



21 April 2021

Excellency,

I have the honour to share herewith the summary of the High-level meeting on the “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda” convened on Thursday, 18 and Monday, 22 March 2021, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/226 entitled “Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Sustainable Development’, 2018–2028”.

The summary highlights key messages and discussions from Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders. I sincerely hope the summary will benefit the preparations for the Conference on the Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Sustainable Development’, 2018–2028”, to be held in 2023. The summary will also be transmitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, to contribute to the future reviews of water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

I once again take this opportunity to thank all Member States for your proactive engagement and building strong momentum around the implementation of the water-related goals and targets of 2030 Agenda. As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better, it is crucial to translate our commitments and visions into concrete and accelerated actions.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives  
and Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York



# HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WATER-RELATED GOALS AND TARGETS OF THE 2030 AGENDA



*18 and 22 March 2021*

## **Summary of the President of the General Assembly**

### **I. Introduction**

The President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Meeting on the “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda” on Thursday, 18 and Monday, 22 March 2021, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/226 entitled “Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028”. The Meeting aimed to promote the implementation of water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda in support of the implementation of the Decade on Water and Sustainable Development (2018-2028) and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

The Meeting consisted of an opening segment, a high-level plenary, two Panels on 1. “Data and information and governance” and 2. “Financing, innovation and capacity building”, and a brief closing segment. Seven Heads of State and Government, 48 Ministers, and more than 100 representatives from intergovernmental organizations, the UN system and stakeholders engaged in the meeting via pre-recorded statements, livestream and limited in-person attendance.

The Meeting demonstrated clear political support for tackling water challenges and highlighted priority areas for accelerating actions to meet the water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. It also acknowledged the significant role of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and contributed to the preparation of the 2023 Conference on the Midterm Review of the Water Action Decade. A special feature of the meeting was a CSO Spotlight in each Panel in which NGOs, activists, scientists, youth champions, and representatives from the private sector made urgent calls for actions, and share their experiences, views, and innovative methods for addressing water, and sanitation issues.

### **II. Key Messages**

- Access to adequate and safely managed water and sanitation is a basic human right for all.
- Water is cross-cutting and supports the achievement of relevant SDGs through close linkages with land, ocean, climate, gender equality, health, amongst others.
- The current rate of progress needs to quadruple to achieve universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, which currently billions of people lack.
- Clean water and sanitation are the first line of defense for a successful COVID-19 response. Recovery plans need to be resilient, green, and inclusive.
- Effects of climate change have increased the risks of disasters like droughts, floods, and sea level rise, as well as led to serious food insecurity and malnutrition, primarily impacting children, the most vulnerable.

- Adaptation to climate change through water, including disaster risk reduction and food security, should be strengthened, targeting a 50% share of financing for adaptation measures.
- It is estimated that the financial gap to reach SDG 6 by 2030 will require mobilizing an additional US\$ 1.7 trillion, three times more than the current level of investment. Closing the financial gap of required investment in water-related infrastructure requires whole-of-society partnership from governments with a diverse group of stakeholders, including the private sector and philanthropic organizations.
- A UN system-wide approach to water, including strengthening of UN-Water as a coordinating mechanism stands to further improve UN support for the achievement of water-related goals and targets.
- Greater access to information and data is imperative to better implement and track progress on water-related measures.
- Multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration at all levels is key to management and development of water and sanitation related infrastructure.
- Partnerships for sustainable water management at all levels are encouraged, particularly with the private sector, rural communities, indigenous groups, and youth. Strengthened partnerships are needed in the areas of capacity building, technology transfer, knowledge sharing and innovation.
- Increased awareness of water issues and high-quality data are key for informed, and evidence-based decision-making among stakeholders. Many decisions affecting water resources are made by stakeholders who lack opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of the issues at stake.
- Innovative solutions backed by science can solve global water challenges and need to be scaled-up.
- The sustainable management of transboundary water resources is a significant global challenge, requiring international cooperation, sustainable, and integrated management.
- International cooperation is key to mitigate the impacts of water scarcity on the displacement of people, as well as the increasing likelihood of conflict and civil unrest within and among countries.
- High-level political commitment, multi-stakeholder platforms and people-centered solutions are key to sound water and hygiene governance.
- There was a call to establish a new platform for global water discussions, such as an international panel on water in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- The 2023 Mid-term Review Conference will provide an important opportunity to take stock and escalate action to reach the water-related goals and targets, which are severely off track.
- Scaling-up international cooperation is essential to rise to the challenge of achieving SDG 6 focusing on the 2030 Agenda, Sendai Framework, SAMOA Pathway, Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda.

### **III. Opening segment**

The Opening segment featured statements from the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the Economic and Social Council, Heads of State (the co-hosts of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Review of the Water Action Decade in 2023) and a youth representative, highlighting the urgency of the accelerated actions, including through multilateral cooperation to achieve the water-related sustainable goals and targets of 2030 Agenda.

H.E. Mr. Volkan BOZKIR, President of the General Assembly stressed that water is life, and we simply cannot live on this planet if we are deprived of this most basic human need. To allow billions of people to exist without clean drinking water or the basic tools to wash their hands was a moral failure of the international community in a world with such high levels of innovation and success. Water is sustainability, and he noted that safe drinking water systems and adequate sanitation are essential to ensure cities and towns grow sustainably. He noted that water and access to sanitation is empowerment, especially for women and girls across the globe whose daily trek to collect water or lack of access to safe sanitation facilities can impede accessing education, healthcare, or work. He called on the international community to provide greater financial and capacity-building support, and prioritize countries in special situations, notably LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. He also noted the important role of youth, women, civil society, academia, and the private sector in this area.

Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General said to achieve universal access to water and sanitation, the current rate of progress would need to quadruple. She stressed that countries must use pandemic recovery plans to address water and sanitation while raising ambition for climate action. More women need to be at the table to make decisions about water in part because women are the backbone of agriculture. She noted that the United Nations system came together under the leadership of UN-Water to launch the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, which is an important vehicle to promote action.

H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, President of the UN Economic and Social Council, drew attention to the human right to water and sanitation and noted that 40 percent of the global population live in shared river basins. Transboundary agreements are important, and the threats to peace are ever present. The achievement of SDG 6 is critical to the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the SAMOA Pathway, the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biodiversity. It is critical to invest in new water infrastructure while also maintaining existing systems.

H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan shared his country's intention to declare 2025 the year of glacier preservation as the issue will draw attention to the link between water and climate issues. As the co-host of Conference on the Midterm Review of the Water Action Decade in 2023, Tajikistan is eager to cooperate with all parties on the process to effectively arrange this important international event, which will be the first UN conference on water since 1977. Tajikistan will also host a high-level conference on water for sustainable development in Dushanbe in 2022 which is expected to contribute a comprehensive input to the Conference on the Midterm.

H.E. Mr. Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands drew attention to the theme of World Water Day 2021 - valuing water - and noted that water must be valued holistically and broadly. He highlighted that the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework is a step in the right direction and stressed the importance of involving youth and the marginalized in all aspects of water management. The Netherlands is ready to step up and is honored to be co-hosting the UN Conference on the Midterm Review of the Water Action Decade in 2023.

Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and UN-Water Chair, outlined that the SDG 6 Summary Progress Update 2021 shows the world is off-track to ensure sustainable water and sanitation for all by 2030. He invited the audience to think of the water crisis at the household level. Addressing water supply failure in the home would be a top priority. He challenged the international community to bring the same sense of urgency to the global water crisis.

Ms. Catalina Silva, Youth Ambassador of CONCAUSA underscored the importance of youth as protagonists and not spectators in addressing water issues. Ms. Silva shared the perspective of climate change, the silent pandemic, which is shrinking glaciers in her region at an alarming rate. She noted that without water, economic growth is impossible. Youth are assessing the great threats being posed to local ecosystems and opposing unsustainable development projects.

#### **IV. High-Level Plenary**

The high-level plenary comprised statements by 90 States Members of the United Nations. World leaders called for accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda's water-related goals and targets as a centerpiece for containing COVID-19, and as a starting place to build back better. Member States demonstrated ambition and urgency of action while reflecting on the fundamental nature of the principle of leaving no one behind. Experiences and lessons were shared on promoting the progress of achieving SDG6 at the national, regional, and global levels and accelerating concrete actions through multilateral cooperation to meet the water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

##### **Implementation of water-related goals**

Some countries stated the 2023 Mid-term Review Conference will provide an important opportunity to take stock and escalate action to reach the water-related goals and targets which are severely off track. International cooperation is essential to rise to the challenge of achieving SDG 6 with a focus on the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed development frameworks, including, Sendai Framework, Paris Agreement and New Urban Agenda.

Member States underscored that water was crucial to health, sustainable development, mitigating climate change impacts, peace and security, and equality in particular for women and girls. Countries reiterated the cross-cutting nature of water to support the achievement of many SDGs, including food, gender, economic growth, livable cities, healthy environment and climate change. Water and land are interconnected. In order to achieve SDG 6, land degradation need to be addressed on a global scale. A holistic approach is necessary to address the interconnection between rivers and oceans. Every single body of water is connected: fresh water and sea water, clean water and wastewater, upstream and downstream.

The interlinkages between sustainable urban settlements, climate change adaptation and disaster preparedness will be the key to ensuring a resilient future and need to be taken into account in national planning. The consensus is that our current path is unsustainable and that political commitments need concrete implementation. Many countries have developed strategic national water management plans to improve water quality, rationalize use of water resource, strengthen irrigation capacity, and enhance water recycling. SDG 6 is incorporated in their national frameworks on water resources management. Several countries mentioned that the right to safe drinking water is stipulated in its constitution or otherwise embedded in national legal frameworks. Many countries have created dedicated ministries and agencies for water.

Investments in public works and improved water resources management have increased the population's access to drinking water and sanitation. Furthermore, access to water and sanitation is being secured by expanding and rehabilitating water supply systems, training water experts, building and renovating water networks, water and wastewater treatment plants, desalination plants, and dams. It is estimated that the financial gap to reach SDG 6 by 2030 will require mobilizing an additional US\$ 1.7 trillion, three times more than the current level of investment. Some developing states emphasized that water challenges are also a financing challenge, and that maintaining and restoring water infrastructure will require long-term increased financing. Countries called for bilateral and multilateral partners, including the private sector to mobilize the necessary financing.

The need for greater access to information, and data to better implement and track progress on water-related measures was emphasized. Monitoring of water quality, and water targets were also highlighted as essential. It is important to collect local, regional and global data on flood and drought warnings with the location, source, extent, and impact of water pollution incidents. An integrated database is used for carrying out precise calculation of damages and funding for prevention measures.

Several countries highlighted that innovative sustainable technologies and methods have been developed to manage water more efficiently and sustainably, e.g. drip irrigation, water recycling and desalination. In this regard, there is a high value in capacity building activities for sharing knowledge, and methods.

Many countries highlighted plans to host events aimed at informing and building momentum towards the 2023 Water Conference, including:

- the Bonn Water Dialogues in 2021;
- the Mediterranean Water Forum in 2021;
- the Latin America Regional Climate Week in advance of UNFCCC COP26 in 2021;
- the 9<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum addressing water security for peace and development in 2022;
- a high-level synergies meeting linking the ocean and freshwater agendas on the margins of the UN Ocean Conference in 2022;
- the Dushanbe Water Conference in 2022; and
- Stockholm+50 Conference on the human environment in 2022.

Meetings to be held as part of other SDG related global processes such as climate and biodiversity will also contribute.

## **COVID-19 Recovery**

The COVID-19 pandemic has thoroughly illustrated the interconnection between the health of people and planet. Many countries highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the essential role of clean water and sanitation as the first line of defense against both current and future pandemics. Handwashing with water, and soap are crucial to prevent COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, which requires safe, and clean water access many don't have. Effective and holistic water management is essential to recovery from future pandemics and disasters. Some countries stressed more resilient and green measures such as modernization and the decarbonization of water facilities, as well as the digitalization of the water management system, so that water can be provided with more efficiency and less carbon footprint.

The pandemic has forced countries to retool and pivot existing plans and budgets to manage the immediate domestic catastrophic impacts. Water is a key enabler for public health, economic development, environmental protection, and social inclusion. National recovery plans must encompass natural resource protection and place integrated and comprehensive water resource management at the center of recovery plans to build back better. Policies must be backed by good governance and encompass economic, social and environmental dimensions to ensure coherent planning with no one left behind. The gendered impacts of water and sanitation challenges should be addressed comprehensively.

Some countries noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated pre-existing challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda, particularly in developing, poor and vulnerable countries. Hence, accelerated and enhanced actions to achieve SDG 6, e.g. through strategic partnerships, was urgent. Challenges remain in enhancing the capacity of local governments, and in increasing public awareness in better management of household drinking water.

## **Climate Change**

Many countries stressed that climate change remains a serious concern and that SDG 6 cannot be looked at separately from other SDGs. Several countries expressed concerns that increasingly serious effects of climate change have increased the risks of disasters like droughts and floods and sea level rise, as well as the variability in the water cycle and the exacerbated water stress. This situation has also led to serious food insecurity and malnutrition, primarily impacting children and vulnerable families. Water is at the heart of climate adaptation as water and natural resources, biodiversity and its ecosystem services are often poorly managed.

Multilateral climate funds play a vital role for investment in climate resilient solutions of water and sanitation, including a focus on adaptation. There was strong support for allocating at least 50% of the total share of climate finance towards building resilience and adapting to global warming. There is need for inventing new economic methodology to assess the impact of investments in climate and water. Developed countries are expected to take responsibility for their role in accelerating climate change and make significant contributions through international financing.

Climate change is increasing the prevalence of water-related disasters and putting a further strain on water. Almost 90% of disasters were water related. Melting glaciers, the primary sources of fresh water in many countries, are a problem of particular concern. It was

emphasized that Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) must be aligned with SDG 6 through adaptation activities.

### **Water Governance**

Water demand already outpaces supply with scarcity expected to double by 2030. It is anticipated that impacts will include the displacement of an estimated 700 million people, increasing likelihood of conflict and civil unrest within and among countries. Implications are severe and exacerbated by the ongoing crisis of climate, pollution and ecosystem degradation. Countries affected by conflict already struggle to cope, as do the poorest and most vulnerable, including SIDS. It was stressed that to achieve the SDGs by 2030 international cooperation was very much needed.

Several countries shared initiatives and policies put in place to enhance Integrated Water Resource Management aiming to meet household demand for clean water, while addressing the rising demands from agriculture, infrastructure development and energy production. Most countries see water resources as national wealth that should be protected, conserved, and developed with care. Some countries highlighted improving water quality, protecting aquatic ecosystems, and controlling floods and droughts as priorities. Others reported discrepancies in water security between urban and rural areas. Rural areas generally have lower water access and safety which needed to be addressed through increased investment and community involvement.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) reiterated that policies need to be promoted consistently with sustainable development goals to ensure a successful outcome. SIDS are particularly struggling as all island and low land countries are experiencing water related events which increase the cumulative challenges in reaching the SDGs. Successful water governance relies on defining new or improved existing legal and institutional frameworks. This will require international cooperation, particularly on distributing financial support, cooperating on transboundary water resource management, sharing good practices and collaborating on innovation and implementation. G20 was referenced as a foundational platform for launching much of this international cooperation.

### **Transboundary Cooperation**

The sustainable management of transboundary water resources is a major global challenge, requiring international cooperation and sustainable and integrated management. Some countries highlighted transboundary partnerships in areas of water management for growing cities, reforestation, the agricultural sector, financing and development assistance. It was noted that when the shortage of water is combined with its transboundary nature, the risks are increased, especially given the different needs of riparian States. Conflict and disputes round water basins were seen as major challenges for development. International agreements, conventions, and sustainable management of transboundary waters play a significant role in increasing cooperation and preventing and resolving conflicts. It was stressed that the activities of regional water use should meet all upstream and downstream countries' interests and needs.

The international legal framework of transboundary water resources management was strengthened, e.g. through the Helsinki Water Convention, which is currently developing global Guidelines for Allocation of Water Resources in a Transboundary Context. Good regional practices include the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube



River (ICPDR), the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), and the African Union water and sanitation funding initiative.

### **Role of stakeholders**

Member States noted that UN-Water, regional entities, and the private sector play critical roles in the Water Action Decade and SDG 6 implementation. Many countries commended UN-Water for its work in promoting implementation of SDG 6 and expressed their support for the SDG 6 Acceleration Framework as a leading initiative to scale up and support actions by all stakeholders to reach water-related goals and targets. It was further suggested that the role of UN-Water as a coordinator must be strengthened to address the fragmentation of the water community.

Multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration at all levels is key to management and development of water and sanitation related infrastructure. Partnerships need to be strengthened on capacity building, technology transfer, knowledge sharing and innovation, including regionally and globally. Some member states expressed success in involving rural communities in their water management systems and policy and the need to work with academia in a more proactive manner.

Some countries highlighted the importance of working with the private sector and access to blended or innovative financing to: meet water supply and accessibility demands; improve critical water infrastructure; protect critical ecosystems; manage reforestation; and conserve, harvest and recycle water. The importance of addressing unsustainable consumption and production patterns was highlighted as a foundation for a successful transformation to reach SDG 6, the 2030 Agenda overall and climate goals.

### **Partnerships and Cooperation**

Several countries stressed that sustainable development cannot be achieved if countries operate in silos. Global partnerships and international cooperation with developing countries are critical for mobilizing the means of implementation of the SDGs, such as data, information, capacity development, technology, transport, and infrastructure modernization. Partnerships between the public and private sectors and civil societies also play an important role in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The private sector and the multilateral development banks need to scale up investments through innovative financing.

Effective and coherent international cooperation is needed to strengthen integration of procedures and programmes dedicated to water and deepening our understanding of interconnection. We must act in global solidarity and boost international cooperation. South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms can also help expand the use of innovative techniques in the management, distribution and consumption of water.

Sharing successful experiences and lessons learned regarding water resource management should be a central element of cooperation within the international community. For instance, the Sustainable Water and Energy Solutions Network creates the space for exchange of experiences and capacity building and is open to all member states and multiple stakeholders.

### **Gender equality and human rights**

The importance of water in connection with social dimensions such as human rights, gender equality and health were highlighted by several countries. Some countries stressed that women and girls suffer most and carry the greatest burden of water scarcity and must be part of the solution given their critical role in agriculture and food production. The empowerment of women and girls is critical. Many countries highlighted the importance of making water available to the most vulnerable. Water and sanitation systems should be designed and implemented in a gender and disability inclusive way. Access to clean water frees up time of women and improves personal safety and dignity.

Access to water and sanitation is a human right. Everyone is entitled to safe and clean drinking water. Therefore, efforts and cooperation must be strengthened to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of SDG 6. Water remains a fundamental component that integrates social, cultural, economic and political values. Concern about the recent trading of water in the financial market was expressed from the perspective of the UN resolution declaring water a human right.

### **Conflict prevention**

Several countries highlighted the important role of water in maintaining peace and security, as increasing water scarcity will result in increasing competition for water resources, conflicts and instability. Such a looming water crisis must be averted. Long-term challenges such as climate change, drought and unforeseen shocks by COVID-19 increase the potential for conflict.

High rates of population growth and conflict-induced migration place additional strain on an already stressed water supply. Water is being used as a weapon of war, as infrastructure supplying clean water to citizens is being damaged. It is stressed to uphold the principles of the UN Charter and not to politicize development work, in order to provide the necessary support for the reconstruction of basic facilities.

International cooperation and preventive diplomacy play a key role. Transboundary water management is considered an enabler guarantee for stability and peace. Water becomes a starting point for cooperation and can be transformed from the source of a potential crisis to an instrument of peace, cooperation and development. Some member states noted that water is currently and will continue to be a central resource to manage as a dimension of international security, emphasizing that water cuts across all three of the UN guiding principles on business and human rights: protect, respect, and remedy.

## **V. Panel 1: Data, Information and Governance**

The first Panel focused on two accelerators of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework: data and information, and governance. Five Panelists shared their opinions and experiences of acceleration actions to achieve water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, followed by an interactive discussion with Member States and civil society representatives, and the Civil Society Spotlight.

### **Data and Information**

Speakers stressed that credible, timely and disaggregated data on water and sanitation is critical to help us fulfill political accountability and commitment. National data systems to measure progress need to be developed in joint ownership between national and local

government services. Support for countries' capacity building and governance should be urgently increased to develop and update national inventories, such as those of wetlands.

Untapped data sources are available in governments, universities, professional organizations, and different industries (e.g. groundwater data in oil companies). Innovative technologies should be widely applied, such as remote sensing, and desalination plants in ships. Mexico City reduced leakages from its water distribution network by measuring and regulating water flow amount and pressure in each hydrologic section of the network. The Region of Madrid has developed the largest early warning system of COVID-19 by analyzing viruses in wastewater. Water-related disasters like urban flooding require rapid response and adaptation of modern technology, which is also sensitive to different local and social contexts. Consideration must be given to the costs of water and energy when adopting desalination measures.

Speakers also highlighted the role of citizen science in availability and trust in data collection. Young volunteers, for example university students in China, conduct local awareness campaigns and map out community information in a crowd database. The data platform is used for finding sponsors and resources that provide solutions to the locals. Young people are bridging the gap between new and conventional techniques and leading open data initiatives, which support data-driven decision making and water risk literacy.

### **Governance**

Speakers stated that more cross-sectoral collaboration, and public and private partnerships need to be encouraged to achieve a water secure world, especially at the local level. More than three quarters of the global workforce is highly dependent on water. Water scarcity threatens all sectors, and economies. Behavioral change is needed to raise awareness of saving water. Mexico City doubled the budget to modernize water distribution systems, and to develop alternate water sources, such as rainwater harvesting and green technologies. The water stewardship initiatives rate the performance of companies and promote water conservation practices.

High-level political commitment, multi-stakeholder platforms, and people-centered solutions are key to sound water and hygiene governance. Addressing water-related issues requires a good balance between a commercial, and social good. Good governance requires policies addressing women's specific needs and empowers women to participate in decision-making on water. A recommendation was made to establish an intergovernmental committee on water.

Public development banks, international financial institutions (IFIs) and Funds such as the Green Climate Fund, and other alliances need to be more involved in supplying funds based on local priorities. Speakers cited the UN-Habitat Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance as an example of peer sharing and learning among utility operators to increase the cadre of well trained and properly equipped staff. Another example noted was the Water Secure Africa Initiative that promotes digital innovation in earth observation and water data, supporting water governance across Africa.

## **VI. Panel 2: Financing, Innovation and Capacity Building**

The second Panel focused on the financing, innovation and capacity building potential of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. The Panelists representing youth and civil society, private sector, academia, the United Nations system and international financial institutions, highlighted ways in which the three accelerators can be unlocked to achieve water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. An interactive discussion with Member States and civil society, as well as the Civil Society Spotlight.

### **Financing**

Water has multi-dimensional values for households, food, culture, health, education, economics, and the natural environment. Although water is essential, it is underinvested, undervalued, underpriced, and poorly managed. To meet the very basic water and sanitation goals of SDG 6, there is a need to increase current levels of investment four times for water and six times for sanitation. At the same time, much investment is lost, as for example in developing countries, roughly 45 million cubic meters of water are lost daily with an economic value of over US\$3 billion per year. Recommendations were made to support the need for greater investment in water by finance ministers and budget decision makers. Every \$1 invested in water and sanitation produces a \$4 economic return from lower health costs, resulting in more productivity, and fewer premature deaths.

Continued efforts at scale are required to fix the basics, including effective policies, sound regulation, evidence-based operational reform programs, well-governed and accountable institutions striving towards creditworthiness, technological innovation, adequate capacity, and appropriate incentives. The economic impacts of COVID-19, and large investment gaps will require innovative financing models, such as ‘blended finance’, which is using philanthropic or development funds to crowd in commercial and private capital.

### **Innovation**

Innovative solutions by entrepreneurs and researcher pioneers can solve global water challenges. Nature based solutions, combined with digital and business model innovation can open up new pathways. Support to innovators is therefore needed to scale-up solutions and inspire other innovators. Mechanisms are needed where corporations catalyze social entrepreneurship by offering core business skills, networks, and consumer knowledge and connect to the global value chain where solutions can achieve scale and catalyze further investment.

There is a need for an inclusive system involving all stakeholders that finds ways of adding value to everyone impacted, is transparent, and enhances accountability. Greater engagement with and inclusion of communities is essential to ensure that solutions are context specific. Innovative ways of working with young people, women, and girls, persons with disabilities, people of color, and marginalized peoples are critical.

### **Capacity building**

Water challenges need to be addressed in a holistic manner, through an integrated water management approach, as there is an ever-widening complex interlinkage of water challenges. There is a need to raise awareness of education at all levels, as most of the decisions affecting water resources are made by stakeholders who lack opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of the issues at stake. Speakers further emphasized that any development project on water should provide provisions for capacity building in

maintenance and empowering communities, which are needed for continuous lifelong learning. Delivering only the water ‘hardware’ will not improve water security unless it is embedded in political and social institutions, and complemented with the right ‘human software’, i.e. capacity, to operate, maintain, and govern it, improving efficiency in use. Involving women in participating and contributing to management of water resources and decision making, as well as increase investments to stop inequalities is key.

## **VII. Closing segment**

H.E. Mr. Volkan BOZKIR, President of the General Assembly, underscored that the goal in this meeting was to demonstrate strong political support and to highlight priority areas for accelerated action. The [joint statement](#) issued by a plurality of Member States ahead of the high-level meeting provided impetus to the discussion. Amongst the elements raised were the need to include all people, to preserve land integrity in relation to water resources, to close gaps in data and observation systems, to upscale financing and innovations, and to call for an international Panel on water. He emphasized that this meeting aimed to keep the issues at the forefront of the international community and called on all to use the next few years to accelerate action and follow through on commitments.