- Environmental flows, freshwater ecosystem restoration and Nature-based Solutions.
- Water, agriculture, food, energy and urban policy alignment.
- Affordability, tariff reform, service regulation and utility resilience.
- Pollution control, wastewater, circularity and safe reuse.
- Benefit-sharing, multi-level governance and dispute prevention.
- National water financing strategies and investable programme pipelines.
- Data governance, digital tools, early warning and science-policy interfaces.
- Regional platforms, UN regional commissions, river basin organisations, professional networks, universities and other competent organisations could support this work. Guidance should remain non-binding, adaptable and grounded in Member State demand and implementation experience.

8 Means of implementation

The Framework's credibility will depend on whether implementation support is designed at the same time as political outcomes.

Means of implementation should include:

- Capacity development for policy, law, institutions, regulation, finance, data, negotiation and implementation.
- Technology cooperation and access to appropriate water, sanitation, monitoring, forecasting and efficiency solutions.
- Hydrological, ecological, social and economic data systems, Earth observation and citizen science, with interoperable standards and agreed protocols for sharing.
- Scientific cooperation and assessments that connect global evidence to national and basin decisions.
- Regional implementation support and peer learning, using existing organisations and capacities where possible.
- Project and programme preparation, including support for governance, ecosystem restoration and transboundary initiatives.
- Partnerships across governments, basin organisations, local authorities, communities, civil society, science, finance and the private sector, operating within public-interest governance and accountability.

9 Follow-up, review and learning

Review should be light enough to avoid unnecessary burden but credible enough to support accountability, learning and course correction. The process should be transparent, facilitative, non-punitive and implementation-focused. The guiding principle should be: report once, use many times.

A possible review architecture could include:

- Voluntary national implementation updates aligned with existing national and international reporting cycles.
- Regional and thematic synthesis of progress, implementation barriers and support needs.
- A periodic global implementation report drawing primarily on voluntary national reports, SDG 6 monitoring and reporting under related conventions and frameworks.
- High-level political review between major conferences, focused on implementation, finance, capacity and emerging risks.
- A periodic midterm review or global stocktake as agreed by Member States, that can recommend adjustments to priorities, technical guidance and support arrangements without reopening the whole framework.
- Structured scientific, stakeholder and rights-holder inputs to complement State reporting and strengthen transparency.

Targets and indicators should be developed in parallel with the political process, using existing indicators wherever feasible and adding new measures only where they address a demonstrated gap, such as governance quality, operational cooperation, ecosystem condition, finance alignment or implementation capacity.

10 Institutional support: functions before form

The framework will require identifiable support for intergovernmental meetings, implementation coordination, monitoring and review, policy cooperation, stakeholder participation and finance mobilisation. Member States should first agree with these functions and then determine the institutional arrangement best able to deliver them.

Options, such as those outlined in the IUCN Technical Brief, may include strengthening existing UN-Water coordination and support functions, establishing a dedicated secretariat or programme function within the United Nations system, or developing other arrangements over time. Any option should be assessed against political feasibility, cost, legal complexity, implementation reach, regional capacity, accountability and complementarity with existing mandates.

Institutional guardrail

The framework should not be presented as requiring a new international organisation. It should establish the functions and outcomes that are missing, make full use of existing institutions and allow Member States to strengthen or complement those arrangements as political demand and implementation experience evolve.

11 Illustrative process timeline for framework development

The modalities resolution for the 2028 Conference sets out a considerably more compressed timeline than comparable UN-led frameworks such as the Sendai Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals or the BBNJ Agreement, which proceeded through multiple Preparatory Committees over several years. As such, one option is to follow the same model as was done for the SDGs themselves, whereby the substantive outline of the framework would be adopted in Dushanbe in 2028, substantive negotiations on the content of the framework would follow that with an adoption of the final outcome in 2031.

Date	Milestone
8–10 December 2026	The 2026 UN Water Conference is held in Abu Dhabi; its interactive dialogues, alongside those of the 2023 Conference, form the basis the 2028 Conference will build upon.
Early 2027	The follow up resolution from the 2026 UN Water Conference mandates regular water conferences, puts forward priorities for a future negotiated process to continue discussions under ID E, and requests the UN SG to prepare an options paper for the Dushanbe framework.
2027	A one-day high-level meeting is held at United Nations Headquarters in New York to support effective preparations for the Conference and have a discussion on the options paper. The SDG Summit in September 2027 kickstarts the process for negotiations of the general sustainable development agenda beyond 2030.
2027 (following the high-level meeting)	The President of the General Assembly appoints two co-facilitators – one from a developing and one from a developed country – to conduct open, transparent and Member State-driven consultations on the Dushanbe framework outcome document.
April 2028	The co-facilitators conclude the intergovernmental consultations on the text of the Dushanbe Water framework.
4-6 May 2028	The Conference convenes in Dushanbe, comprising eight plenary meetings and six interactive dialogues held in parallel, mirroring the themes of the 2026 Conference; its closing plenary, on the evening of 6 May, is expected to adopt the Dushanbe Water framework, and mandate the Open Ended Working Group to negotiate the contents of the framework, by consensus together with the Conference report.
Fall 2028	Appointment of co-facilitators for the process
2029	GA negotiations on the content of the framework and adoption of the framework by the GA
2031	First implementation Conference

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