

Flagship Initiative: F3_SWA

Workstream 1 — Promote human-rights-based approaches to water, sanitation, wastewater, and water quality across all contexts

Interactive Dialogue (a): Water for People

2026 United Nations Water Conference

Part 1 — Submission details

Submitting organisation	<i>Sanitation and Water for All.</i>
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Date of submission	<i>22 June 2026</i>

Part 2 — Flagship Initiative

Initiative title
<i>A short, clear name (maximum 15 words).</i>
Heads of State Initiatives (HoSI): Political Leadership for Water Security and Sanitation
Guiding question(s) addressed
<i>Indicate which of the guiding questions above the initiative addresses (state the number(s)). Multiple questions may be selected where relevant.</i>
1, 3, 4 and 5
Problem
<i>Describe the systemic challenge that the initiative seeks to address and explain why a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response is required. Explain why this issue is important for advancing the human rights to water and sanitation. (Maximum 150 words)</i>
The most persistent gap in water and sanitation governance is not the absence of strategies, plans, or technical solutions. It is the absence of sustained political ownership at the level where cross-sectoral priorities, budgets, and reforms sit. Water and sanitation compete with health, education, and energy for political attention and public resources. World Bank analysis across 68 countries found water received roughly 1 percent of government spending between 2009 and 2020, against 60 percent for human development. Yet investment in water and sanitation carries among the highest returns a government can make: in Africa, every dollar invested returns seven dollars, and adequate investment could boost the continent's GDP by 5 percent. Even where governments commit to SDG 6, implementation is often constrained by fragmented mandates and weak political leadership. Accelerating progress requires leadership at the highest level of government, able to mobilise institutions, financing, and accountability across sectors.
Description
<i>Describe the initiative, its overall vision, and the shared objective it seeks to achieve. Explain why the initiative is catalytic, transformational, and capable of mobilising stakeholders around a common goal. (Maximum 250 words)</i>
The Heads of State Initiatives (HoSI) unite political leaders at the highest level to achieve sustainable and resilient water and sanitation for all. Through HoSI, national leaders make vital contributions to poverty reduction, peacebuilding, and the realisation of human rights, working directly with Presidents, Prime Ministers, and other Heads of State and Government

to elevate water, sanitation, and hygiene as a national political priority, with increasing focus on water security and resilient sanitation. Initiated at the 2023 UN Water Conference, HoSI has grown to more than 32 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, with national leaders mobilising action, coordinating multi-stakeholder support, and driving concrete change on the ground. The initiative is supported by the Netherlands, UK's FCDO, UNICEF, SWA, and IRC-WASH, with WaterAid subsequently joining. Each HoSI is nationally owned and tailored to country context, taking the form of Presidential Compacts, Executive Orders, national flagship programmes, royal seals of approval for new sector strategies, or other high-level political instruments capable of driving implementation across ministries, helping countries strengthen climate resilience, address waterborne disease, and end open defecation. The initiative also seeks to mobilise sustainable financing and reinforce accountability for commitments. By elevating water, sanitation and hygiene as political priorities and strengthening whole-of-government responses, HoSI ensures commitments translate into tangible results rather than remaining declaratory. Operating at the highest political level, HoSI creates the enabling conditions countries need to accelerate SDG 6 implementation: political leadership of this kind promotes long-term stability and a more equitable, resilient future.

Transformational impact and expected results

Describe how the initiative will drive systemic change at scale. Outline measurable outcomes, expected benefits, and accountability mechanisms. Explain how the initiative moves beyond dialogue and commitments towards concrete action and results. (Maximum 250 words)

HoSI drives systemic change by embedding water and sanitation priorities within national political agendas.

Results demonstrate outcomes from SWA partner countries: in **Dominican Republic**, water received a 60 percent budget increase in the first year of the national Water Pact, with a Water Cabinet now coordinating national response and infrastructure spending reaching a USD 600 million annual target. **Ghana's** Presidential Compact mobilises approximately USD 1.7 billion annually and has supported a National Sanitation Authority and Fund; a change in government has reinforced rather than weakened it. **Indonesia's** Presidential Instruction targets closing the access gap for 3 million people; a subsequent government revised the financial commitment while retaining the coordination architecture. **India's** Swachh Bharat and Jal Jeevan missions have driven a record 160 billion dollar investment, with India now mentoring other HoSI countries. **South Sudan's** Compact contributed to a thirteen-fold increase in the Ministry of Water budget, though disbursement has not yet matched that ambition. **Nepal's** Prime Minister's Initiative is being carried forward through a significant political transition, with the new administration committing to convene an international financing conference. **Nigeria's** Clean Nigeria Executive Order has helped 174 cities and towns reach Open Defecation Free status, covering 23 million people, and extended to 2030.

Each HoSI country moves through the partnership's TIDE model: Triggering, Incubation, Delivery, and Evaluation, with governments across different stages, signalling a shift in how governments are positioning water and sanitation politically. Expected outcomes include increased domestic financing, stronger accountability, improved cross-sectoral coordination, and expanded access for underserved populations.

Human rights and inclusion focus

Explain how the initiative advances the human rights to water and sanitation, including the AAAQ principles, and benefits people in vulnerable situations. (Maximum 150 words)

Who has access to water and sanitation is rarely a question of resources alone. It is a question of political choice: which populations a government serves first, and whose claims are weighed as a priority. The human rights to water and sanitation are progressively realised through these choices, and HoSI ensures the choice is made deliberately, not left to chance. Climate change makes these choices more consequential. As droughts intensify, governments decide which populations receive protection and which absorb the shock. Without sustained political attention, decisions tend to favour those with voice, rather than those furthest behind. HoSI places water and sanitation in front of the leaders who make these trade-offs, embedding climate resilience and equity as structural requirements of each compact. By securing whole-of-government ownership, HoSI ensures these issues are weighed in finance and planning, not only by sector ministries, so populations furthest behind are not left waiting.

Alignment with SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework

Explain how the initiative contributes to one or more SDG 6 accelerators: financing and investment, innovation and technology, capacity development, and data and information systems. (Maximum 150 words)

HoSI contributes directly to all four SDG 6 accelerators:

- Financing and Investment: mobilises domestic and external financing through political leadership and budget prioritisation.
- Capacity Development: strengthens institutions and governance structures responsible for implementation.
- Data and Information: promotes monitoring and accountability through national reporting mechanisms and integration with SWA's Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM).

Innovation: supports innovative governance arrangements and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms tailored to national contexts.

Evidence Base and Strategic Rationale (Mandatory)

Provide evidence from existing or past projects, programmes, policies, partnerships, or initiatives demonstrating why the proposed approach is likely to succeed. Include measurable results, lessons learned, evaluations, and references. (Maximum 300 words)

HoSI builds on examples of countries mentioned above, where initiatives led by the head of state or government delivered transformational results.

HoSI was created in response to a recurring challenge identified across the water sector: strong technical solutions often fail to achieve scale because water and sanitation lack sustained political prioritisation. The head-of-state-led initiatives have demonstrated measurable results across multiple governance contexts: budget increases, institutional reform, and service delivery outcomes in countries such as South Sudan, Ghana, and the Dominican Republic. These results sit within a wider movement, with countries at every stage of the TIDE process, from triggering through to delivery and evaluation, and results expected to deepen as more countries advance towards signed compacts. HoSI also responds directly to findings highlighted in global monitoring processes, including GLAAS assessments, which repeatedly identify fragmented institutional responsibilities, insufficient political prioritisation, and financing constraints as major barriers to achieving SDG 6. These findings reinforce the rationale for a mechanism that elevates water and sanitation within national political decision-making and sustains attention beyond individual projects or electoral cycles, which the country evidence above demonstrates HoSI is already doing.

Builds on existing efforts

Describe how the initiative strengthens, complements, or scales existing commitments, platforms, and initiatives. (Maximum 150 words)

HoSI strengthens and complements existing global and national initiatives rather than replacing them. The initiative provides the political leadership necessary to accelerate implementation of commitments made through the national SDG processes, climate adaptation strategies, and sector reform programmes. HoSI also complements other initiatives, including Water Forward, by raising the political support needed to develop, implement and regularly track national initiatives. HoSI also builds on itself as a movement. Countries that have established compacts and are delivering results support others earlier in the process, through country-to-country exchange and shared lessons coordinated by HoSI's technical team, so that experience gained in one country accelerates progress in the next. This peer support runs alongside HoSI's complementarity with SWA's Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM), which provides a structured accountability framework for tracking commitments and monitoring progress over time.

Partners, governance and stakeholder engagement

Describe the stakeholders involved and explain governance arrangements, leadership structures, and accountability mechanisms. (Maximum 150 words)

Founding partners include Government of Netherlands, FCDO, UNICEF, SWA, and IRC-WASH with WaterAid subsequently joining the initiative. Implementation is nationally led and government-owned, with Heads of State and Government providing political leadership and national institutions coordinating delivery. The initiative engages ministries responsible for finance, planning, water, sanitation, health, climate, local government and related sectors, alongside development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

Existing Member State / stakeholder support

Identify Member States, organisations, or stakeholders that currently support, participate in, or have endorsed the initiative. (Maximum 100 words)

HoSI currently operates in more than 32 countries. Supporting partners include DGIS, UNICEF, IRC-WASH, SWA, FCDO and WaterAid. HoSI has received support from senior political leaders and champions, including former presidents and prime ministers from SWA's Global Leadership Council, such as H.E. Michelle Bachelet, H.E. Laura Chinchilla, H.E. Jigmi Y. Thinley and H.E. Dr. Aminata Touré. Ghana, Co-Chair of Interactive Dialogue (a), is itself implementing a Head of State Initiative and can speak directly to the value of high-level political leadership in advancing water and sanitation priorities.

Potential Member State / stakeholder support

Identify potential Member States, organisations, or stakeholders that could support, champion, finance, or participate in the initiative. (Maximum 100 words)

The 2026 United Nations Water Conference represents a strategic opportunity to expand HoSI to a new cohort of countries and strengthen political leadership for water and sanitation globally. Potential supporters include additional Member States participating in the Water Action Agenda, UN-Water members, regional organisations, development finance institutions, philanthropic foundations, civil society networks and private-sector partners seeking to strengthen implementation and accountability for water and sanitation commitments. Building on existing momentum, HoSI could serve as a vehicle for countries seeking to translate Water Action Agenda commitments into nationally owned political compacts, reforms and implementation frameworks.

Existing financing / resource mobilisation

Describe any existing funding, investments, technical assistance, partnerships, or resource-mobilisation mechanisms that currently support the initiative. (Maximum 130 words)

Current support is provided through participating governments and partner organisations, including technical assistance, policy support, advocacy, coordination and country engagement activities.

Potential financing / resource mobilisation and financing strategy

Describe how the initiative will mobilise the financial resources, investments, technical assistance, innovation, partnerships, and political support required for implementation and scale-up. Identify potential funding sources, financing mechanisms, investment opportunities, and strategic partnerships over the medium to long term, including how it could leverage existing programmes, financing facilities, donor commitments, public budgets, private-sector engagement, or blended finance. (Maximum 300 words)

HoSI's financing strategy focuses on leveraging political leadership to unlock domestic public finance, align development partner investments, and mobilise additional external resources. HoSI's catalytic role is to leverage national budget processes, strengthen financing frameworks, and create the enabling conditions for long-term investment, achieved primarily through high-level political engagement and technical support rather than through substantial funding of its own. The growing network of more than 32 countries reinforces this effect: as more governments sign compacts and demonstrate results, peer learning and country-to-country exchange build the evidence and confidence that attract further investment, both from within the countries already engaged and from those preparing to join. Future resource mobilisation opportunities include bilateral donor support, multilateral financing, climate finance mechanisms, philanthropic partnerships, and private-sector engagement aligned with national priorities.

Implementation horizon

The medium- to longer-term timeframe for delivery beyond the 2026 Conference. (Maximum 70 words)

2026–2030 and beyond, with expansion to additional countries and continued support for implementation, accountability, financing mobilisation and political leadership for water and sanitation.