

Priority Action: P4_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>Name of the organisation (or consortium members).</i>
Focal point	<i>Name of the person submitting.</i>
Date of submission	<i>DD Month 2026.</i>

Part 2 — Priority Action

Proposal title <i>A short, clear name (maximum 15 words).</i>
From Commitments to Action: Scaling SWA's Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM)
Guiding question(s) addressed <i>Indicate which of the Interactive Dialogue (a) guiding questions the proposal addresses. Multiple questions may be selected where relevant.</i>
2, 3, 4 and 5
Description of the action <i>Describe the proposed action in clear and operational terms. Explain what is proposed, what activities would be undertaken, and how the action would contribute to advancing the human rights to water and sanitation. Focus on practical actions that can be initiated or scaled up within the short to medium term. (Maximum 300 words)</i>
The proposed Priority Action is to scale SWA's Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM) as the sector's accountability backbone: an existing, operational platform through which governments and stakeholders register specific, time-bound commitments on water, sanitation and hygiene, and report publicly on progress before the 2028 UN Water Conference. It already tracks more than 560 commitments from over 170 partners across 60+ countries, spanning national water and sanitation policies, the Heads of State Initiatives, climate integration, gender and sector financing. Commitments made through the Water Action Agenda (WAA) are a natural and significant input, but the mechanism's value is independent of any single political process. The MAM enables governments, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to define commitments, monitor implementation, and participate in periodic review. It provides structured commitment registration, public reviews drawing on JMP and GLAAS data, multi-stakeholder review processes, monitoring of implementation progress, and opportunities for corrective action and policy dialogue. Unlike many commitment platforms, the MAM links commitments to evidence and periodic review, which has supported governments and partners identify implementation gaps and

strengthen alignment with national priorities. Under this Priority Action, new commitments, including those arising from Heads of State Initiatives or other 2026 Conference follow-up, would be recorded through the MAM. Commitment holders would receive support to formulate measurable, time-bound commitments, following the approach SWA adopted for 2023 Water Action Agenda commitments; many of those are already incorporated into the MAM for tracking and reporting. Progress would be reviewed through periodic reporting and multi-stakeholder engagement, with results made publicly available.

By building on an existing mechanism rather than creating a new platform, the action converts political commitments, whatever process they originate from, into a structured accountability system capable of tracking implementation and supporting corrective action where needed. It can be implemented immediately and scaled globally.

Problem

Describe the challenge, gap, or barrier that the proposed action seeks to address. Explain why action is needed and why this issue is relevant to Interactive Dialogue (a). (Maximum 100 words)

The water and sanitation sector has generated significant political commitment, but mechanisms to hold it to account have not kept pace. The Water Action Agenda illustrates the scale of the challenge: it has accumulated over 700 commitments from governments, partners, and civil society. Yet such platforms often lack a structured follow-up mechanism or a transparent process for assessing progress, leaving commitments at risk of remaining isolated pledges. Without accountability and review, it is difficult to know whether commitments are delivered or reaching underserved populations. Strengthening accountability is essential to advancing the human rights to water and sanitation and SDG 6.

Evidence of Effectiveness (Mandatory)

Provide evidence from existing or past projects, programmes, policies, reforms, or initiatives demonstrating that the proposed approach has been successfully implemented. Include measurable results where available and cite sources, evaluations, reports, or publications. Submissions should be evidence-based and not solely conceptual. (Maximum 300 words)

The Mutual Accountability Mechanism is already operational and has demonstrated its effectiveness across the SWA partnership. Since 2018, more than 560 commitments have been registered from over 170 partners across 60+ countries, about half submitted by national governments. Of 241 commitments with reported progress, 102 are rated Fully or Substantially Achieved, each with a documented public record, from legislation enacted to monitoring systems established. Achievement clusters where deliverables are specific and verifiable, such as policy reform and sector financing, showing the mechanism is strongest where it tracks the conditions service delivery depends on.

In Nepal, a 2019 civil society commitment to advocate for a Water and Sanitation Act has been tracked to its enactment in 2022, a supporting Regulation in 2024, and a new Service Regulation Division. In Mali, the MAM holds commitments across all four constituencies on the same issue, government, civil society, private sector and research, something no comparable instrument achieves. The Director of Water for People in Malawi put it directly: with the MAM, you can ask questions because there are commitments, and the Government also asks us what we are doing, it is mutual. In Mali, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Energy and Water credited MAM engagement with a government commitment to dedicate five percent of its national budget to water and sanitation. In Kenya, five tracked commitments since 2021 have supported the country's first National Sanitation Management Policy and new sanitation budget lines. In Nigeria, the MAM underpins a presidential

campaign that former Water Resources Minister Suleiman Hussein Adamu credits with supporting progress on SDG 6.

The mechanism draws on JMP and GLAAS data and has supported countries' Voluntary National Reviews, reducing duplication across reporting. Because the platform already exists and works, this proposal scales a proven approach rather than creating something new.

Target group

Identify the primary beneficiaries of the proposed action, with particular attention to underserved, marginalised, and vulnerable populations. (Maximum 75 words)

Primary beneficiaries include populations that remain underserved by water and sanitation services, particularly low-income communities, rural populations, women and girls, persons with disabilities, and communities affected by fragility, conflict and climate change. The action also targets governments, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders responsible for implementing water and sanitation commitments, including but not limited to those made under the Water Action Agenda, and for improving accountability for results.

Human rights and inclusion focus

Explain how the action advances the human rights to water and sanitation, including the principles of availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and quality (AAAQ). Describe how the action contributes to reducing inequalities and reaching those furthest behind. (Maximum 140 words)

The proposed action advances the human rights to water and sanitation by tracking the conditions under which those rights become deliverable, not as abstractions but as specific, named commitments: the legislation that gives a right legal force, the financing that backs it, and the monitoring system that tracks whether it is met. Unlike mechanisms where only governments report on progress, the MAM is multi-constituency by design: civil society, closest to communities without access, holds the same formal standing as governments to make and be held to commitments. Mutual accountability means partners holding each other to what they have pledged, with all constituencies examining the record together, rather than governments reporting on themselves alone. Because commitments are grounded in each country's own sector plans, the mechanism strengthens national ownership while requiring that progress, or its absence, be made public.

Expected results

Describe the measurable changes expected from implementation of the action. Where possible, include indicative targets, outputs, outcomes, or milestones that can reasonably be achieved within the short to medium term. (Maximum 150 words)

By 2028, a significant share of new political commitments made at and around the 2026 Conference could be voluntarily registered and held to account through the MAM, with progress against each commitment tracked and publicly reported. Increased registration of new and existing commitments through the MAM, including from the Heads of State Initiatives and other processes. New commitments tracked individually against their own stated targets and timelines, so that delivery, partial delivery, or non-delivery becomes part of the public record. Enhanced transparency and public reporting on implementation progress. Stronger accountability among governments, development partners and stakeholders, including clearer visibility of commitments that stall or go unreported. Increased use of evidence from JMP and GLAAS to inform commitment monitoring. Improved identification of implementation challenges and corrective actions. Greater alignment between commitments, financing decisions and national priorities. Strengthened reporting on progress towards SDG 6 and the human rights to water and sanitation.

Implementation modalities

Describe how the action would be implemented, including key activities, implementation arrangements, responsible actors, timeframe, and any coordination mechanisms required. (Maximum 250 words)

Implementation would build on the existing SWA Mutual Accountability Mechanism. SWA, participating governments, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders would collaborate to register and review commitments. Key activities would include: outreach to commitment holders, including those from the Water Action Agenda and other relevant processes; registration or alignment of commitments within the MAM; development of measurable indicators and reporting timelines; periodic progress reporting and review; multi-stakeholder dialogue and learning exchanges; and synthesis reporting in advance of the 2028 UN Water Conference. Implementation would begin following the 2026 Conference and continue through 2028. The action relies on existing governance structures, reporting processes and accountability mechanisms, making implementation feasible without creating new institutional arrangements.

Financing modalities

Provide indicative resource requirements and describe potential financing mechanisms, funding sources, or investment arrangements that could support implementation. (Maximum 150 words)

Implementation would primarily utilise existing SWA accountability infrastructure and partner engagement mechanisms. Additional resources may support outreach, technical assistance, reporting processes, data analysis and synthesis reporting. Funding could be mobilised through existing SWA partner contributions, bilateral donor support, development partner programmes and voluntary contributions from participating organisations. Because the mechanism is already operational, resource requirements are modest compared with creating a new accountability platform.

Scalability and replication potential

Describe how the proposed action could be expanded, replicated, or adapted in other countries, regions, or contexts. (Maximum 125 words)

The action is inherently scalable because it relies on an existing mechanism open to governments, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. The approach can be applied across countries, regions and sectors and can accommodate commitments related to water, sanitation, climate resilience, financing and governance. Because participation is voluntary and the infrastructure already exists, the action can be expanded rapidly without significant additional institutional investment.

Member State / stakeholder support

Identify existing supporters, implementing partners, or champions. Where support has not yet been secured, describe the potential for Member State endorsement and stakeholder engagement. (Maximum 120 words)

The MAM is already supported through the SWA partnership and has been used by governments, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. More than 560 commitments have been registered through the mechanism, demonstrating existing political and stakeholder engagement. Participating governments already use the mechanism to record and review commitments, demonstrating both political ownership and practical feasibility. The proposal is well positioned to secure additional support from governments and stakeholders engaged in the Water Action Agenda, UN-Water members, the Heads of State Initiative, development partners, civil society networks and other actors committed to strengthening accountability for SDG 6 implementation.

Links to other workstreams / dialogues

Describe any complementarity with other Workstreams or Interactive Dialogues and how the action could contribute to broader Conference outcomes. (Maximum 50 words)

The action supports all Interactive Dialogues by providing a common accountability framework through which commitments on water access, financing, and governance can be monitored. It connects to the broader SDG follow-up architecture, supplying evidence countries can use in Voluntary National Reviews and the High-Level Political Forum, aligning with GLAAS cycles.