

Priority Action: P3_Water Aid

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	WaterAid
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Date of submission	18 June 2026

Part 2 — Priority Action

Proposal title

A short, clear name (maximum 15 words).

Just Water Partnership Principles:
Integrating justice-based principles into Water Compacts and Country Platforms

Guiding question(s) addressed

Indicate which of the Interactive Dialogue (a) guiding questions the proposal addresses. Multiple questions may be selected where relevant.

The proposal addresses four of the five guiding questions:

- **Successful policies/programs for underserved populations:** Compacts are an established mechanism for consolidating commitments and coordinating investments, while principles are an established method to steer policies and programming. This Priority Action combines the two, embedding equity and inclusion into the design and implementation of Water Compacts and Country Platforms to ensure that progress benefits all, not just a select few.
- **Local / regional government capacity for equitable services:** Principles are an established method (in human rights, SDGs, sector programming) for steering government and development partners' decision making without being over-prescriptive. This Priority Action would provide decision-makers at local, national and global levels with a common set of principles for integrating justice, equity and inclusion into planning and investment decisions.
- **Participation, accountability, and transparency in governance:** These priorities are embedded in the five principles of Just Water Partnerships (JWP), particularly through inclusive decision-making, stakeholder engagement and accountability mechanisms that strengthen water governance.
- **Innovative financing for equity and inclusion:** The failure of traditional water investment decision-making to consider social equality and inclusion was the motivation for the Global Commission on the Economics of Water to identify a need for JWPs to elevate outcomes for people and planet alongside economic returns. The principles that have since been developed to underpin JWPs aim to integrate equity and inclusion in water finance, making this Priority Action fully aligned.
- **Lessons/approaches for post-2030 human rights focus:** Mainstreaming JWP principles into Water Compacts and country platforms would help institutionalise

multistakeholder participation, accountability and human rights-based approaches to water investments, strengthening the post-2030 water agenda.

Description of the action

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)

Member States commit to endorse and integrate Just Water Partnership principles into the development and operationalisation of Water Compacts and country platforms, beginning with a high-level announcement at the UNWC, where at least five countries commit to applying the principles in their national processes.

With Water Compacts and country platforms already being developed in many member states under Water Forward, this Priority Action embeds principles grounded in human rights into implementation of existing and the design of new Water Compacts and governance structures, thereby directly advancing the human rights to water and sanitation.

The action builds on established political momentum, making it practical and scalable both in the short and medium term:

- JWP Principles were developed in a consultative process involving over 100 institutions across 34 countries, with two-thirds coming from the Global South. Designed for integration in national multistakeholder coordination platforms (country platforms) and grounded in human rights, the principles were launched at COP30, with support from the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, the Ministry for Climate Change and Sustainability of Ghana, the Ministry of Cities for Brazil, the OECD, the Institute of Climate and Society, and the Development Bank of Brazil, showing broad high-level support.
- The World Bank's *Water Forward* initiative aims to reach 1 billion people with water security through the coalescence of development banks, governments, development partners, and private capital behind specific, country-led action plans (Water Compacts). Fourteen countries have already launched compacts connected to the *Water Forward* initiative, with many more expected.
- A commitment by 5 or more countries to integrate JWP principles into their efforts can set a new example for how water investments should be made and inspire others to follow.

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 sector continues to struggle with sustainable finance models. The traditional economic focus on return on investment often keeps water undervalued and overused and overlooks inclusion, resulting in persistent inequalities in access to services. A more balanced and equitable approach to water governance and investment decision-making is urgently needed to support the realisation of human rights and treat water as a common good. Originally proposed by the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, JWPs are

underpinned by a set of principles that apply a rights-based lens to water investment decisions and can be integrated into existing planning, financing, and governance processes.

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)

Evidence from water governance and other sectors demonstrates that inclusive decision-making processes lead to more equitable, sustainable, and widely supported investment outcomes. While integrating JWP Principles into Water Compacts is a new approach, the underlying components – stakeholder participation, accountability, transparency, and inclusion – have consistently delivered positive results relevant to this Priority Action:

- A review of water governance highlights the success at [Ghana's Densu Dam](#). Through an inclusive participation framework bringing together local community leaders, domestic water users, agricultural groups, and government agencies, the project achieved a shared rationale for watershed conservation. This broad buy-in mitigated upstream-downstream user conflicts and supported sustainable access to the water resource.
- Evidence from [Eastern India](#) demonstrates that formalizing women's participation in Water Users' Associations significantly enhanced both gender equity and the quality of local water allocation decisions.

Additional evidence that inclusive consultation can lead to more equitable outcomes stems from Just Energy Transition Partnerships ([JETPs](#)), that helped inspire Just Water Partnerships:

- South Africa's **Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)** led an extensive, multi-year consultation process with vulnerable coal-dependent communities in Mpumalanga. This approach shaped the [South Africa Just Energy Transition Investment Plan \(JET IP\)](#). Rather than prioritising solar and wind farms, a substantial portion of the \$8.5 billion package was directed towards localized economic diversification, worker retraining, and social protection.
- Indonesia's **\$20 billion JETP** established a dedicated Just Transition Working Group encompassing academic, community, and government perspectives. Consultation revealed a high risk of sidelining local populations through large-scale renewable projects. To counter this, the partnership focused on economic transformation, including structures for grant funding for community-owned renewable energy and local supply chains.

Together, these examples demonstrate that structured participation and accountability mechanisms improve investment decisions and social outcomes, providing a strong evidence base for integrating JWP Principles into Water Compacts and Country Platforms.

Target group

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

Primary beneficiaries are populations currently underserved by water and sanitation investments, including people living in informal settlements, rural communities, women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, low-income households, and communities disproportionately affected by climate change. The action also benefits local governments, civil society organisations, and community-based groups by strengthening

their participation in water governance and investment decision-making processes, ensuring that investments respond more effectively to local priorities and needs.

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)

All too often, water investment decisions in the Global South are made at the national government level with development banks, corporate entities and some commercial investors with a singular focus on economic returns. This focus concentrates investment in areas of high market potential with less consideration of those residing in other areas, often leading to a negative spiral of underinvestment and degradation of services, resulting in lower availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of water and sanitation services.

By adhering to the five Just Water Partnership Principles for investment decisions in water, greater stakeholder participation and accountability will help rebalance where investments are made across a country and help achieve investments in infrastructure that provide returns across not only economic lines, but also social ones such as maternal and child health and climate resilience for commonly excluded and vulnerable communities.

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)

The Theory of Change underpinning JWPs is that more inclusive, transparent, and accountable decision-making leads to more equitable investment choices and, ultimately, improved outcomes. Evidence from water governance and other partnerships demonstrates that structured stakeholder participation improves investment prioritisation, strengthens accountability and coordination, and over time contributes to more equitable allocation of investments and improved outcomes for underserved populations.

Within two years of the UNWC:

- At least five countries integrate JWP principles into the development, implementation, and review of Water Compacts and Country Platforms.
- Participating countries establish or strengthen inclusive multi-stakeholder governance ensuring representation of local government, civil society, and marginalized communities.
- Water Compacts and Country Platforms increasingly incorporate JWP principles into investment planning.
- Development partners, development finance institutions, and investors apply the Principles to prioritise investments that deliver equitable and sustainable outcomes
- A community of practice emerges, generating lessons and evidence that can inform water governance and financing approaches.

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)

This Priority Action will be implemented through existing national and international water governance processes, particularly Water Forward's Water Compacts and Country Platforms, avoiding the creation of parallel structures.

The first milestone will be securing public commitments at UNWC from at least five Member States to integrate the JWP principles into the design, implementation, or review of national Water Compacts and Country Platforms.

Following these commitments, participating governments, supported by development partners, civil society organisations, multilateral institutions, and financial institutions, will undertake a review of existing governance arrangements and identify opportunities to operationalise the principles. This may include strengthening stakeholder participation mechanisms, improving transparency and accountability arrangements, integrating equity considerations into investment prioritisation processes, and establishing monitoring mechanisms.

WaterAid, the International Water Management Institute and other stakeholders will support knowledge-sharing, technical assistance, peer learning, and documentation of emerging practices. Existing multi-stakeholder platforms and coordination mechanisms will be used wherever possible to minimise transaction costs and maximise country ownership.

Implementation will be country-led and adapted to national contexts. Progress will be tracked through reporting by participating countries and partners, focusing on adoption of the Principles, governance reforms undertaken, stakeholder participation, and lessons learned.

This approach enables immediate action while creating a pathway for wider uptake and institutionalisation across future Water Compacts and Country Platforms.

Financing modalities

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

This Priority Action does not require the creation of new financing instruments. Instead, it seeks to strengthen governance and decision-making frameworks that guide existing and future water investments.

Implementation will primarily utilise existing resources allocated to Water Compacts, Country Platforms, sector coordination mechanisms, and related technical assistance programmes. Activities such as stakeholder engagement, governance reviews, capacity strengthening, and monitoring can be integrated into ongoing processes supported by governments, development partners, multilateral development banks, and civil society organisations.

The World Bank's Water Forward initiative and associated financing streams provide a significant opportunity to embed the JWP Principles within already planned investments. By improving participation, transparency, accountability, and consideration of equity outcomes, the Principles can help ensure that existing resources generate greater social value and more inclusive outcomes.

Over time, adoption of the Principles may also strengthen investor confidence by improving governance, reducing conflict risks, and enhancing the sustainability and legitimacy of water investments.

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 JWP Principles are designed to be country-led and adaptable to different political, institutional, and financing contexts. Like human-rights principles, they provide a common reference point for decision-making while allowing flexibility in implementation. Because they

can be integrated into existing Water Compacts, Country Platforms, and sector coordination mechanisms, they can be applied across diverse contexts without requiring new institutions or financing mechanisms. As more countries adopt and implement the Principles, lessons and good practices can be shared through existing global and regional water networks, supporting wider uptake and continuous improvement.

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 Just Water Partnership Principles were co-developed through an extensive global consultation process involving over 100 institutions across 34 countries, approximately two-thirds of which were from the Global South. The Principles were launched at COP30 with support from the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, the OECD, the Ministry for Climate Change and Sustainability of Ghana, the Ministry of Cities of Brazil, the Institute of Climate and Society, and the Development Bank of Brazil.

Governments, such as Brazil, Ghana, Madagascar and Nepal, and institutions are already exploring opportunities to apply the Principles within national water governance and investment processes. The rapid expansion of Water Forward and Water Compacts creates a significant opportunity to secure additional Member State endorsements and demonstrate practical implementation across diverse country contexts.

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)

This priority action would be directly complementary to Interactive Dialogue (f) on Investments in Water finance, while also contributing to the Interactive Dialogue on Water for Planet and Water for Prosperity.