

SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

Priority Action

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>Consortium of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and Networks (Indigenous Environmental Network, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, Tukisivallirutitsanut Parnaitiit, Working Group with Indigenous World Forum on Water and Peace)</i>
Focal point	<i>Aminta Menjivar</i>
Date of submission	<i>17 June 2026</i>

Part 2 — Priority Action

Proposal title: <i>A short, clear name (maximum 15 words).</i>
Recognition and respect of Indigenous Peoples' Water Governance and Management
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>
Indigenous Peoples' governance and knowledge systems about water contribute to all five guiding questions above because Indigenous Peoples' Water Governance Systems are regulated by Indigenous principles and customary institutions, representing the collective responsibility and accountability to protect and preserve water bodies and sources to keep them clean and healthy. The Indigenous Knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, and culture upholds the protection and the continued reciprocal and ecological relationship between water biodiversity and ecosystems. Indigenous Peoples respect and revere water bodies and water sources, upholding their protection and preservation because they are sacred to Indigenous Peoples, connecting them to their ancestors and nature. In current water management practices, Indigenous Peoples apply Indigenous knowledge, laws, values, and practices in water decision-making. These include using only the water quantity that is needed without any disturbance to the water ecosystem and to water quality. By working with the water cycle rather than against it, traditional Indigenous water practices do not waste or pollute water, thus generating sustainable water management systems. SDG6 was created in 2015, whereas Indigenous Peoples have time-tested knowledge and practices about sustainable water governance and management since time immemorial.

The world must learn from the Indigenous Peoples about how Indigenous institutions on water governance and management, and Indigenous knowledge and practices have been contributing to SDG 6 without financing from outsiders. This has been possible due to the collective work of Indigenous Peoples' guided by the principle of Self-Determination.

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)

Indigenous Peoples have been protecting and preserving water bodies and water sources in their lands and territories since time immemorial. These practices uphold the tradition of respect and reverence of water. Water connects all of life. The increased commodification and industrialization of water in the name of the blue and green economy has led to violations of the human right to water, the natural rights of the water to flow, the rights of the biodiversity living under water, and the right to water and sanitation. These actions are needed: 1) it is imperative that Indigenous Peoples' right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is upheld; 2) to stop the commodification and the industrialization of water bodies and water resources; 3) to acknowledge, respect, and uphold the Indigenous governance systems, knowledge, science, and practices to protect, preserve, and respect their dignity, existence, perseverance, and the natural right of water to flow in its cycle; 4) the hydrological cycle, which includes snowpack in the mountains, glaciers, rainforests, rivers reaching the ocean, and the ocean itself must not be disrupted further, rather it must be protected and restored; 5) states and corporations who destroy the water bodies and water sources for their economic benefit and income, with little or no respect for nature, people and the planet must be accountable and responsible. Irresponsible policy formulation, excessive extractions, and the destruction of biodiversity have exacerbated the water crisis, water pollution in various forms, and climate change; and 6) to allocate financial resources to support the Indigenous Peoples for upholding their Indigenous governance systems, knowledge, science, and practices for the preservation of the natural water bodies and sources. (273/300)

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 exclusion of Indigenous Peoples in water governance leads to the commodification and industrialization of water in the name of the blue and green economy and to violations of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the natural right of water to flow and to be clean and healthy. Indigenous Peoples must be included in decision-making as a solution and achieving SDG6. Indigenous Peoples have a track record of upholding environmental sustainability in their lands and territories. 80% of the world's biodiversity is found in Indigenous lands and territories. Freshwater ecosystems are not separate from marine ecosystems. (95/100)

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)

Engagement of Indigenous Peoples in global water governance is relatively new. It is due to Indigenous Peoples' efforts to gain equitable participation at decision-making processes that this is happening and it is a historic and pioneering endeavor. When Indigenous Peoples do have input at these governance tables, all life benefits. Recent examples include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf), local/regional/global Indigenous declarations on water rights (<https://www.iitc.org/indigenous-peoples-declaration-for-the-2023-united-nations-water-conference/>), and the restoration of Indigenous practices, sciences, and value systems around water. Examples are The Okanagan Nation Alliance in British Columbia, Canada, which created the Sylx Water Declaration (<https://sylx.org/natural-resources/water/water-declaration/>) that is the foundation for their Kindergarten to Grade 12 water education (<https://sylx.org/natural-resources/water/siw%20acknowledges-water-curriculum-k-12-teachers-resource-guide/>) and also have been actively engaged with the local and provincial (BC) governments to implement their Indigenous water laws, values, and practices; the achievement of legal personhood of waterways like the Whanganui River in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the Magpie River in Quebec, Canada (<https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/when-a-river-is-a-person-from-ecuador-to-new-zealand-nature-gets-its-day-in-court/>; <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/these-rivers-are-now-considered-people-what-does-that-mean-for-travelers>); the recognition of the Sipapu Spring at the Hopi Tribe in Arizona, United States by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Water and Heritage as a historical and cultural heritage site (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/environmental-stewards-sacred-hopi-site-in-arizona-awarded-icomos-water-and-heritage-shield-88464>); and the legal recognition of the aquatic reserve status of the Kovik River basin in northern Quebec, Canada, which means that the watershed is protected from mining claims and industrial development (<https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/nunavik-welcomes-new-protected-status-of-river-watershed/>). (279/300)

Target group

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

The beneficiaries of implementing Indigenous knowledges, laws, values, and practices will be the Earth's biodiversity and future generations. Additionally, the policy and decision makers of the states will learn how Indigenous Peoples have been contributing to keep the water bodies and sources alive through their institutions, knowledge systems, science, and practices since time immemorial and maintaining the ecology and ecosystems. (60/75)

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)

Indigenous Peoples' right to peace and prosperity according to our terms promises to restore the balance of harmony with the natural world, which has been disrupted by settler colonialism and unregulated capitalism. Human rights are interrelated, interdependent, indivisible, and interconnected and cannot be separated from our right to water. Health and wellbeing will be restored by the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights, which will improve the quality of life. Including and ensuring the equitable and ethical utilization of Indigenous knowledge brings about justice. (83/140)

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 2026 UN Water Conference focuses only on freshwater. Under Indigenous worldviews, all forms of water must be protected, including oceans, glaciers, subterranean water, and water in the air (i.e. clouds). We must consider water in all its forms and stop siloing its protection and care. Water knows no boundaries and unifies us all. Western science has scientific indicators for healthy water. Indigenous knowledges have *cultural and spiritual indicators for healthy water*, which need to be recognized. The creation of an International Indigenous Observatory on Water and Peace (World Water Forum, Brazil, 2018) needs to be supported and resourced. The implementation of the UNDRIP will be a pathway to achieving SDG6. Clean water will support healthy communities, balance and harmony with nature. Outputs include films for community education, contributions to conferences, improved water education, improved water policies. The outcome is clean and healthy water for all. (147/150)

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)

Humanity needs to revisit its relationship with Mother Earth. There needs to be transformational education and a shifting of values from the individual to the collective, and to balance and harmony from chaos. The implicit need for sustainable water policies guided by Indigenous Peoples is more critical now than ever. The actions proposed in this Priority Action scheme are immediate and ongoing at the same time. For the rights of Indigenous Peoples to be recognized within spaces where decisions impacting water rights are made, Indigenous Peoples must be included and the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent must be implemented. Indigenous Peoples' regional water gatherings need to be supported to identify emergent issues that are culturally specific and their solutions. The regions could be according to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights

of Indigenous Peoples. Proper engagement between Indigenous organizations/nations and their regional Indigenous representation need to be supported. This will include virtual and in-person meetings. Regional and global meetings of Indigenous Peoples about water need to be supported and resourced. (189/250)

Financing modalities

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

Indigenous Peoples at local, national, regional, and global levels of water decision-making are consistently under-represented. There is a need for the guidance of Elders and knowledge keepers. Indigenous Peoples must be financed in order to participate meaningfully in all levels of water decision-making (at the local, regional, national, and international levels). Such financing should come from nation-states, large regional/international foundations and philanthropists as Indigenous Peoples face a disproportionately high cost of travel from remote areas. This financing is needed because the presence of Indigenous Peoples at the tables where decisions about water are made is imperative for the development of innovative and sustainable solutions to today's water crises. (109/150)

Scalability and replication potential

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

Indigenous-led solutions to the obstacles preventing the achievement of SDG6 are replicable in each region and need to respect the cultural protocols, governance, and geographical location of the place of origin. Indigenous languages define culture and therefore guide cultural practices with water. Indigenous cultural youth exchanges are important to uplift the importance of our languages and cultures. While Indigenous solutions to the water crises of today can be replicated, replications must be culturally specific and Indigenous knowledge must not be misappropriated. Indigenous Peoples around the world share a long history of cultural and linguistic dispossession. Indigenous Peoples share a common spirituality with their places of origin, especially water. (108/125)

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)

Since the rise of the movement for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, states have supported the rights of Indigenous Peoples at various points in time (e.g. Mexico, Brazil, and the Netherlands). Women's nongovernment organizations (e.g. Women and Water Diplomacy Network) and environmental groups (e.g. Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature) have also provided support. Potential supporters of the rights of Indigenous Peoples for the 2026 UN Water Conference and beyond include Canada, Mexico, Norway, and the Netherlands. (81/120)

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)

All Workstreams/Interactive Dialogues will benefit from the full participation of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous knowledges, sciences, laws and cultures hold solutions to some of today's most pressing water issues. It is time that the voices of Indigenous Peoples are included, respected, and enacted in global decision-making spaces about water. (49/50)