



FLOWING TOWARDS PEACE

Recommendations ahead of the
2026 UN Water Conference

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



JULY 2026

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Geneva Water Hub, Pôle Eau Dakar, and TRENDS Research & Advisory. (2026). *Flowing Towards Peace: Recommendations ahead of the 2026 UN Water Conference - Executive Summary*.

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ISBN (print): 978.2.9701504.6.6

Printed on Recystar© recycled paper. This report cannot be sold.

Prepared jointly by:



With the support of:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



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DE GENÈVE



INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORDS	6
SUMMARY	8
KEY MESSAGES	10
ID A: WATER FOR PEOPLE	12
ID B: WATER FOR PROSPERITY	13



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ID C: WATER FOR PLANET	14
ID D: WATER FOR COOPERATION	15
ID E: WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES	16
ID F: INVESTMENTS FOR WATER	17
ABOUT THE PARTNER INSTITUTIONS	18



FOREWORD FROM SENEGAL

Water is central to humanity's most pressing challenges and a key vehicle for peace. This publication argues that water is more than a resource to be managed: it is fundamental to dignity, social cohesion, and sustainable development. The Africa Water Vision 2063 anchors this conviction with continental force, calling for a paradigm shift that recognises water's contribution to livelihoods, regional integration, peace, and security.

The policy brief is very timely: climate change, environmental degradation, demographic pressures, and geopolitical tensions are placing water systems under unprecedented pressure. However, we must see this not as a crisis but rather as an opportunity to build cooperation, strengthen resilience, and reaffirm water as a foundation for shared prosperity.

Over five decades, this has been Senegal's lived experience with its neighbors: in building transboundary cooperation through the Senegal River Basin Development Organization (OMVS), the Gambia River Basin Organization (OMVG) and for the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, we have demonstrated that

equitable governance of shared waters fosters trust, dialogue, and prosperity; a living proof that hydrodiplomacy works.

As co-host of the 2026 UN Water Conference, Senegal is committed to carrying this spirit forward. This policy brief argues that peace is the central thread connecting all six interactive dialogues of the Conference. At their core, each asks the same question: how can water build more peaceful, just, and resilient societies?

I call on Member States, international organisations, researchers, and practitioners to engage seriously with the recommendations set out in this brief. The momentum is ours to sustain. Let us ensure that water remains a lasting political priority, and that we merge our flows toward the future we share.

H.E. Dr Cheikh Tidiane Dieye

Minister of Hydraulics and Sanitation,
Republic of Senegal



FOREWORD FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Water is the foundation for sustainable and equitable human dignity, for collective safety and stability, and for prosperity for all nations. It is our most precious resource.

Water should be prioritized and protected; and, the value of water, and how we can collectively protect this pipeline, needs to be prioritized in discussions and decision-making, at every level. From diplomacy to public policy, city planning and civil society, to business and industry - water is integral to prosperity, stability, and life.

The 2026 UN Water Conference is the most significant, global moment of convergence that places water at the front of the agenda - where it belongs. This is the first UN Conference dedicated to accelerating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), which underpins progress across the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The United Arab Emirates, as Co-Host of the 2026 UN Water Conference, alongside Senegal, applauds thoughtful collaborations that both recognize the true value of water and further inspire and mobilize public and private

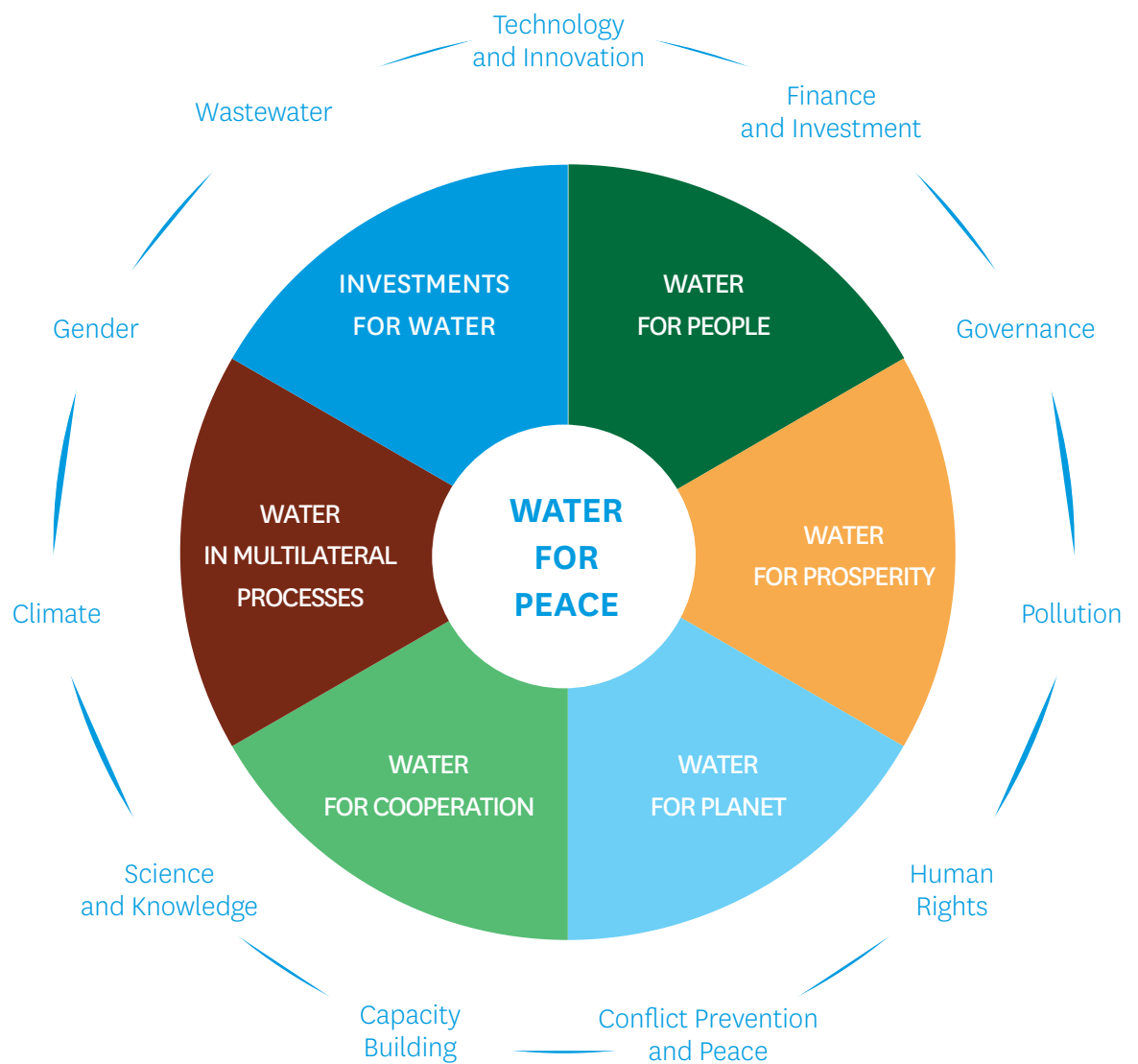
sector stakeholders to action. We congratulate the Geneva Water Hub, TRENDS Research & Advisory, and the Pôle Eau Dakar on the launch of this timely policy brief, which underscores the critical and inseparable link between water and peace.

As we look ahead to the Conference in December in Abu Dhabi, we call on all stakeholders to continue to engage with ideas, collaborations, and cross-sectoral and innovative commitments that can deliver inclusive political, technical, and quantifiable solutions that will address the scale and urgency of the global water challenge.

The 2026 UN Water Conference presents an unparalleled opportunity - to improve lives, support ecosystems and communities, and accelerate access to clean water and sanitation systems for all. Water is life, and every future flows from water.

H.E. Abdulla Balalaa

Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability, United Arab Emirates



PEACE is the unifying thread across all six interactive dialogues of the 2026 UN Water Conference



No Peace without Water, No Water without Peace

The 2026 UN Water Conference comes at a moment of deep global instability and renewed political attention to water. Building on the momentum of the 2023 UN Water Conference, the 2026 Conference, co-hosted by Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, will be organized around six interactive dialogues: Water for People, Water for Prosperity, Water for Planet, Water for Cooperation, Water in Multilateral Processes, and Investments for Water.

This is the moment for the water community to step up and advance water's role in delivering on the UN's core mandate: peace. This policy brief argues that peace is the thread unifying all six dialogues, placing water squarely within the UN's purpose to maintain international peace and security, foster friendly relations among nations, promote sustainable development, and uphold human rights.

Water is far more than a technical, environmental, or development concern. It is a human right and a necessary condition for life, dignity, public health, livelihoods, and social cohesion. It is also deeply political. When governed equitably and sustainably, water can support

legitimacy, trust, cooperation, and shared prosperity. When withheld, polluted, overexploited, or weaponized, water becomes a source of exclusion, fragility, and suffering. Forward-looking thinking on water beyond the 2030 Agenda – now reinforced through the [Pact for the Future](#) and in particular its actions 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, and 18 – signals increasing awareness that water underpins sustainable development, social cohesion, and international stability.

In adopting a broader understanding of “positive peace,” this brief acknowledges plural understandings of peace – including relational, cultural, and ecological perspectives – that have the potential to enrich global water governance. Against this backdrop, the brief calls for translating the political recognition of “Water for Peace” into concrete institutional, legal, financial, and diplomatic action. Across the six interactive dialogues, the brief identifies distinct but mutually reinforcing entry points for action.

KEY MESSAGES



ID A: WATER FOR PEOPLE

Protect water from armed conflict to protect civilians.

Protecting equitable access to WASH services, especially in conflict settings, is essential to safeguarding civilians, restoring dignity, and reinforcing state legitimacy.



ID B: WATER FOR PROSPERITY

Share water's benefits to build social cohesion, not grievance.

Water-driven economic development must be governed inclusively and equitably so that shared benefits strengthen social cohesion rather than deepen inequality and grievance.



ID C: WATER FOR PLANET

Govern water equitably to reduce fragility and sustain climate security.

Context-sensitive, climate-resilient water governance reduces fragility and supports stable, sustainable societies.



ID D: WATER FOR COOPERATION

Share water equitably to prevent conflict and foster social cohesion.

Inclusive, rules-based transboundary water governance can function as a tool for preventive diplomacy, reducing tensions and enabling durable and effective cooperation between states and communities.



ID E: WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES

Embed water in global frameworks to strengthen conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Systematically integrating water into peacebuilding, climate-security, and multilateral frameworks strengthens coherence in preventing and managing conflict. Water must be more explicitly integrated into the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas.



ID F: INVESTMENTS FOR WATER

Reduce risk and strengthen resilience through peace-positive water investments.

Conflict-sensitive and inclusive water financing, and in particular water infrastructure financing, can help avoid grievances, de-risk investments, and contribute to long-term social stability.

Taken together, the brief offers a clear message to UN Member States: the 2026 UN Water Conference is a strategic opportunity to place water at the center of what the world needs most – peace – and to develop the agenda to get us there.



ID A. WATER FOR PEOPLE

1. **Comply with human rights obligations and adopt a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation.** Authoritative guidance, including the [UN-Water Policy Brief: Towards a Human Rights-Based Approach to Water, Sanitation and Environmental Action 2026](#) and the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Guidelines on the Right to Water in Africa](#), provides practical direction for implementation. This approach should also guide transboundary water cooperation, promoting equitable and reasonable use and supporting basin-level peace and stability.
2. **Respect and ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law to protect water and other critical infrastructure in all circumstances.** Protection efforts must fully account for the foreseeable reverberating effects of weaponizing or targeting water so as to prevent civilian harm. **States should also establish a dedicated mechanism to monitor, document, and report damage or destruction of water systems**, drawing on models such as the WHO's Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA).
3. **Support the [Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts](#) in its mission to protect water infrastructure and human dignity.** Integrate the guidance of the [Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure](#) into relevant policies, operational practices, training, and advocacy efforts.
4. **Invest in resilient and inclusive water governance and infrastructure to ensure reliable, safe, and equitable access to water and sanitation (WASH) in the context of climate change, rapid urbanization, and crises.** This requires strengthening both physical systems and institutional capacities, ensuring meaningful decision-making power for women and marginalized groups at all levels, and addressing structural barriers and tokenistic forms of participation.
5. **Advance WASH implementation by building on existing frameworks and tools, including the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health**, and develop policies and partnerships within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to strengthen the resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure in fragile, conflict, and post-conflict settings.
6. **Reinforce social cohesion among displaced populations, host communities, and downstream communities affected by upstream water-related interventions through cooperative water governance and dialogue.** Benefit-sharing mechanisms for water – whether institutionalized or rooted in traditional practices – are essential tools for peaceful coexistence and conflict-sensitive natural resource management, as demonstrated by [equitable water governance initiatives](#) such as those at Mbera Camp in Hodh Chargui, Mauritania.



ID B. WATER FOR PROSPERITY

- 1. Complement technological solutions with demand management, sustainability, and a human-rights-based prioritization of water uses,** in line with the UN Special Rapporteur's report A/HRC/57/48. This means prioritizing "water for life" – drinking water, sanitation, food production, and ecosystem protection – before water for public interest functions, and only allocating water to profit-generating economic activities thereafter.
- 2. Promote equitable benefit sharing through cooperative water governance.** Invest in and optimize joint water infrastructure – such as dams, irrigation systems, and wastewater treatment facilities – beyond political borders where feasible, ensuring inclusive and transparent governance to generate mutual gains, reduce grievances, and strengthen regional stability.
- 3. Recognize and integrate the multiple dimensions of water's value in policymaking,** ensuring that governance frameworks reflect not only water's economic importance but also its social, cultural, environmental, and spiritual dimensions.
- 4. Integrate conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding analysis into the planning and implementation of water-related technologies and innovations.** This includes applying tools such as stakeholder mapping, distributional impact analysis, and grievance mechanisms to ensure that interventions do not exacerbate inequalities but instead contribute to social cohesion and stability.
- 5. Be explicit and precise in the use of key concepts.** Clearly define terms such as "common good" and specify the policy interventions they entail, as this enhances transparency, fosters mutual trust, and supports more effective and inclusive cooperation.



ID C. WATER FOR PLANET

- 1. Advocate for research exploring the links between water and peace across environmental, societal, governance, and economic dimensions,** including agri-food systems, biodiversity, and desertification. Such research should distinguish between hydrological scarcity and socially driven scarcity – inequitable access, governance failures, and power asymmetries – and unpack how structural pressures beyond climate change alone shape risk, resilience, and cooperation potential.
- 2. Adopt frameworks such as Climate Resilient Water Arrangements (CRESWAs)** which integrate biophysical analysis with socio-political assessment to design context-sensitive, risk-literate, and equitable transboundary water arrangements. Within such frameworks, prioritize joint monitoring, shared data, and scientific cooperation as confidence-building tools and politically feasible entry points for cooperation in difficult political contexts.
- 3. Integrate water into the design of climate policies, including national adaptation plans (NAPs) or strategies, nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and associated implementation plans, as well as national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs).**
- 4. Invest in nature conservation and restoration while explicitly accounting for peace, social stability, equity, and the human right to water.** Investment approaches should prioritize long-term ecological integrity and distributive justice, avoiding overly narrow or purely financialized valuation methods that risk overlooking social and governance dimensions.



ID D. WATER FOR COOPERATION

1. **Advance the uptake of transboundary agreements, treaties, and mechanisms, and reinforce international normative frameworks**, including through accession to the 1992 and 1997 UN Water Conventions where appropriate. These and other relevant frameworks should more explicitly integrate benefit-sharing approaches, perspectives from the Global South including Indigenous knowledge systems, and improved indicators to monitor cooperation outcomes beyond resource sharing – including relations among actors, dispute resolution, and social cohesion.
2. **Leverage SDG indicator 6.5.2 as an operational driver of transboundary water cooperation**, using the reporting cycle not merely as a monitoring exercise but as a practical mechanism to strengthen cooperation through joint bodies, data exchange, and coordinated planning. Particular attention should be paid to institutional practice – not only the existence of agreements – and to closing governance and data gaps on transboundary aquifers, which remain significantly under-reported.
3. **Harness international water law and the human right to safe drinking water to guide peacebuilding**. The principles of equitable and reasonable utilization, the obligation not to cause significant harm, and the duty to cooperate provide essential guidance for preventing disputes and fostering trust; the human right to safe drinking water can further structure transboundary water cooperation at the basin level by promoting equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination.
4. **Enhance the effectiveness of water cooperation through capacity building**. This means ensuring that cooperation mechanisms are equipped to meet priority population needs – including food security and access to water and electricity – and that stakeholders can design and implement hydro-diplomatic instruments adapted to local contexts for conflict prevention and sustainable peace.
5. **Strengthen cooperation on transboundary aquifers as a distinct priority area**, addressing particular needs for improved hydrogeological knowledge, joint monitoring, and tailored governance frameworks. Building on promising examples such as the Senegal-Mauritania Aquifer Basin (SMAB), efforts should support fit-for-purpose cooperation mechanisms for aquifers that complement surface water governance and strengthen long-term regional cooperation.



IDE. WATER IN MULTILATERAL PROCESSES

1. **Promote Water for Peace in multilateral commitments.** Advocate for explicit recognition of water's peacebuilding role in UN resolutions and declarations, explore options for a Security Council resolution on "Water, Peace and Security," and encourage Member States to prioritize commitments to initiatives at the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.
2. **Strengthen the [UN Climate Security Mechanism](#) by systematically incorporating water into climate-related peace and security risk assessments, policy guidance, and support for field and peacekeeping missions.** Ensure that policy and financing frameworks recognize water's unique role in social cohesion and conflict prevention beyond climate adaptation.
3. **Systematically integrate water into the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas,** recognizing its role as a central element in the implementation of UNSC Resolutions [1325](#) and [2250](#). Ensure that the meaningful participation of women and youth in water governance is embedded in peace processes and recovery frameworks.
4. **Embed Water for Peace across all levels of government** – local, national, regional, and global – by systematically including water considerations in early warning, mediation and peacekeeping mandates, and nationally owned peacebuilding strategies. Ensure that water for peacebuilding is consistently included on the agenda of UN Peacebuilding Week, and that water-related conflict prevention and cooperation objectives are integrated into regional and national peace and security architectures.
5. **Strengthen inter-agency Water for Peace efforts and evidence generation.** Task UN-Water to assess how water is being used in peacebuilding and to periodically present findings to the UN Peacebuilding Commission. This should be accompanied by capacity building to gather evidence on water-peace linkages, enabling countries to address emerging challenges and anticipate future water risks.



ID F. INVESTMENTS FOR WATER

1. **Embed peace-relevant safeguards into water investment planning by requiring conflict-risk assessments, social cohesion impact screening, and equity analysis for all major water projects**, ensuring that infrastructure development does not exacerbate horizontal inequalities or resource-based tensions.
2. **Align investment decisions in shared basins with joint infrastructure planning, data-sharing mechanisms, and cooperative management arrangements**, thereby reducing the risk that unilateral infrastructure development becomes a driver of tension or conflict.
3. **Scale investment in water systems as a foundation for stability** by prioritizing resilient service delivery for critical sectors (food, health, and energy) and ensuring that financing strategies explicitly consider water's role in preventing crisis escalation and supporting recovery in fragile contexts.
4. **Mobilize finance in ways that reinforce peace outcomes by expanding blended finance, guarantees, and, where appropriate, public-private partnerships structured to incentivize inclusive service delivery**. Investment frameworks should reward projects that strengthen equity, trust in institutions, and long-term social cohesion. Financing approaches should be guided by human rights principles, including timely disclosure of information in accessible formats and access to effective remedies. In transboundary contexts, stable cooperative arrangements are a prerequisite for mobilizing such finance, as they create enabling conditions for donor engagement and long-term basin planning.
5. **Prioritize decentralized, modular, and diversified water supply systems to reduce systemic risk and enhance continuity of access during crises**. Design and finance water infrastructure (for example, desalination plants, dams, and wastewater reuse systems) in ways that are conflict-sensitive and resilience-oriented, explicitly assessing their vulnerability in armed conflict and ensuring that no single installation becomes a point of failure or a strategic target.

ABOUT THE PARTNER INSTITUTIONS



The Geneva Water Hub (GWH) is a Center of Competence on Water for Peace based out of the University of Geneva and the Geneva Graduate Institute. Established in 2015 by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the GWH pursues the roadmap laid out in the report of the

Global High-Level Panel of Water and Peace “A Matter of Survival”. The GWH’s mission is to advance the use of water for peace in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. Our experience has shown that when water is shared equitably, and spared from war and pollution, peace can prevail.



The Pôle Eau Dakar, a flagship initiative of the Senegalese Ministry of Water and Sanitation, is grounded in the mission to promote water diplomacy to foster collaborative, integrated, responsible, and inclusive governance of water resources in the

service of peace and shared prosperity. By bridging knowledge and networks, it functions as “a catalyst for hydrodiplomacy” aiming to evolve as a platform for exchange, foresight, and proposals serving Senegal, West Africa, and the African continent.



TRENDS Research & Advisory is a leading research and advisory institute operating under TRENDS Group, dedicated to producing impactful knowledge, strategic insights, and evidence based analysis that support informed decision making. Through rigorous research, forward-looking analysis, and specialized advisory services, we addresses critical political, economic, technological, and security issues at regional and global levels. TRENDS Research & Advisory works to bridge

the gap between research and practice by delivering high-quality studies, policy recommendations, and strategic assessments tailored to the unique needs of our partners, government institutions, and private sector organizations. As part and the core of TRENDS Group, we are committed to fostering innovation, advancing knowledge, and contributing to a deeper understanding of emerging challenges and opportunities in an increasingly complex world.



The Itaipú Hydroelectric Dam, the largest operational hydroelectric energy producer in the world is located on the border between Brazil and Paraguay. The plant is operated by Itaipú Binacional, with 90% of its energy output going to Brazil © UN Photo/Mark Garten

Photo credits.

Cover photo: Valentin Flauraud for Saype. An aerial view shows a giant landart fresco by French-Swiss artist Saype, painted for the 10th step of his worldwide “Beyond Walls” project on the beach in Ouidah, Benin, on Monday March 8, 2021.

P.4: Jubail Mangrove Park in Abu Dhabi. © malangusha on Adobe Stock

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