10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference

23-26 September 2024, Punta del Este

URUGUAY

Transformative Actions and Impacts for the Water and Ocean SDGs: The GEF IW Response to the Global Challenge

CONFERENCE REPORT

Organizers

Pre-Conference Workshops supported by

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Conference Report: **IW:LEARN**

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IWC10
GEF INTERNATIONAL WATERS CONFERENCE 2024

History

Explore



30+ years of GEF
International
Waters

AND GENDER
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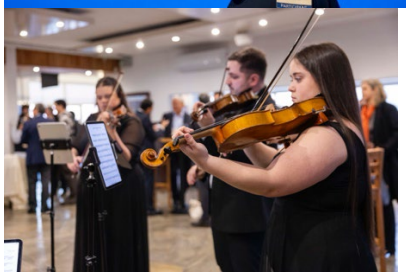
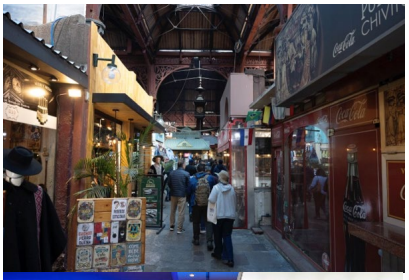
CReW+



GEF7 Coral Reef
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Introduction

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a multilateral family of funds dedicated to confronting biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution, and supporting land and ocean health. Its financing enables developing countries to address complex challenges and work towards international environmental goals. The partnership includes 186 member governments as well as civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth, with a focus on integration and inclusivity. As an independent financial organization, the GEF provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for projects related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and persistent organic pollutants, through the respective focal areas. These projects benefit the global environment, linking local, national, and global environmental challenges and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

The GEF's IW International Waters (IW) focal area has a unique mandate to support transboundary cooperation in shared marine and freshwater ecosystems. It is the world's largest funding mechanism for multi-country collaboration on freshwater and the ocean. To date, $3 billion in grants have been invested by GEF, and $19 billion in co-financing have been mobilized in a portfolio of 470 IW projects, across 157 countries. The International Waters Conference (IWC) is the key learning and exchange event for projects funded by GEF IW.

Hosted by the Government of Uruguay, in Punta del Este, the IWC returned after six years in its 10th edition under the theme: "Transformative actions and impacts for the water and ocean SDGs: The GEF IW response to the global challenge". It brought together the IW portfolio to celebrate 30 years of the GEF IW focal area. IW:LEARN led the organization of IWC10, with guidance by UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO-IOC, and other partners on behalf of the GEF IW project portfolio.

IWC10 convened nearly 400 participants, including GEF IW project managers, institutional stakeholders from beneficiary countries, non-governmental and civil society organizations, transboundary and regional management institutions, UN agencies, Development Banks and Intergovernmental Organizations, and the private sector. Collectively they represented more than 90 active GEF IW projects, from 72 countries and various GEF Agencies, which aimed to facilitate cross-sectoral and portfolio-wide learning and experience sharing. It was an interactive training and experience-sharing event, where challenges were discussed, solutions were highlighted, and good practices were showcased. Furthermore, this conference summarized the impact achieved and generated ideas for new projects.

IWC10 Programme

Day 1: A Celebration: 30 years of GEF IW achievements and impact 23 September 2024	
09.00-09.10	10th anniversary Video: Reflections & Expectations
09.10-10.30	**Opening Ceremony** **Welcome address GEF International Waters** Speakers: • His Excellency Omar Paganini, Minister of Foreign Affairs • His Excellency Robert Bouvier, Minister of Environment • Frederick Boltz, Manager of Programs, GEF Secretariat • Alfonso Fernández de Castro, Resident Representative, UNDP • Ernesto Fernández Polcuch, Director, UNESCO Montevideo **Overview and Evaluation of GEF IW** Speakers: • Andrew Hume, IW Focal Area Coordinator, GEF Sec • Ines Benabdallah, Environmental Specialist, GEF Sec • Taylor Henshaw, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Sec • Mitsuaki Hirai, Evaluation Officer, GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) • Jeneen Reyes Garcia, Evaluation Officer, GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) **30+ years of GEF International Waters** Speakers: • Alfred Duda, former GEF IW • Isabelle Vanderbeck, GEF IW Task Manager, UNEP • Vladimir Mamaev, Regional Technical Advisor, UNDP • Fatou Sock, CFI Project Manager, FAO
10.30-11.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
11.00-12.30	**Stream 1: Kickoff** **Catalysing Transboundary Cooperation - Panel discussion with policy makers and key actors** Panel: • Mr. Miguel Stutzin, GEF OFP, Ministry of Environment, Chile • Ms. Thuy Ahn Nguyen, Head of Development Cooperation, Ministry of Environment, Viet Nam • Mr. Lono Leneuoti, Climate Change Department, Tuvalu • Mr. Gilbert Mawere, Director Water Resources Development, Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Zimbabwe • Ignacio Lorenzo, Director of Biodiversity and Climate Technical Advisory Services, CAF **GEF IW Highlights from the Host Region** Speakers:

	• Bermejo – Mark Lambrides, OAS • Pantanal – Marisa Castro, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bolivia • Guarani – Jorge Rucks, CAF • Maritime Front - Ana Maria Nunez, UNDP • Amazon – Maria Apostolova, ACTO • Humboldt – Esteban Delgado, UNDP **IW:LEARN: from a pilot initiative to phase V** <u>Speakers:</u> • Mish Hamid, former IW:LEARN Project Manager, IAEA • Konstantina Toli, IW:LEARN Project Coordinator, UNESCO-IOC *Pitches: Interactive Sessions & Workshops*
12.30-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.30	**Interactive sessions in parallel** • Theme A: Evolution and Innovation towards the next generation of transboundary cooperation and governance: From Assessment to Action - Lead: UNDP, Co-lead: UNIDO • Theme B: Achieving policy coherence from source to sea - Lead: UNEP, Co-lead: WWF-US • Theme C: Towards the 30x30 target across the globe - Lead: CI
15.30-16.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
16.00-17.30	**Workshops in parallel** 1. Cross-sectoral cooperation for the sustainable management of the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction with an outlook to the BBNJ Agreement – FAO & Global Ocean Forum 2. Accelerating Blue Transformation in SIDS - UNDP 3. Beyond Borders and Beyond Impacts: reconsidering cooperation of transboundary groundwaters - UNESCO-IHP, OSS & CEREGAS 4. Transboundary Water Governance - Bridging Borders - CAF with Limpopo Commission & TNC 5. Scaling-up public-private water stewardship approaches - UNIDO
18.30-20.30	Welcome Reception – hosted by Ministry of Environment, Uruguay Escuela Superior de Alta Gastronomía

Day 2: Technical Site Visits: From Source to Sea **24 September 2024**
ITINERARY 1 - Montevideo: Technical solutions, nature and culture (Sponsored by IDB) The Montevideo itinerary, sponsored by the IDB, offered a mix of cultural, technical, and natural experiences, including exploring the historic Ciudad Vieja, visiting a modern wastewater treatment facility, and discovering the biodiversity of the Santa Lucía Wetlands. The day ended with a sunset cocktail at Casapueblo.
ITINERARY 2 - Garzón Lagoon and Rocha Lagoon The itinerary included visits to Garzón Lagoon, a protected sanctuary with diverse ecosystems and scenic views, and Rocha Lagoon, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with over 220 bird species and unique dunes. It was the whale's season! The day ended with a sunset cocktail at Casapueblo.
ITINERARY 3 - Black Lagoon / Santa Teresa Fort / Punta del Diablo Village

The itinerary highlighted Uruguay's natural and historical treasures. It started with Laguna Negra to learn about sustainable water management, followed by a visit to the 18th-century Santa Teresa Fort to explore its history and architecture. The final stop was Punta del Diablo, a charming fishing village known for its coastal beauty, concluding with a sunset cocktail at Casapueblo.
ITINERARY 4 - Punta del Este Porto/Lobos Island / The Hand/ Wastewater Maldonado/ Garzón Lagoon (Sponsored by CAF) The itinerary around Punta del Este, Uruguay, included a visit to Isla de Lobos, home to South America's largest sea lion colony and a historic lighthouse; "La Mano," an iconic sculpture symbolizing life at Brava Beach; a cutting-edge wastewater treatment plant enhancing local sanitation and environmental protection; and Garzón Lagoon, a biodiversity hotspot with unique ecosystems and stunning views. The visit ended with a sunset cocktail at Casapueblo.

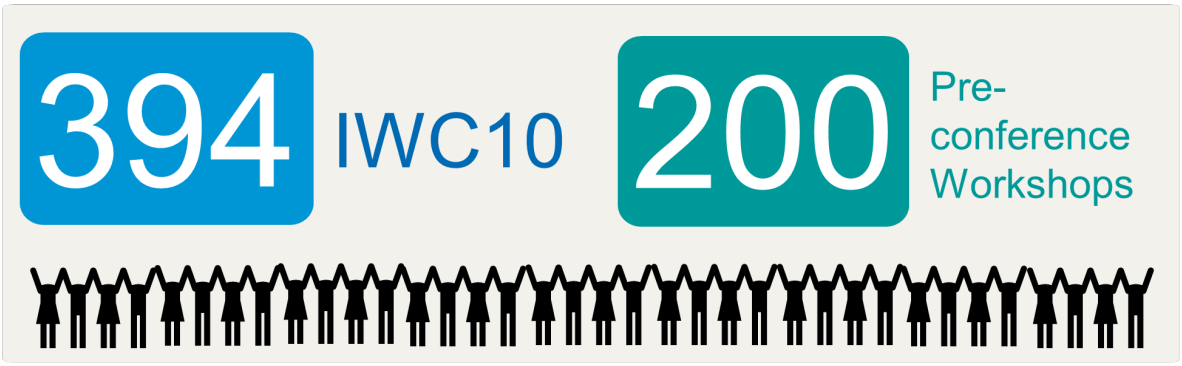
Day 3: Bridging Then and Now: Impactful solutions, tools and innovative approaches **25 September 2024**	
09.00-09.15	Reflections Video & Session Kickoff
09.15-10.30	**Plenary - Bridging Then and Now** **1. Towards more integrated solutions – Talk Show** • Application of integrated approaches (CWM, Nexus, MSP, S2S etc.), *Susanne Schmeier, GEF STAP* • Breathing underwater: why we should all care about marine hypoxia (CHO IP), *Lorenzo Galbiati, FAO* • Circular solutions to plastic pollution (Plastics IP), *Isabelle Vanderbeck, UNEP* • Blue Green Islands (BGI IP), *Adnan Awad, UNDP* **2. Policy coherence and challenges – Panel Discussion** • Integrated approaches and the Water Convention, *Sonja Koeppel, UNECE* • Towards the establishment of an International Nitrogen Management System (INMS), *Mark Sutton, UK CEH* • Ocean Science solutions for policy integration, in the framework of the Ocean Decade, *Julian Barbiere, UNESCO-IOC* • Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), *Andrew Hume, GEF Sec* *Pitches: Workshops*
10.30-11.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
11.00-12.30	**Stream 2: Workshops in parallel - Innovative tools and solutions** 1. Sustainable fisheries for sustainable livelihoods: approaches and tools (EAF & FPAT) – FAO 2. Transboundary Marine Spatial Planning: Towards large marine ecosystems of partnerships – UNESCO-IOC 3. Accelerating transboundary water cooperation: How are GEF projects contributing to SDG reporting? – UNECE, UNESCO-IHP & UNESCO-IOC 4. Mobilizing global and regional action on nitrogen and nutrient pollution for a healthy planet – UK CEH/UNEP

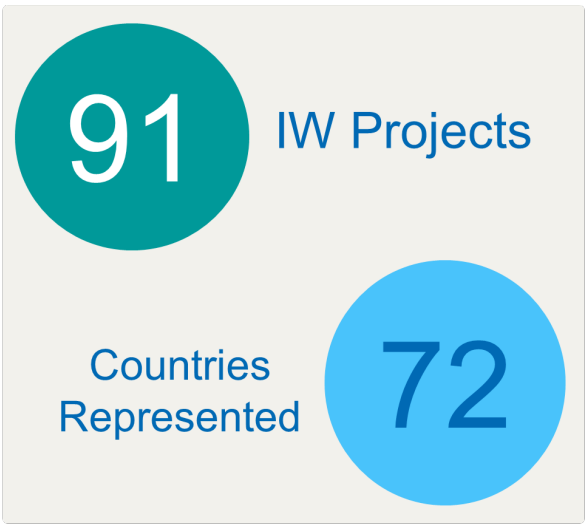
	5. Strengthening the Nexus Approach to address the climate change effects on shared water resources and ecosystems - IDB, OAS, GWP & Interactive Demonstration – IIASA & CRS
12.30-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.30	**IW Clinics on Tools and Solutions I (in parallel)** 1. How to strengthen Marine Conservation Through the Blue Economy, Tourism and Nature-based Sports – CI 2. How to develop sustainable legal and institutional arrangements for transboundary water cooperation – UNECE & GWP-SA 3. How to foster innovative instruments for Water Security in Transboundary Water Systems - CAF & IUCN 4. How to navigate Conjunctive Management of Surface and Groundwater - UNESCO-IHP, UNEP/MAP & UNDP 5. How to leverage NBS to enhance synergies and scalability for Transboundary Water Resilience – Pacific Institute, UNDP, TNC & UNIDO 6. How to increase coral reef resilience - University of Queensland & WWF-US 7. How to apply environmental DNA monitoring at scale in freshwater and marine systems - IUCN 8. How to unleash the power of knowledge - IW:LEARN & FAO
15.30-16.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
16.00-17.30	**IW Clinics on Tools and Solutions II (in parallel)** 1. How participatory, multi-stakeholder processes can contribute to effective Regional Ocean Governance in LMEs - UNEP-Nairobi Convention 2. How to use Participatory-Citizen Science to improve knowledge and engagement: opportunities and limitations for IW projects - Adventure Scientists 3. How do Governance and Management Strategies tackle Transboundary Water Pollution in freshwater and marine ecosystems - ORASECOM with IUCN-South America & UNEP-COBSEA 4. How to improve communication and outreach using contemporary means and tools - GRID-Arendal & ICPDR 5. How can I effectively integrate gender equality and social inclusion and achieve gender equality outcomes in my GEF-IW project(s) – GEF, WWAP/UNESCO & WCS 6. How to Incorporate High Integrity Blue Forest Solutions into GEF Projects – GRID-A/UNEP 7. How to develop GEF IW projects following STAP guidance on good project design – GEF STAP
19.30-22.30	Gala event – hosted by IW:LEARN

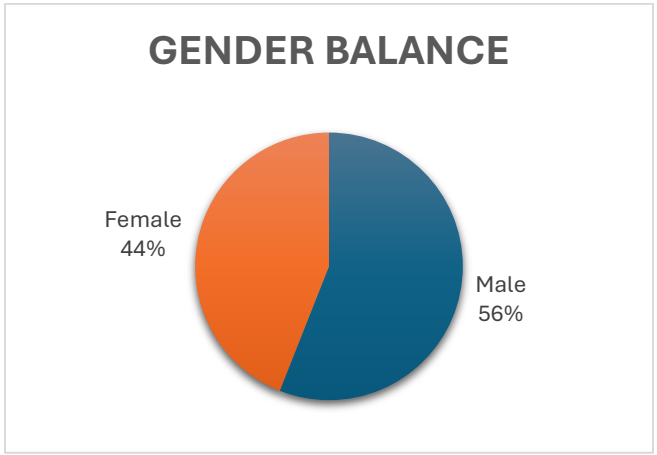
Day 4 : Transforming the Future: Opportunities and challenges **26 September 2024**	
09.00-09.15	Reflections Video & Session Kickoff
09.15-10.30	**Plenary - Transforming the future for a Healthy Planet, Healthy People**

	1. Navigating the Future: Transforming IW with Innovation and Technology – Talk show • Transformation and innovation in GEF IW Project design, *Susanne Schmeier, GEF STAP* • Transformations supported by technology & AI innovations – what's at stake for GEF IW? *Nagaraja Rao Harshadeep, WB* & *3 lightening videos by K.I.D.S Group* • Video by Ocean Innovation Challenge – bridging innovation and inclusivity **2. Fostering inclusivity in IW – Talk Show** • Youth: *Eliana Harrigan, One Water*; *Lucia Samaniego, GWYN; Raymond Schuster, Pacific Community* • Indigenous Peoples: *ValdeLice Veron Kaiowa, Guarani* • Gender: *Verona Collantes-Lebale, GEF Sec* *Pitches: Interactive Sessions & Workshops*
10.30-11.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
11.00-12.30	**Stream 3: Interactive sessions in parallel - IW Opportunities and challenges** • Theme D: Sustainable Fisheries & Aquaculture Management: Integrating Ecosystem Approaches for Resilient Resources and Livelihoods - Lead: FAO, Co-lead: WB • Theme E: Fostering inclusivity: Gender and Youth engagement in IW projects - Lead: IUCN, Co-lead: UNESCO/WWAP • Theme F: Looking into the future: Ensure robustness to future change - Lead: IADB, Co-lead: ADB
12.30-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.30	**Workshops in parallel** 1. Striving for Social and Economic Equity in LME & MPA Management - BNA/CI & UNDP-ATSEA 2. Data and Information Management (DIM) in IW projects and programmes - IW:LEARN, UNDP & UNEP 3. Shared Basin, Shared Destiny: Fostering Collaborative Water Governance for a Sustainable Future - ICPDR & NBI
15.30-16.00	Break: Networking / IWC10 Marketplace
16.00-17.00	**IWC10 Closing session** *Reporting back on results of Interactive Sessions* **Closing Ceremony: Reflections from conference & way forward** • Closing remarks: Ignacio Lorenzo, CAF; Raul Munoz Castillo, IADB; IW:LEARN, Video from GEF CEO, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez & Transfer of conference cup to IWC11 host region

IWC10 in figures







IWC10 resources

- Celebrating the 10th GEF International Waters Conference: Three Decades of Transboundary Water Management
- IWC10 Conference Flyer
- IWC10 Agenda
- IWC10 Presentations
- IWC10 List of participating booths
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- IWC10 Photos

All Conference Videos

- IWC10 Pre-Workshop Saturday - Project Management
- IWC10 Pre-Workshop - Sustainable Funding & Financing
- IWC10 Day 4 - Transforming the Future: Opportunities and challenges
- IWC10 Day 3 -Bridging Then and Now: Impactful solutions, tools and innovative approaches
- IWC10 Day 1 - A Celebration: 30 years of GEF IW achievements and impact
- CEO GEF statement
- Day 3: 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference
- Day 1: 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference
- Day 4: 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference
- Celebration of 30 years of GEF IW: 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference
- IWC10 Pre-Conference Workshops
- IWC10 Combo Video
- Film festival playlist

Executive Summary of Interactive Sessions

Theme A: Evolution and Innovation Towards the Next Generation of Transboundary Cooperation and Governance: From Assessment to Action (TDA-SAP)

The session focused on innovative strategies, gaps in the TDA-SAP process, and ways to enhance stakeholder engagement across four regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Africa Region:

Key discussions centered on the development of concept notes for SAP support following TDAs, highlighting the need for early donor involvement and collaboration to ensure sustainability. Raising awareness through educational activities, webinars, and accessible platforms was emphasized to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including government and community partners. Gaps identified in the TDA-SAP process included insufficient data availability and management, as well as weak community involvement from the outset. Adaptive governance models, such as inter-ministerial committees, and demonstration projects were suggested to strengthen national capacities and ensure long-term project success. Innovative financing mechanisms, including mapping basin-specific interests and demonstrating the financial value of environmental interventions to the private sector, were also recommended.

Asia-Pacific Region:

The region discussed multi-layered assessments integrating water, food, and energy nexus relationships, with an emphasis on strengthening local data collection networks and ensuring the inclusion of youth and gender in project activities. Leveraging AI for resource management and simulation models was also a priority. Private sector engagement was encouraged early in the TDA process, with cost-benefit analyses to identify collaboration opportunities and the organization of annual workshops for continuous dialogue.

Europe and Central Asia Region:

Innovative approaches included the use of isotopes and satellite imagery to improve decision-making and fostering cooperation through interministerial commissions. Adaptive management strategies were recommended to respond to evolving environmental challenges. Early private sector collaboration was highlighted as essential, with a focus on green economy initiatives and sustainable financing mechanisms.

Latin America and the Caribbean Region:

Discussions focused on aligning strategies to address fisheries, pollution, and governance separately, as well as addressing capacity challenges within government ministries. A shift in focus from problem analysis to opportunity identification in TDAs was recommended, alongside increasing civil society involvement through citizen science and indigenous knowledge. Pilot projects were suggested to explore private sector contributions and align priorities with government strategies.

Across all regions, recommendations included strengthening national ownership of SAP actions,

ensuring the sustainability of project equipment and data systems, and integrating technology like AI and remote sensing for better decision-making. Early engagement with the private sector, focusing on mutual financial and environmental benefits, was stressed. Inclusive approaches, involving gender, youth, and civil society, as well as regular knowledge-sharing through webinars and accessible platforms, were also emphasized for greater collaboration and long-term success.

Theme B: Achieving Policy Coherence from Source-to-Sea

Embracing the source-to-sea (S2S) approach is essential for achieving policy coherence and fostering healthy ecosystems and resilient societies. While it presents challenges, especially when addressing different scales such as watersheds or coastal zones, it offers significant multilevel benefits. A holistic S2S management strategy must span across sectoral and administrative boundaries, uniting upstream and downstream stakeholders. However, achieving this requires a shift in thinking to adopt greater systems thinking throughout the source-to-sea continuum.

To promote the S2S approach effectively, the business case must be presented more robustly, emphasizing benefit sharing and highlighting the economic opportunities for both national and regional communities. Overcoming resistance from stakeholders and investors requires addressing concerns about potential risks and demonstrating clear advantages. Achieving buy-in for S2S must involve the whole of government and society. The primary barriers to action include the lack of an integrated framework for managing S2S processes and insufficient coordination among sectors and stakeholders. For S2S to succeed, coordinated policy implementation is crucial, with a strong focus on policy coherence across sectors. Education and awareness-raising efforts will also play a key role in driving the adoption of this approach. Additionally, the development of an online solution portal, such as IW:LEARN, could help codify S2S practices and streamline their application.

Further, it is recommended that IW:LEARN supports the development of the business case for S2S and creates a thought piece to promote understanding and action. The upcoming GEF 9 strategy should incorporate a strategic objective dedicated to S2S, ensuring that it is institutionalized with the necessary resources. Additionally, an integrated platform could be envisioned that addresses all key S2S flows—water, biota, sediment, pollution, materials, and ecosystem services—expanding beyond the current focus of the CHO IP, which is centered only on pollution flows.

Theme C: Towards the 30x30 Target Across the Globe

This interactive session outlined strategies for strengthening the management and conservation of Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) across terrestrial, freshwater, marine, and coastal ecosystems, with a focus on integrating multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is encouraged to prioritize projects that build local capacity, ensure grassroots knowledge is integrated into management, and foster sustainable financing for long-term co-management. Inclusivity, stakeholder representation, and aligning with the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) are key to creating resilient, community-led conservation systems.

For marine conservation, GEF is urged to promote regional cooperation, interactive platforms, and Conservation Trust Funds (CTFs) to enhance Marine Protected Area (MPA) management and Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) governance. Strengthening ecological connectivity and including local communities in management are critical for achieving the 30x30 goals and ensuring sustainable funding. Freshwater ecosystems, though vital for biodiversity and connectivity, have been underfunded and overlooked. GEF should consider increasing investment in freshwater conservation by promoting area-based measures, transboundary planning, and better management of existing PCAs. Freshwater ecosystems require tailored protection and restoration strategies that connect across biomes and integrate with broader environmental planning.

Participants also emphasized the need for a Global Alliance to improve sustainable funding, streamline policies, and enhance management effectiveness. Governance frameworks should support long-term, adaptive, and inclusive management, with a focus on capacity development and closing financing gaps. Knowledge management, sharing best practices, and improving networks of MPA managers are instrumental to maintaining momentum and ensuring the success of conservation efforts.

Theme D: Sustainable Fisheries & Aquaculture Management: Integrating Ecosystem Approaches for Resilient Resources and Livelihoods

This highly interactive session provided some important lessons on the need for regional approaches, integrating the climate change dimension into fisheries management, and the foremost importance of community co-management.

1. **REBYC II CLME+ Project**: The project addresses unsustainable bycatch in tropical fisheries, aiming to improve fishing gear selectivity, reduce bycatch, and enhance fish survival rates. It also tackles ghost gear, which harms marine life and ecosystems. A key innovation is the testing of green LED lights in gillnets in Trinidad and Tobago to reduce leatherback turtle entanglements, although improvements are needed to balance catch rates and safety. The project emphasizes ecosystem-based management, balancing conservation and livelihood needs.
2. **Fisheries Refugia**: These are protected marine areas designed to help restore fish populations and support the blue economy by promoting eco-tourism, aquaculture, and marine conservation. The refugia approach focuses on ecosystem health rather than individual species, integrating local knowledge and community involvement to manage these areas sustainably.
3. **Women's Empowerment in Fisheries**: Women play a critical role in small-scale fisheries but face gender-based constraints. GEF projects enhance outcomes by improving women's skills, market access, and leadership in governance. Initiatives like the Coastal Fisheries Initiative empower women through training, enterprise development, and increased participation in fisheries management, promoting gender equality throughout the value chain.
4. **Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)**: RFMOs help scale national fisheries management into a cohesive, ecosystem-based regional approach, providing a framework for scientific advice and decision-making. The GFCM's success in reducing overexploitation in the Mediterranean and Black Sea highlights the importance of adaptive, inclusive management.

Engaging stakeholders and supporting complementary livelihoods are key to building resilience against climate change and other challenges.

5. **AfDB Projects and Community Resilience**: AfDB initiatives enhance community resilience to climate change in fisheries by improving food security through fish farming, promoting integrated livelihoods, and supporting eco-tourism. These projects focus on climate adaptation, overfishing reduction, and the protection of mangrove habitats. Partnerships with international financiers, conservation groups, and UN agencies have been critical to their success.
6. **Seychelles Blue Bond and SWIOFish3 Project**: Seychelles' first sovereign Blue Bond supports sustainable fisheries management and strengthens value chains. It raised USD 15 million, with funding allocated to conservation, overfishing reduction, and business models. The project adopts an ecosystem-based approach, engaging local communities in decision-making and fisheries co-management, ensuring sustainability while balancing ecological and economic needs.

Theme E: Fostering inclusivity: Gender and Youth engagement in IW projects

There is a growing demand among project managers, government representatives, and country officials for expertise in integrating gender and inclusion considerations into GEF projects. Countries often lack the necessary skills to develop effective action plans before implementation, while GEF projects have increasingly advanced requirements in this area. Funding for gender and inclusion efforts in these projects is frequently insufficient to meet the scope of work, desired outcomes, and partner expectations.

Inclusion should go beyond participation to create real economic opportunities, empowerment, and influence for communities and indigenous groups. While there is a significant demand for integrating gender, youth, and social inclusion, there is a clear gap in knowledge, skills, and funding needed to achieve this goal. Several projects have developed useful tools and best practices for inclusion, and there is a need to connect these resources and foster greater dialogue and exchange. Participants have shown strong interest in discussing these topics more openly, indicating a need for ongoing learning. Additionally, incorporating gender mainstreaming sessions and gender training into National SAP workshops would help disseminate knowledge more widely. Finally, offering online open courses in multiple languages on key technical topics like soil and climate would further support capacity-building efforts.

Theme F: Looking into the future: Ensure robustness to future change

Mobilizing sustainable finance for climate-resilient integrated water (IW) projects is crucial for ensuring their long-term impact beyond the project lifecycle. Innovative financial mechanisms are necessary to sustain adaptation efforts, particularly through public-private partnerships (PPPs) that enhance financial flows and scalability. Successful projects integrate the private sector via transparent mechanisms, fostering investment in nature-based solutions and water security. Overcoming the challenges of attracting private sector participation and managing climate adaptation costs requires innovative strategies and transparency.

Private sector engagement is key to scaling climate resilience initiatives. Understanding how to align private investments with public sector goals is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability. Examples such as the Adaptation Benefit Mechanism (AfDB) and the UNEP/MAP Med Programme highlighted the successful application of PPPs across different stages of adaptation projects. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also presented its Healthy Oceans Action Plan for Sustainable Blue Economies.

Best practices from various projects demonstrated the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration. For instance, the GloNoise and GloFouling projects by IMO map and engage industry partners, while The Nature Conservancy (TNC) incorporates private partners into Water Funds' governance for water security. The key takeaway is the need for knowledge exchange and collaboration between governments, industries, and NGOs to ensure scalable, adaptable, and financially sustainable solutions for climate adaptation and water security.

Results Framework

	Design Summary (Outcomes and Outputs)	Performance Targets and/or Indicators	Data Sources and/or Reporting Mechanisms	Assumptions and Risks	Evaluation
1.	**Good practices, experiences and successful approaches** shared among GEF IW projects.	At least 50 % of GEF IW projects at the IWC10 present at least one of their top innovations and/or replicable experiences.	Presentations from GEF IW portfolio in pre-conference workshops, conference sessions and plenaries; background documentation; and innovation marketplace exhibits	Good practices can be identified from the current GEF IW project portfolio. Risk that not all participating projects produce an exhibit poster, portfolio solution or film, operate a booth or participate in a conference workshop or plenary.	Representatives from 91 active GEF IW projects attended IWC10. Approximately 70% (64) of these projects presented at least one innovation of theirs and shared replicable experiences during conference sessions (i.e., interactive sessions, workshops and clinics) and at the IWC10 Marketplace.
2.	**Learning and capacity development** promoted for GEF IW projects	At least 70 % of participant evaluations received confirm increased knowledge.	Learning and capacity development documented in participant evaluation	Risk that increased knowledge is not incorporated into ongoing projects as strategies and	81% of the respondents of the conference evaluation survey reported that IWC10 helped increase their knowledge on at least one enhanced management or governance approach (ratings ranging between 4 and 5).

			and pre-conference workshop reports	workplans are already fixed	91% of the respondents of the pre-conference workshops evaluation survey reported that the IWC10 Pre-conference workshops helped increase their knowledge on at least one enhanced management or governance approach (ratings ranging between 4 and 5).
3.	IW Portfolio **<u>learning needs and priorities</u>** captured for improving GEF IW:LEARN and its other portfolio learning project services.	List of at least 10 emerging learning priorities identified	Rapporteur session summaries	GEF IW projects value a central clearinghouse of information through IW:LEARN to service their learning requirements.	Below is a list of identified emerging learning priorities, collected from the conference sessions' reports: **1.Improved Knowledge Management and Network Integration:** There is a pressing need to improve knowledge management to maintain institutional memory across projects. Strengthening networks of MPA managers, supporting their knowledge sharing at the regional and global level, deploying partnerships between MPA managers and CTFs, and building academic-community alliances will create a more integrated, informed approach to conservation and support critical sustainable funding. **2.To include gender mainstreaming sessions and gender training** in National SAP implementation workshops for a wide scale dissemination of knowledge.

				3.Technical solutions for climate adaptation projects: Leveraging technology and capacity-building efforts are critical in implementing and scaling technical solutions that address both immediate and long-term adaptation challenges. 4.We need to share guidance on **cost-effective virtual methods of stakeholder engagement** to ensure that the maximum amount of engagement is achieved at a reasonable cost. **5.Private sector engagement**, developing bankable projects and investment planning **6.Accessibility in Communication**: All communication should be designed with accessibility in mind to ensure inclusivity for a wider audience. **7.Gender Mainstreaming Framework and Indicators**: Develop a comprehensive gender mainstreaming framework to integrate gender perspectives in IW projects and programs. Establish clear and measurable gender-responsive indicators to track progress and impacts.

				8.Complex Governance Frameworks: The necessity of developing capacity for cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation to strengthen existing frameworks in addressing conflicting interests and fragmented governance in ABNJ. **9.Organizations managing transboundary basins** are crucial but face challenges regarding financial sustainability. Therefore, **developing financial mechanisms to ensure their long-term operability** is a fundamental concern. **10.Balancing subsistence and commercial Fishing:** The competition between subsistence and commercial fisheries, especially in transboundary waters, requires careful co-management planning. Organizing fishers into cooperatives and regional associations can help both groups work together to protect shared resources. **11.Enhancing reporting of GEF project results in SDG frameworks:** Strengthen the integration of GEF project outcomes into SDG reporting to better reflect their contributions and improve visibility.

					12.Importance of education and **awareness of reducing nitrogen losses and recycling nitrogen** among the various sectors. 13.Blue Carbon Projects: **Capacity development in data collection and analysis on carbon sequestration** potential of ecosystems like mangroves, seagrasses, and wetlands.
4.	Increase in **<u>knowledge sharing</u>**	Increase in knowledge exchange and activity of IW community through services offered by IW:LEARN in the months following IWC10	Increased community activity measured by number of website and social media analytics Number of expressions of interest for project-project twinning exchanges		The metrics overview of the IW:LEARN social media performance from September 7, 2024, to October 6, 2024 demonstrated that IW:LEARN has significantly grown its audience engagement across platforms, particularly on Facebook and LinkedIn. <u>Brand awareness metrics (overall):</u> - Post reach: 3,247 users (Up 2,400% from 131) - Post impressions: 16,536 (Up 429% from 3,128) - New followers: 145 (Up 7,200% from 2) Increased activity was noted on event-related content, particularly the 10th International Waters Conference. The posts tied to IWC10 were the clear drivers of engagement, especially on LinkedIn and Twitter.

					IW:LEARN has received 13 expressions of interest for project twinning exchanges. The deadline to submit an expression of interest was 15 November 2024.
5.	Active IW projects learn to apply evolving **GEF** **policies, procedures, and** **results-based management** to project implementation.	Increase in active GEF IW projects that apply policies and procedures for results-based management	Applicability documented in participant evaluation and pre-conference workshop reports	IW project managers and participants actively seek opportunities to apply evolving GEF policies, procedures, and good practices in their projects. Assumption that 75 % of current GEF IW projects attend IWC10	81% of the respondents of the conference evaluation survey reported that IWC10 contributed to increase their knowledge on the applicability of evolving GEF policies, guidelines, and results-based management to project implementation (ratings ranging between 4 and 5). This percentage accounts for 47 active GEF IW projects. 85% of the respondents of the pre-conference workshops evaluation survey reported that the IWC10 Pre-conference workshops contributed to increase their knowledge on the applicability of evolving GEF policies, guidelines, and results-based management to project implementation (ratings ranging between 4 and 5). This percentage accounts for 42 active GEF IW projects.

Stream 1 - A Celebration: 30 years of GEF IW achievements and impact

Plenary Session

Opening Ceremony

High level participants extended their welcome address to the IW audience which reconvened after 6 years since the last IWC. Interventions from the Government of Uruguay, the GEF Secretariat and the IWC co-organizers set the scene for the 10th edition of the GEF International Waters Conference.

Figure 1: His Excellency, Omar Paganini, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uruguay

Figure 2: His Excellency, Robert Bouvier, Minister of Environment, Uruguay

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*''El apoyo del GEF no solo ha permitido la **ejecución de proyectos clave**, sino que también ha facilitado la **cooperación entre naciones y actores locales**, en beneficio del medio ambiente global. Para Uruguay, esta colaboración ha sido de un valor incalculable. Ha **fortalecido nuestras capacidades técnicas y de gestión**, y nos ha permitido avanzar con mayor rapidez hacia un **desarrollo sostenible basado en la conservación de nuestros recursos naturales**. Confiamos en que el GEF seguirá siendo un **socio clave en el futuro**, apoyándonos en los desafíos que aún tenemos por delante y trabajando juntos para asegurar que nuestras acciones generen un impacto duradero para las **generaciones venideras**.''*

His Excellency, Robert Bouvier, Minister of Environment, Uruguay

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GEF International Waters: an overview

The GEF Secretariat in the International Waters focal area introduced the theme of the conference and set the scene of GEF IW in the presence with a forward look into the next programming period GEF-9.

International Waters Focal Area Goals:

- **Purpose**: The International Waters Focal Area (IW) supports countries in transboundary cooperation for shared marine and freshwater resources.
- **Key Processes**: Emphasis on tools like the Transboundary Diagnostic Assessment (TDA) and Strategic Action Program (SAP), as well as integrated water management approaches such as SOURCE to SEE.
- **Long-Term Evolution**: The IW strategy has evolved in response to global environmental challenges, with the GEF partnership shaping its direction.

GEF 8 Objectives:

- **Objective 1**: Focus on coastal and near-shore areas, particularly large marine ecosystems, to promote sustainable blue economies.
- **Objective 2**: Address high seas and areas beyond national jurisdiction, aligning with the new Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement.
- **Objective 3**: Enhance water security in freshwater ecosystems.

  Progress under these objectives is reported to be on track, with 57% of GEF 8 programming completed at the halfway point.

Figure 3: Andrew Hume, IW Focal Area Coordinator, GEF Sec

Funding and Impact:

- **GEF IW Funding**: Over $1.25 billion has been programmed in marine and freshwater ecosystems since GEF's inception, including co-financing and multifocal area support.
- **Project Reach**: More than 470 projects across 157 countries, leveraging $19 billion in co-financing.
- **Performance**: A high success rate in project outcomes (86% satisfactory) and sustainability (73% likely to be sustained post-project).

Looking Ahead - GEF 9:

- **New Priorities**: Emphasis on a more integrated, innovative, and inclusive approach in GEF 9, which begins in 2026.
- **Themes for GEF 9**:
  - A stronger "whole of government and whole of society" approach.

    - Enhanced policy coherence between environmental and non-environmental policies.
    - Integration across GEF's various trust funds for more coordinated programming.
- Impact on Global Commitments: GEF 9 will align with key global milestones, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Biodiversity Framework, offering opportunities for transformative environmental action.

GEF Independent Evaluation Office – Perspective on GEF International Waters Evaluation 2020

The GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) presented the current status of IW portfolio (including the overall outcome rating and sustainability rating), key themes emerging from completed projects, and recent evaluations/policy coherence.

GEF IEO Contributions:

- **Progress in Marine vs. Freshwater**: The IW portfolio has become more balanced, with freshwater projects increasing from 24% in GEF 6 to 36% in GEF 7.
- **Types of Successful Projects**:
    - Long-term regional engagements, particularly in transboundary water bodies.
    - Testing and scaling up of technologies across regions.
    - Knowledge sharing and global evidence generation, e.g., the Transboundary Water Assessment Program.
- **Water Security Focus**: GEF IW projects have contributed to water security by:
    - Strengthening transboundary governance.
    - Promoting policy reforms and intersectoral coordination.
    - Enhancing stakeholder knowledge at national and regional levels.
- **Case Study**: In the Lower Mekong River Basin, GEF projects aligned with both national and regional priorities and supported marginalized groups, such as women and indigenous populations.

Key Lessons and Opportunities:

- **Policy Coherence**: A major theme for GEF 8 and 9, emphasizing the integration of environmental goals with policies in sectors like agriculture, water, and climate change.
- **Sustainability and Scaling**: Opportunities exist to enhance the financial sustainability of interventions and better integrate IW projects across multiple focal areas (e.g., biodiversity, climate change).
- **Transformative Action**: The next phase (OPS 8) will focus on how IW is adapting to GEF's trend toward integrated programming and the shifting global and national priorities.

Future Studies and Evaluations:

- The IEO will conduct further studies on how the IW focal area is adapting to new trends, its added value compared to other interventions, and its leadership in knowledge sharing.

30+ years of GEF International Waters

Figure 4: Alfred Duda, former GEF IW Lead

The last segment was a tribute to the 30+ years of the International Waters focal area, with insights and testimonials on how the International Waters focal area was developed and shaped through time from GEF 1 to GEF 8. Key actors on stage brought to light the strategic decisions, key milestones and turning points through untold stories and testimonials.

''The GEF Council adopted the definition that global benefits are produced in international waters if a key transboundary concern is being addressed, that's important. IW is not for all environmental stuff in a basin or a marine system, only for concerns that cross borders, and it's important to note that the GEF IW operational strategy, which still survives, is the only global instrument for all transboundary waters that the North and the South politically agree on. And IW is intended to resolve these conflicts and help people, help them and their communities to overcome the conflicts.''

Alfred Duda, Former GEF IW Technical Lead

Figure 5: Panel - 30+ years of the International Waters focal area

The panel raised the following **concerns about the future of International Waters:**

- **Sustainability of Projects**: A major concern is ensuring that the outcomes of IW projects are sustainable beyond the project lifetime. This requires stronger country ownership and financing that extends past the initial implementation phase.
- **Shift from Projects to Programs**: While programs are seen as more impactful, there's concern that shifting focus to national-level projects may reduce the emphasis on transboundary cooperation, which is the unique strength of the IW focal area.
- **Imbalance Between Oceans and Freshwater**: There's a concern about the continued focus on ocean-related projects, potentially at the expense of freshwater basins. Ensuring balanced attention to both oceans and freshwater ecosystems remains a key challenge.
- **Transboundary Freshwater Basins and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)**: There is a growing need to promote conjunctive use of surface water and deep aquifers to address water scarcity and droughts, especially in transboundary freshwater basins.

Figure 6: Fatou Sock, CFI Project Manager, FAO

Key Areas for Future Focus:

- **Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)**: Strengthening Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in coastal and marine ecosystems to ensure sustainable use and protect biodiversity.
- **Fish Refugia**: The concept of **fish refugia**, where fisheries management focuses on maintaining productive landscapes instead of just establishing protected areas, is highlighted as a critical future direction, especially in contentious regions like the South China Sea.

The Need for Partnerships and Funding:

- **Building Strong Partnerships:** The success of IW programs depends on continued partnerships, particularly with development banks and investors to create sustainable financing models.
- **Holistic Approach:** To address the challenges in international waters, a "whole of society" and "whole of government" approach is necessary, involving multilateral banks and other stakeholders from the beginning of the project, not just at the end.

Kick off

Catalyzing Transboundary Cooperation

GEF IW projects are rooted in country-led processes and cross-country dialogues that foster transboundary cooperation. National policies, regulations, and legal and institutional frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of these projects. This session brought together high-level government representatives from the GEF IW project community to discuss how these projects can catalyze international waters cooperation.

Key Lessons and Recommendations:

- **National Policy Alignment:** For successful project implementation, **national policies** must align with **international project goals**, and key stakeholders (e.g., local experts, Ministries) should be involved early in the process.
- **Local Engagement: Community-based monitoring** and **local expertise** are critical for shaping water management decisions and ensuring projects are adapted to national contexts.
- **Consensus Building:** Early consensus among stakeholders is crucial for the success of international water projects, particularly when working across **multiple countries** and **government levels**.
- **Speeding Up Project Cycles:** There is a need for **faster project approval processes** and **streamlined communication** between **GEF agencies** and national governments to ensure timely implementation and maximize project impact.
- **Broader Collaboration:** It is important to integrate **regional development banks** into discussions on **financing** and **policy reforms** to ensure long-term sustainability and impact of water-related projects.

The panelists collectively emphasized the need for **strong partnerships**, both within countries and across borders, to ensure sustainable **transboundary water management**. Additionally, they highlighted the **importance of adapting to local realities** while **aligning policies** with broader international goals, ensuring that both **policy reforms** and **on-the-ground implementation** are well coordinated for the future of **water security** and **climate resilience**.

GEF IW Highlights from the Host Region

The second slot shed light to the GEF IW portfolio in the host region. From the first GEF IW project in the region, the Bermejo River Basin to a current portfolio that includes the largest river basin in the world, the Amazon, to the Guarani Aquifer system with the first agreement for transboundary groundwater under the Law of Transboundary Aquifers; the world's largest wetlands, the Pantanal wetlands; the La Plata River Basin that drains one fifth of the Latin American continent into the Atlantic Ocean; the Humboldt project that strives for a healthy, productive and resilient Humboldt Current Large Marine Ecosystem; and the Maritime front that focused on preventing and reducing land based pollution into

the La Plata and Maritime front. The connection of these GEF IW investments, their achievements and impact on Latin American freshwater and marine ecosystems were highlighted.

Figure 7: Panel - GEF IW Highlights from the Host Region

IW:LEARN: from a pilot initiative to phase V and beyond

The last part of this session featuring the journey of IW:LEARN from its inception, through 4 phases to the current 5th phase was presented in a form of a timeline featuring key milestones, turning points and highlights, in a dynamic presentation, with rich audio visual material and backstage insights. The journey concluded with the launch of the story map, a new digital tool capturing the stories and impact of the GEF IW portfolio.

Figure 8: IW:LEARN presentation, Mish Hamid, former IW;LEARN Manager & Konstantina Toli. IW;LEARN Project Coordinator

Interactive Sessions

Theme A: Evolution and Innovation Towards the Next Generation of Transboundary Cooperation and Governance: From Assessment to Action (TDA-SAP) [Session code: IS-D1-A]

Coordinators: Adnan Awad, UNDP; Natalie Degger, UNIDO

Key Session Discussions

<u>Africa Region:</u>

1. Innovative Approaches:
    - Concept Notes for SAP Support: Following a TDA, concept notes are developed to detail specific interventions, required actions, budgets, and private sector engagement strategies. These notes support transboundary analysis, climate change modelling, and project scalability, ensuring alignment with potential donor priorities.
    - Donor Involvement: Early involvement of donors was emphasized as crucial for sustainability. Collaborating with existing donors to identify additional funders strengthens project viability.
    - Awareness Raising: Educational activities, webinars, and widely accessible platforms (potentially at the basin level) were recommended to engage a broad range of stakeholders, including governmental and community partners.
2. Gaps in the TDA-SAP Process:
    - Data Availability and Sustainability: Significant gaps in data access, management, and sustainability of project-purchased equipment were highlighted. While AI aids in data search, participants called for sustainable mechanisms for long-term data handling.

- Stakeholder Engagement: Community involvement from the onset of a project remains insufficient. Establishing working groups and leveraging social media for continuous engagement were suggested.

3. Adaptive Governance Models and Bridging Gaps:
    - Institutionalizing Governance Practices: Inter-ministerial committees, such as those in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa, were cited as effective models for transitioning from TDAs to national plans. Representation across diverse sectors (agriculture, water, environment) was recommended.
    - Demonstration Projects: Strengthening national capacity to sustain and upscale project achievements was suggested as a critical step for project continuity.
4. Stakeholder Engagement:
    - Speaking the Language of Companies: Projects should demonstrate the financial value of environmental interventions to companies. Highlighting tangible benefits, such as connections between water resource issues and company profits, is key. Companies should feel part of the solution rather than blamed for the problem.
5. Innovative Financing Mechanisms:
    - Mapping Basin Interests: To avoid duplication, basin-specific interests should be mapped to align efforts. For example, Lesotho's use of data to engage industries demonstrated how contributions can yield a return on investment for all parties.

<u>Asia-Pacific Region:</u>

1. Innovative Approaches:
    - Multi-layered assessments integrating water, food, and energy nexus relationships.
    - Strengthening local networks for data collection and SAP updates.
    - Encouraging wider result dissemination through accessible channels.
    - Prioritizing youth engagement and gender inclusivity.
    - Leveraging AI for resource management and simulation models.
2. Private Sector Engagement:
    - Involving the private sector early in TDA discussions.
    - Conducting cost-benefit analyses to identify collaboration opportunities.
    - Organizing annual workshops to maintain continuous engagement.

<u>Europe and Central Asia:</u>

1. Innovative Approaches:
    - Using isotopes and satellite imagery to improve decision-making.
    - Fostering cooperation through interministerial commissions.
    - Promoting adaptive management strategies to respond to evolving challenges.
2. Private Sector Engagement:
    - Prioritizing early collaboration and fostering regular communication.
    - Promoting green economy initiatives and sustainable financing mechanisms.

<u>Latin America and Caribbean Region:</u>

1. Key Discussions:

- Aligning strategies to address fisheries, pollution, and governance separately.
- Addressing capacity challenges in government ministries.
- Shifting focus from problem analysis to opportunity identification in TDAs.
- Increasing civil society involvement through citizen science and indigenous knowledge.

2. Private Sector Engagement:
    - Using pilot projects to explore private sector contributions.
    - Aligning private sector priorities with government strategies.

Session Achievements:

1. Identification of Key Gaps: The session clarified challenges such as limited government ownership, data sustainability issues, and inadequate private sector engagement.
2. Innovative Strategies: Recommendations included adaptive governance models, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and leveraging AI for resource management.
3. Actionable Recommendations: Practical solutions were proposed for SAP sustainability, including demonstration projects and basin-level mapping.
4. Knowledge Document: A comprehensive document summarizing findings will inform GEF-9 programming and future initiatives.
5. Strengthened Collaboration: Partnerships were enhanced across regions, with commitments to co-host workshops and share best practices.
6. Engagement Insights: Early and meaningful private sector engagement strategies were identified, emphasizing financial benefits and shared environmental goals.

Actionable Recommendations:

1. Government Engagement: Strengthen national ownership of SAP actions by integrating them into national policies and regularly reviewing them.
2. Sustainable Practices: Ensure the sustainability of equipment and data systems introduced during projects.
3. Technology Integration: Leverage AI, remote sensing, and simulation models for improved decision-making.
4. Private Sector Partnership: Engage companies early, using financial and environmental benefits to foster collaboration.
5. Inclusive Approaches: Incorporate gender, youth, and civil society into all project components.
6. Knowledge Sharing: Regularly communicate findings across stakeholders, leveraging webinars and widely accessible platforms.
7. Innovative Financing: Map basin-specific interests and demonstrate the mutual benefits of financial contributions.

Theme B: Achieving Policy Coherence from Source-to-Sea [Session code: IS-D1-B]

Coordinators: Isabelle Vanderbeck, UNEP; Sarah Davidson, WWF; Jacquelyn Beatie, WWF

Key priority messages:

1. While still very much a challenge, embracing fully the source-to-sea approach as a pathway towards achieving **policy coherence** with multilevel benefits and opportunities for healthy ecosystems and resilient societies is key.
2. Depending on the scale of the systems, if one is approaching the matter from a watershed or a coastal zone standpoint, challenges and perspectives in promoting a holistic source-to-sea management approach, across sectoral and administrative boundaries, bringing together upstream and downstream stakeholders will differ. While it needs to be recognized as such, **greater system thinking** is however required in the source to sea continuum.
3. The **Business Case for Source to Sea** needs to be made more strongly highlighting benefit sharing, presenting a compelling story to help overcome stakeholders and investors' fears and demonstrating the opportunities for national and regional economic communities; S2S buy-in needs to come from the whole of government and the whole of society.

Summary of session outcomes:

- In SIDS, given the interconnected ecosystems, the strong link between development and the natural environment, the interdependency on marine and coastal environment and the limited financial and human resources, embracing the S2S management approach is not a choice but a necessity; there is still much to do to improve the integrated fresh and coastal water resources management, sustainable land management and sustainable forest management for enhanced resilience of socio-ecological systems to the impacts of climate change.
- Integrating sectors and countries/sub-regions, preventing negative impacts downstream and upstream, managing key flows connecting terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments, reducing governance fragmentation for more effective and sustainable resource management, integrating water and environmental data for decision-making hence promoting long-term ecosystem health and resilience remain a challenge wherever you are in the watershed or at the coastal zone.
- In most situations, decision making systems are not designed to support a Source to Sea System approach; no one model fits all. It is however critical to show how best to link the different S2S flow management to cascading basins and marine economies downstream to ensure all riparian states and coastal countries are invested in the source to sea approach.
- "As we give downstream, so we receive from upstream. We thus have to work together for our ecosystem health and provisioning services for better resource efficiency and system health."
- So "SHOW ME" could be the next S2S pitch to adopt a System approach, for enhancing the Health of our Oceans and Waters with the relevant Monitoring and Evaluation systems.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Need for codification of S2S practices into an online solution portal in IW:LEARN
- Need for IWLEARN to help make the business case for a S2S System framework and draft a thought piece on the matter.

- Need for the GEF 9 strategy to have a strategic objective and assigned resources on S2S to ensure it is truly institutionalized
- One could perhaps envisage an IP on S2S which would address all the S2S "flows" (water, biota, sediment, pollution, materials, and ecosystem services). At present the CHO IP focusses solely on pollution flows.

Theme C: Towards the 30x30 Target Across the Globe [Session code: IS-D1-C]

Coordinator: Olivia Reed, Conservation International

Key priority messages:

1. **Strengthening Multi-Level and Multi-Sector Co-Management:** Co-management and community-led management of protected and conserved areas (PCAs) must be supported at local, national, and transboundary levels. This must happen for terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal for integrated planning, and involving all sectors. At the same time, in the design and management of PCAs, the key ecological attributes that characterize each ecological realm, biome and ecosystem type must be considered. GEF-9 should prioritize projects and programs that strengthen local capacity and ensure that knowledge and experience from the grassroots level are integrated into management. Adequate stakeholder representation and sustainable financing are essential for embodying the whole society approach of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), fostering inclusivity, and creating resilient co-management systems that endure beyond project lifespans.
2. **Enhancing Regional and International Cooperation between MPA Networks and Trust Funds:** To improve Marine Protected Area (MPA) management and Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs), GEF-9 should promote regional cooperation through networks, interactive platforms, and Conservation Trust Funds (CTFs). This cooperation is essential for policy coherence, science-based approaches, and effective ecological and socio-economic governance of MPAs. Enhancing ecological connectivity and integrating sustainable, cross sectoral management strategies, including local communities and small-scale fisheries, is crucial. Sustainable funding for marine conservation is a pressing issue. Achieving the 30×30 goals requires global cooperation and coordination of MPA networks through a Global Network to build capacity and harmonize policy implementation. Special focus should be on MPA networks and freshwater ecosystems within Protected Conservation Areas (PCAs), aligning with CTFs to transform underfunded and deteriorating ecosystems into effectively managed and sustainably funded conservation areas. Scaling up global partnerships between MPA networks and CTFs is instrumental in meeting biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development goals.
3. **Elevating Freshwater Ecosystems in Conservation:** Lakes, rivers and other freshwater ecosystems cover less than 1% of the Earth's surface but contain 50% of the world's known fish species and a wealth of other biodiversity, in addition to connecting life and habitats from source-to-sea and even across continents. Yet, one in three freshwater species are threatened with extinction and globally monitored freshwater populations have declined by 83%, twice the

rate of terrestrial and marine species. Overlooked and underfunded, inland waters have ecological attributes that require tailored protection and restoration, in addition to integrated planning with other biomes. This includes better employing area-based conservation measures that intentionally protect inland water ecosystems through networks of PCAs that are well-connected, provide for effective management, and ensure ecological representation across realms, biomes and ecosystem types. To that end, tested models, such as fisheries reserves and protected free flowing rivers, exist, along with global datasets and protection coverage indicators for inland waters. The Freshwater Challenge is a country-led, multistakeholder initiative founded to support both protection and restoration efforts. In this context, GEF-9 needs to better incorporate freshwater ecosystems into its broader focus areas and strategies to advance 30x30, including by increasing investments in these ecosystems. This may include support for countries to develop transboundary spatial plans for freshwater ecosystems; to assess their national PCA systems for adequacy of freshwater protection coverage, connectivity, and management effectiveness; to improve management plans of existing PCAs to include freshwater objectives; and, where appropriate, to adopt new protections that contribute to reversing freshwater biodiversity loss.

4. **Supporting a Global Alliance:** There is a need for global connections, and participants highlighted their interest in a Global Alliance for marine protection to bridge the gap of sustainable funding and increase management effectiveness via policy harmonization and streamlining and leveraging multiple forms of capital.

Summary of session outcomes:

The session outcomes highlighted the need for multi-level conservation approaches, with a strong focus on strengthening co-management across local, national, and transboundary levels, building local capacity, the sectors involved work in a coordinated manner, joining conservation efforts, and ensuring sustainable financing. Regional cooperation was emphasized, particularly through science-based platforms for managing MPAs integrating socio-economic benefits and stakeholder engagement. Freshwater ecosystems, often overlooked, were recognized as critical priorities requiring targeted management and integration into broader conservation efforts. Sustainable financing and capacity-building are essential for long-term success, along with improved governance frameworks and knowledge management systems to ensure continuity and lasting impact.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- **Scaling Up Interactive Regional Platforms:** Bolster regional cooperation platforms to enhance the management of MPAs, freshwater ecosystems, and transboundary resources. These platforms should focus on science driven approaches and serve as a space for collaboration between governments, local communities, academia, and the private sector.
- **Implementing 30x30 for Freshwater Biodiversity:** Freshwater ecosystems should be recognized alongside marine and terrestrial conservation priorities. Global datasets and methodologies for measuring freshwater protections exist and dedicated IUCN policy and technical guidance will be released at COP16. A global framework similar to the Key Biodiversity Areas for freshwater ecosystems needs to be established, with the more strategic and increased use of conventional

PAs and of tailored PCA mechanisms, like Ramsar sites and community-managed fishing areas, to protect these critical ecosystems.

- **Sustainable Financing Mechanisms:** GEF-9 should emphasize and support development of permanent financing mechanisms such as Conservation Trust Funds (CTFs) for the long-term sustainability of MPAs and community led conservation efforts. Furthermore, engaging the private sector and ensuring that local communities see direct benefits from conservation will be vital in sustaining these efforts. There is a need for global cooperation at the global level of CTFs to better support marine conservation efforts at the national and regional levels. Supporting a Global Network of MPA Manager Networks supporting a Global Alliance bringing together MPAS networks and CTFs would be instrumental and catalytic in terms of synergy and efficiency of investments and ensuring strong technical support for capacity development that advances marine management.

Workshops

Cross-sectoral cooperation for the sustainable management of the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction with an outlook to the BBNJ Agreement [Session code: WS-D1-01]

Coordinators: Viktoria Varga Lencses, FAO; Qingqing Wang, FAO

Key priority messages:

1. **Importance of stronger regional, global cross-sectoral collaboration:** Successful global and cross-sectoral cooperation is one of the biggest challenges of management of ABNJ which is due to barriers such as a lack of political will, finance, data/information, and capacity. Initiatives by the Common Oceans Programme through its child projects (Tuna, Deep Sea Fisheries, Cross-sectoral, and Sargasso Sea projects) are addressing these challenges aiming to demonstrate effective sustainable utilization of resources and conserving biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), particularly in the context of the BBNJ Agreement. These initiatives upscale the practice of key approaches such as participatory, integrated area-based management, the ecosystem approach, and wider environmental impact assessments in ABNJ.
2. **Need for capacity building and integration of knowledge:** There is a significant need for capacity-building initiatives that empower stakeholders from various levels, including regional and government officials and local communities, to navigate the complex governance systems in ABNJ and establish collaborative mechanisms. Better information and knowledge of the ABNJ is needed, particularly in terms of certain high seas fisheries and on vulnerable marine ecosystems, on the cumulative impacts across marine industries, and on the effectiveness of area-based management tools. The Common Oceans Cross-sectoral project is currently working to strengthen capacity for sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination through a training program for officials from regional and national organizations and engaging with

partners in the Southeast Pacific and Pacific Islands to improve understanding of ABNJ issues and governance.

3. **Utilization of effective management tools and market incentives:** The promotion of market-based mechanisms such as certification programs can drive sustainable fishing practices and enhance conservation efforts in ABNJ. By providing economic incentives and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, this strategy can lead to significant environmental benefits and reinforce the commitment to sustainable resource management.

Summary of session outcomes:

1. **Demonstrated Successes in Cross-Sectoral Cooperation:**
   The workshop highlighted numerous successful instances of cross-sectoral cooperation that also align with many of the objectives and principles of the BBNJ Agreement. Participants noted progress in managing bottom fisheries through enhanced regulations and collaborative processes, as well as effective utilization of scientific data to inform ecosystem-based governance, particularly exemplified by initiatives in the Sargasso Sea.
2. **Call for Enhanced Global and Regional Collaboration:**
   Participants collectively emphasized the urgent need for stronger global and regional cooperation to scale up the impact of successful interventions. This entails providing sustained finance for enhancing capacity development and knowledge sharing related to governance issues within ABNJ, particularly for regions and countries facing significant challenges.
3. **Identification of Research and Information Gaps:**
   The discussion underscored the necessity for improved information-gathering mechanisms to better understand ABNJ in general and high seas fisheries and vulnerable marine ecosystems in particular. Addressing these knowledge gaps is vital for assessing cumulative impacts across marine industries and informing effective management practices.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

1. **Enhance Capacity Development:**
   Initiatives should focus on raising awareness and building capacity for engaging in sectoral and cross-sectoral ABNJ governance, particularly targeting regions and countries, in particular those that are dependent on resources coming from the ABNJ and require support.
2. **Strengthen Knowledge Gathering:**
   Efforts should be directed towards improving data collection and knowledge-sharing mechanisms concerning ABNJ, high seas fisheries and the dynamics of vulnerable marine ecosystems.
3. **Evaluate Management Effectiveness:**
   There should be an emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of area-based management measures as a critical step toward sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation.
4. **Mainstreaming Biodiversity and Food Security:**
   It is crucial to further support the incorporation of biodiversity considerations into fisheries and other sectoral management strategies in ABNJ while also recognizing the importance of food and nutrition security in conservation discussions.

5. **Foster Reciprocal Mainstreaming:**
   Encouraging key stakeholders to engage in reciprocal mainstreaming will ensure both biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries are pursued synergistically.

Accelerating the blue transformation in SIDS [Session code: WS-D1-02]

Coordinator: Sofiane Mahjoub, UNDP

Key priority messages:

- Integrated regional frameworks and coordinated regional agendas strengthen SIDS' regional ability to attract investors and donors for blue economy projects.
- Stronger institutional frameworks and effective marine spatial planning are essential for sustainable management and utilization of marine resources.
- Developing and bundling smaller blue carbon projects to attract investors is a significant yet underutilized opportunity in SIDS.
- Strengthening institutional capacity and building public service capabilities are crucial for timely project execution and engagement with donors, ensuring sustainability in ocean economy sectors.
- Implementing projects in SIDS is inherently more costly due to challenges including small populations, geographical dispersion, and limited institutional capacity.

Summary of session outcomes:

- GEF is providing crucial early-stage funding to help build and consolidate regional frameworks for blue economy projects.
- GEF supports capacity building efforts, helping to strengthen institutional frameworks, improve data accessibility, and enhance public service capabilities, which are essential for project execution and sustainable management of ocean resources.
- Through ongoing support, GEF has contributed to sustaining efforts for ocean coordination and regional cooperation, as seen in the CLME+ region.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

Develop Regional Frameworks and Institutional Capacity:

- Establish regional cooperation initiatives to create integrated blue economy frameworks.
- Focus on building institutional capacity through targeted training and resource allocation.

Enhance Marine Spatial Planning and Data Management:

- Invest in high-resolution data collection and data information management systems.
- Provide training for local authorities and stakeholders on marine spatial planning and data usage.

Promote Resilience and Blue Carbon Projects:

- Develop and implement strategies for diversified livelihoods (for example in tourism and fisheries)

- Support capacity building for blue carbon projects, focusing on data collection and market engagement. Support bundling of smaller blue carbon initiatives to attract larger investments and create scalable impact.

Beyond Borders and Beyond Impacts: reconsidering cooperation of transboundary groundwaters [Session code: WS-D1-03]

Coordinators: Miguel Doria, UNESCO-IHP; Abdel Kader Dodo, Sahara and Sahel Observatory

Traditionally, river basins, lake basins, and aquifers have been managed as unified systems, reflecting the natural interconnectedness within these water bodies. However, multiple solutions and benefits are also relevant at more local level, as exemplified in the GEF portfolio, where actions implemented at pilot sites or local transboundary level have revealed direct benefits, particularly for transboundary aquifers. By examining examples from GEF IW projects, the workshop first showcased and discussed localized groundwater issues and solutions, demonstrating their significance for water and food security, ecosystem protection, and sustainable resource management.

In the second part, the participants explored how the aquifer level can enhance experience sharing and foster a community of practice among countries. Moving beyond traditional concerns of resource allocation and pollution, or mitigating transboundary impacts, they discussed how cooperation frameworks can promote best practices in integrated water management, biodiversity conservation, nexus approach, or climate resilience, while promoting local groundwater-based solutions.

Transboundary Water Governance - Bridging Borders [Session code: WS-D1-04]

Coordinator: René Gomez-Garcia, CAF – Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean

Key priority messages:

1. Water diplomacy is essential for fostering technical and political dialogue processes that transcend borders and promote the establishment of organizations focused on water resource management.
2. The exchange of experiences among organizations that promote transboundary water resource management is most effective within a dynamic of communities of practice and cooperative networks. Within these frameworks, it is possible to implement early warning systems for floods, sedimentation processes, and other relevant issues.
3. The involvement of local communities is a fundamental dimension of water governance in transboundary basins. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure an optimal budget and adopt approaches such as citizen science, which engages the public in knowledge management for decision-making from the outset of project cycles.

Summary of session outcomes:

- The case of the Guarani aquifer illustrates a governance mechanism where four countries with different objectives and agendas share an institutional framework to facilitate decision-making

and foster dialogue among them. However, challenges remain, particularly in strengthening the link between climate change and biodiversity, promoting intersectoral management, ensuring coherence among policy instruments, and enhancing transparency. Additionally, to create transboundary bridges, it is recommended to promote consensus based on robust evidence, include gender and Indigenous peoples' issues, generate shared visions, and maintain open budgets.

- In the case of Lake Tanganyika, it has established itself as a model of sustainable management through the development of guidelines and protocols that regulate both fishing and agricultural practices, thereby protecting the region's biodiversity. The creation of the Lake Authority has been crucial in improving water resource management, facilitating more effective governance. TNC has formed collaborations with various institutions through the "Fresh Water Challenges Members" initiative, supporting countries in implementing conservation-oriented objectives for biodiversity and ecosystems. Currently, a comprehensive inventory of national legislation and land management practices is underway. After more than 20 years of transboundary cooperation, it has been learned that understanding decision-making processes at all levels and making long-term investments are essential for achieving sustainable and lasting agreements.
- In the Amazon basin, civil society is vital for protecting water resources and biodiversity, especially given that it hosts the world's largest migration of fish species. Significant collaboration has been established with local communities, where 50% of the territory is managed by Indigenous communities in protected areas. However, the threat of mercury to public health requires an approach that respects local needs and promotes greater integration throughout the basin. TNC has enhanced governance and improved data collection through the concept of “citizen science,” which is essential for understanding migratory patterns and protecting affected rivers. The collective action of 29 organizations in the Amazon aims to establish an effective cooperation mechanism, emphasizing the importance of transforming public attitudes towards a stronger commitment to protecting the Amazon and its biodiversity.
- In the cases of the Plata Basin and the Upper Bermejo River Basin, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States has fostered processes aimed at generating various consensuses. One such effort involves promoting a comprehensive vision for the future through a consensus-based investment portfolio among the countries of the Plata Basin and a decision-support system for the basin. Additionally, in the Upper Bermejo River Basin, the establishment of training and public awareness programs designed under a participatory framework is noteworthy, aimed at engaging the population in reducing environmental impacts. In both cases, water diplomacy serves as a tool that encourages actions based on shared visions.

<u>Proposals for way forward for IW:</u>

- Contribute to the financial sustainability of organizations managing transboundary basins.
- Encourage the involvement of local communities in generating information and knowledge through innovative approaches such as citizen science.
- Strengthen the link between water and disaster risk management in transboundary basins.
- Promote the development of financial mechanisms, such as investment portfolios agreed upon by riparian countries.

Scaling-up public-private water stewardship approaches [Session code: WS-D1-05]

Coordinator: Christian Susan, UNIDO

Key priority messages:

1. Private sector commitments should be used to leverage complementary funding from GEF rather than designing projects/programmes and then expect the private sector to contribute
2. Nature Based Solutions constitute a cost-efficient approach to overcome water scarcity and other water related problem in fresh water and marine transboundary context and to adapt to climate change

Summary of session outcomes:

- To engage with private sector, overcome water scarcity and to apply NBS some out of the box and out of the focal area thinking

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Promote NBS by support dissemination of information on financial and economic benefits of NBS

Stream 2 - Bridging Then and Now: Impactful solutions, tools and innovative approaches

Plenary Session

Panel I: Towards more integrated solutions

This segment started with an intervention on the role of GEF in promoting integrated approaches in transboundary water management by fostering cooperation, strengthening governance, and supporting sustainable and systemic practices, including examples on conjunctive water management, Nexus, marine spatial planning, source-to-sea etc. It highlighted how addressing complex challenges associated with managing shared water resources contributes to broader environmental and developmental goals, such as biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and sustainable livelihoods.

Figure 9: Susanne Schmeier, GEF/STAP

Key messages

Importance of Integration:

- **Integration** is crucial for addressing complex environmental and societal challenges, especially in the context of water management.
- Integration should not only avoid negative impacts between sectors but also actively harness benefits by viewing interconnected systems holistically.

Water as a Central Resource:

- Water is often treated as an input for various sectors (agriculture, energy, human settlements) rather than as a fundamental resource in its own right.

- There is a need to **reframe water** as central to environmental and societal challenges, including water-related conflict and cooperation, biodiversity, and sustainable development.

Water Challenges:

- Water-related challenges can be summarized as **too much, too little, or too dirty**, and these issues are exacerbated by broader societal contexts that can be politically or economically challenging.
- Freshwater and marine water resources are central to achieving multiple **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly those related to food, energy, and climate.

The Evolution of Integration:

- Historically, integration has been focused on **avoiding negative impacts** between sectors, but more recently, the approach has expanded to focus on **synergies and co-benefits** that emerge from integrated water management (e.g., social and peace co-benefits).
- The development of GEF (Global Environment Facility) projects reflects this shift, with a growing emphasis on **integrated programming** across sectors.

Challenges in Water Integration:

- While progress has been made in integrated water management, water is still often **underemphasized** in broader environmental strategies. It is sometimes treated merely as an **input** for other sectors rather than being integrated into the core of sustainability and governance approaches.
- There's a need for **more comprehensive integration** of water into broader programs, considering its connection to other sectors like agriculture, energy, finance, and governance.

Designing Integrated Projects:

- Designing **integrated projects** requires understanding both the **challenges and opportunities** of integration, particularly in terms of balancing risks and rewards.
- Integrating water management across sectors often involves **stakeholder engagement** beyond the water sector, such as agriculture, energy, and finance, to create systemic change.

Risk and Reward:

- Integrating multiple sectors into a project can increase **risks** (e.g., complexity, conflicting interests), but the **benefits**—in terms of broader environmental and social impacts—may outweigh the risks, making integration a valuable approach.

Expanding Knowledge and Stakeholder Involvement:

- Beyond the **water sector**, engaging stakeholders from other sectors (like **agriculture, energy, and finance**) is essential for effective, integrated water management. Expanding knowledge-sharing and cooperation across sectors will lead to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

Moving Toward Holistic Approaches:

- The goal is to shift from fragmented projects addressing isolated issues to **holistic, integrated programs** that recognize the interconnectedness of water with political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, as well as its fundamental role in sustainable development

The second part consisted of three lightening chats on the Integrated Programmes (IPs) closely linked to International Waters, focusing on how the IPs will address the complexities of implementing integrated and systemic solutions, their status and upcoming milestones.

Figure 10: Isabelle Vanderbeck, UNEP

The **Plastic Reboot Integrated Program** is a $109 million initiative co-led by UNAP, WWF, UNIDO, and UNDP, aiming to address plastic pollution by adopting a circular economy approach. With 15 projects globally, it focuses on the upstream and midstream aspects of the plastic value chain, particularly in the food and beverage sector and single-use plastic packaging. The program works with various stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and communities, to eliminate single-use plastics, promote circular design, and implement reuse and refill systems. Activities include policy change, private sector engagement, financing mechanisms, and promoting social and behavioral change to drive systemic transformation in plastic management.

Figure 11: Lorenzo Galbiati, FAO

The **Clean and Healthy Oceans Integrated Program** aims to tackle marine hypoxia and nutrient pollution from agriculture, industrial, and municipal sources through a combination of policy measures, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure investments, and nature-based solutions. With over 500 ocean "dead zones" globally, primarily caused by land-based pollution, nutrient runoff, untreated wastewater, and exacerbated by climate change, the program seeks to generate global environmental benefits in selected countries while also delivering social and economic impacts. By adopting an integrated approach, the program aims to address the scale of the problem and implement innovative solutions for cleaner, healthier oceans.

Figure 12: Adnan Awad, UNDP

The **Blue and Green Islands Initiative** seeks to align and integrate various environmental projects related to coastal management, marine spatial planning, fisheries, pollution control, and the blue economy. It aims to establish a global platform with several key hubs, including a Knowledge Management and Learning Hub for thematic working groups, a Policy and Practice Hub offering

technical guidance on natural capital and ecosystem services, and a Nature-Based Solutions Accelerator that provides both technical assistance and investment matchmaking for small businesses and projects. This platform will support and scale up solutions across different regions, particularly in coastal and island nations, enhancing the impact of integrated water (IW) and other environmental projects.

Panel II: Policy Coherence and Challenges

This segment consisted of a talk show on policy coherence and associated challenges, highlighting the support by GEF and other initiatives to enhance the capacity to design, implement, and monitor coherent and integrated freshwater and marine policies.

Figure 13: Panel II- Policy Coherence and Challenges

Integrated approaches & the Water Convention

Sonja Koeppel highlighted the global need for better cooperation on transboundary water management, noting that only 26 countries meet the SDG indicator 6.5.2 on water cooperation. She emphasizes the role of the United Nations Water Conventions, particularly the 1992 Helsinki Convention, as a crucial global legal framework that has advanced cooperation by mobilizing political will, providing rules, and encouraging countries to develop agreements and joint bodies. With over 140 agreements inspired by the convention, it facilitates long-term, sustainable projects, addresses challenges like climate change, and promotes policy integration. The convention has grown to include 55 parties worldwide and continues to expand, offering a platform for addressing transboundary water issues.

Towards the establishment of an International Nitrogen Management System (INMS)

Professor Mark Sutton drew on the International Nitrogen Management System (INMS), which aims to address the fragmentation of existing conventions by providing science-based support for international policy. He highlighted the need for long-term, coherent approaches that integrate scientific expertise with government negotiations. Over the past decade, INMS has worked on providing scientific evidence

to guide policy, with support from the GEF and UN Environment. The initiative focuses on bridging the gap between scientific research and policy needs, ensuring that the scientific community can effectively respond to governmental questions and support global nitrogen management efforts.

Ocean Science solutions for policy integration, in the framework of the Ocean Decade
Julian Barbiere discussed the key challenges in ocean governance, emphasizing fragmented policies and jurisdictional complexities across local, national, and international levels. He identified three main areas where science can help: the need for integrated frameworks like Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), stronger integration of climate and ocean policies, and the inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge in decision-making. MSP, which has been developed by IOC for the past 20 years, is highlighted as a valuable tool for coordinating across borders and sectors. Additionally, integrating climate and ocean models can improve policy coherence and help with climate adaptation. Julian called for faster, operational science that informs decision-makers and engages local communities in the policy process.

Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)
The GEF has recently taken on a formal role in supporting the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) agreement, which was adopted in June last year. As part of this, the GEF's International Waters (IW) focal area will contribute to the agreement's financial mechanism, with a focus on supporting countries in the ratification and implementation readiness of the agreement. This includes a $34 million allocation aimed at ensuring at least 60 countries ratify the agreement before it enters into force. The BBNJ agreement seeks to address major ocean governance issues, including access to marine genetic resources, environmental impact assessments, and capacity building. While the agreement has yet to enter into force, the GEF is preparing to help harmonize national policies to ensure global policy coherence, particularly in addressing the fragmented state of ocean governance.

Workshops

Sustainable fisheries for sustainable livelihoods: approaches and tools (EAF & FPAT) [Session code: WS-D3-01]

Coordinator: Fatou Sock, FAO

Key priority messages:

1. **Roles and Responsibilities in Co-management:** Institutional Structures and Empowerment Co-management must be built on clear, inclusive institutional structures that empower local communities, ensuring shared decision-making and accountability for sustainable resource management.
2. **Establishing enabling conditions for fisheries and mangrove Co-management:** Creating a supportive legal, financial, and technical environment is essential for the successful

implementation of co-management, enabling communities to effectively manage fisheries and mangroves.

3. **Creating positive incentives for sustainable fishing and safeguarding of mangroves:** Incentives such as economic benefits, social recognition, and livelihood integration are key drivers for encouraging sustainable fishing practices and the protection of mangrove ecosystems.

Summary of session outcomes:

1. Roles and Responsibilities in Co-management: Institutional Structures and Empowerment

The session emphasized the importance of establishing stable, well-defined institutional frameworks for co-management, particularly at the local level. Participants agreed that cross-sector collaboration is key to success, as demonstrated in the Philippines, where fisheries management is integrated into broader coastal management strategies supported by tourism funding. The need for clear roles between government entities and local communities was highlighted, with a focus on empowering community conservation officers to ensure shared responsibility. Additionally, the session underscored the importance of distinguishing between small-scale and large-scale fisheries to ensure that management strategies address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of each group. Local-level implementation, especially at the district level, was seen as a practical starting point for formalizing institutional structures before scaling up to national frameworks.

2. Establishing Enabling Conditions for Fisheries and Mangrove Co-management

The session underscored that effective co-management hinges on creating enabling environments that combine scientific research with traditional knowledge. This approach ensures that decision-making is informed by both data and community insights. It was noted that access to basic rights, such as water and tenure security, is a prerequisite for empowering local communities, as seen in the case of Honduras. Capacity building, particularly in gender equity, emerged as a priority, with participants stressing the need to equip all stakeholders with the skills to actively engage in the co-management process. Additionally, the harmonization of policies across various sectors and governance levels was deemed essential for coherent and sustainable management. Governments were recognized as critical actors in providing both political will and the long-term financial and technical support needed for successful co-management implementation.

3. Creating Positive Incentives for Sustainable Fishing and Safeguarding of Mangroves

Participants highlighted the importance of creating economic and social incentives to encourage sustainable fishing practices and the conservation of mangrove ecosystems. It was agreed that awareness-raising efforts should target fishers, offering them clear benefits for adopting sustainable practices. Certification programs were seen as an effective way to promote market-based incentives for eco-friendly products, improving both competitiveness and sustainability. Strengthening data collection systems was identified as critical for monitoring progress and informing decisions. Furthermore, supporting the organization of fishers into cooperatives was recommended to enhance compliance with regulations and promote peer-led accountability. Finally, the session explored the role of technological innovations, such as ecological biotechnology, in providing sustainable solutions that support both environmental preservation and economic growth.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

1. **Scale-up of co-management models:** International Waters programs should prioritize the scaling up of successful co-management models across regions, focusing on institutional capacity building and role clarity. Emphasis should be placed on small-scale fisheries, which are often the most vulnerable and in need of protection.
2. **Capacity building and knowledge sharing**: Programs should enhance capacity-building initiatives that target both governments and local communities. Regional networks should be strengthened to facilitate the sharing of lessons learned, particularly in integrating scientific and traditional knowledge in resource management.
3. **Strengthen legal and policy frameworks**: International Waters initiatives should work toward harmonizing legal and policy frameworks across countries to support transboundary management of fisheries and marine resources. This would ensure consistent management practices and foster cross-border cooperation.
4. **Promote sustainable market-based solutions**: Market-driven solutions, such as certification programs for sustainable fishing practices, should be promoted to ensure fishers have economic incentives for adopting sustainable approaches. These initiatives should also focus on increasing market access for eco-friendly products.
5. **Leverage technological innovation**: The development and deployment of sustainable technologies, particularly in data collection and ecological biotechnology, should be expanded. GEF International Water portfolio should support programs and projects that empower local communities to adopt these technologies, ensuring that the solutions remain relevant and scalable in diverse contexts.
6. **Ensure inclusive participation and equity**: Moving forward, International Waters projects should emphasize inclusivity by ensuring gender equality and the active participation of marginalized groups in co-management processes. Equitable social and economic benefits must be integral to the design of future programs, ensuring that all stakeholders, including vulnerable communities, youth and women are represented.

Transboundary Marine Spatial Planning: Towards large marine ecosystems of partnerships [Session code: WS-D3-02]

Coordinator: Michele Quesada da Silva, UNESCO-IOC

Key priority messages:

1. To ensure sustainability of projects' outcomes, regional organizations and national authorities need to connect projects' activities to governmental Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) processes. Besides, innovative financing mechanisms such as blended finance and multi-contributions to one pool could facilitate synergies.
2. Except for some good examples at regional and national level, there is still lack of coordination among countries' partners and initiatives regarding different topics such as data.
3. There is a need to improve co-designing of projects with stakeholders (incl. governmental agencies) based on local interests, gaps and needs.

Summary of session outcomes:

- There are good examples in Africa and the Caribbean about regional coordination on MSP as well as countries that are clearly using the projects as opportunities to build blocks of their MSP processes.
- Capacity development, sustainable blue economy and MPAs are the main topics of projects' collaborations on MSP.
- Challenges faced regarding collaborations between different initiatives:
    - limited and overwhelmed human resources at government level,
    - limited human and financial capacity;
    - in particular in the case of SIDS, insufficient capacity to absorb activities of international organizations;
    - different timelines of projects and governmental processes;
    - conflicting mandates and incompatible procedures of partners causing delays;
    - lack of coordination among countries' partners;
    - competition for funding, instead of collaboration and leveraging; etc.
- Suggestions to facilitate synergies and overcome challenges above:
    - establish agreements between stakeholders, incl. governmental agencies;
    - establish governance platforms;
    - develop capacity, including capacity development efforts at different levels: provincial, municipality and at the local level very close to communities;
    - establish and maintain constant communication;
    - investment in technology on data, AI and monitoring could offset human resource gaps and optimize financial expenditures; data sharing protocols and mechanisms; etc.
- Status of partnerships regarding data aspects:
    - lack of data, data harmonization, and data sharing agreements and protocols;
    - limited coordination;
    - many disconnected data portals;
    - lack of governmental willingness to share data; etc.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Type of mechanisms that could help to foster synergies between different projects:
    - in-person exchanges involving local representatives and practitioners, not only project coordinators;
    - share information and progress;
    - partnerships and Memorandums of Understanding;
    - working groups, communities of practices and inter project forum; etc.
- Specific recommendations to GEF:
    - Create incentive mechanisms within the GEF IW portfolio that reward or prioritize projects fostering synergies in MSP;
    - Keep projects focused, avoiding so many outputs and activities covering many areas;
    - Flexible funding mechanisms;

- Provide sustained financing at initial stages until the projects are sustainable and have time to mature;
- Realistic PPG stage schedule to really deliver into partnership identification, building, etc.;
- Look at longer period of cycles like a 10-year cycle;
- Contribute to improving institutional arrangements in the countries involved;
- Building on ongoing initiatives;
- GEF IW could establish or strengthen regional MSP coordination platforms where stakeholders from various projects —governments, NGOs, private sector, and academic institutions— can share best practices, data, and lessons learned;
- Identify and empower a suitable regional entity to host and maintain centralized platforms;
- Focused capacity building support;
- Provide policy support;
- Promote private sector participation;
- Share learning between and within regions;
- Exchange programs, regional cooperation, project monitoring tools, decentralized platforms;
- Meetings between projects with collaboration agreements established for similar activities;
- Develop a roster of MSP experts that countries can access;
- Priorities exchange programmes and capacity building initiatives;
- Meetings between projects with collaboration agreements established for similar activities;
- Invest money focused on exchanges in country, in addition to IWC. Very specific on the ground IW exchanges.

Accelerating transboundary water cooperation: How are GEF projects contributing to SDG reporting? [Session code: WS-D3-03]

Coordinators: Tatiana Dmitrieva, UNESCO-IHP; Sonja Koeppel, UNECE

Key priority messages:

1. Linkages between SDG indicators and GEF's core indicators could be enhanced. GEF projects are a mean to advance on SDGs achievement. SDGs data and information can feed in Project Identification Forms (PIFs). SDGs can provide a platform to showcase GEF results and drive broader uptake. Additionally, GEF projects can help identify key issues that are crucial for countries to report on, highlighting cases that matter most.
2. There is a need for more robust capacity-building initiatives to address reporting and monitoring challenges, particularly in the face of staff turnover, lack of harmonized methodologies. These efforts should involve national statistical offices (NSOs), academia as well as civil society, promoting broader inclusion. This will ultimately contribute to generating more "reliable" data.

3. GEF projects as catalysts for transboundary cooperation: GEF projects serve as an effective starting point for fostering transboundary cooperation. They help build trust, facilitate data exchange, and introduce "smart" approaches to monitoring in politically sensitive environments. They can help the achievement of SDGs targets.

Summary of session outcomes:

The session emphasized the need for stronger synergies between SDG indicators (SDG 6.5.2 and SDG 14) and GEF projects. It was noted that GEF projects often achieve more than what is captured in SDG 6.5.2 reporting, which should focus more on impact. Also, SDG monitoring results can be better included in the GEF projects preparation. GEF can play a pivotal role in helping countries define political priorities for cooperation. Strengthening the role of academia and clarifying the link between water cooperation and peace were identified as key areas for improvement. GEF projects can help contextualize SDGs, creating information-sharing opportunities even in the absence of data, especially at the community level.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- **Facilitate harmonization of monitoring methodologies**: Organize technical workshops with the involved countries to harmonize monitoring methodologies for aquifers for example. This should include developing a shared monitoring framework that accounts for the different technical capacities and political sensitivities. Ensure the framework incorporates common data standards that align with SDG 6.5.2 reporting requirements.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity for sustainable monitoring**: Develop capacity-building programs to address staff turnover and ensure long-term sustainability in monitoring efforts. This could include training government officials (i.e. NSOs) and creating a system to retain expertise, along with investing in the resilience of monitoring networks to address failures caused by climate change or political context.
- **Use GEF projects to foster political cooperation and trust**: Leverage GEF projects for political dialogue, particularly around SDG reporting. Develop targeted entry points for cooperation by using SDG indicators as a platform to identify common interests among countries. Additionally, engage academia and civil society to contribute research, data sharing, and practical solutions to strengthen trust and cooperation at the transboundary level.

Mobilizing global and regional action on nitrogen and nutrient pollution for a healthy planet [Session code: WS-D3-04]

Coordinators: Mark Sutton, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology; Gabrielle de Souza, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Government of the Republic Trinidad & Tobago

Key priority messages:

1. Coordination among sectors for measures and mitigation strategies for sustainable nitrogen management; moving towards a circular nitrogen economy.

2. Importance of policy coherence and the development of a regional/national policy for sustainable nitrogen management
3. Regulatory framework required to implement funding programmes that encompasses actions that will save money whilst considering health and climate costs.

Summary of session outcomes:

- National roadmaps and action plans are needed to manage pollution issues as well as encourage public and private sector coordination and integration.
- Sustainable nitrogen management is multi-sectoral with actions needed in transport, industry, bio-energy, food waste reduction, fertilizer use efficiency and improved management of livestock excreta, all of which can reduce the waste of valuable nitrogen resources
- Call for governments, civil society, academia and other bodies to cooperate in actions for sustainable nitrogen management to ensure policy coherence and mobilize a global reduction in nitrogen pollution

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Nitrogen is everywhere and invisible
    - Communication is integral in its management. Nitrogen has the power to bring us from fragmentation to integration.
    - GEF in its next cycle and should look to have nitrogen or nutrient-integrated programme from source to sea implemented. A treaty may be required for a call to action and implementation. Further consensus building is needed on the form (e.g. intergovernmental nitrogen coordination mechanism or legally binding agreement).
    - Actions moving forward should promote circularity, both for environment and economy. This means mobilizing actions towards a circular nitrogen economy based on listed key priorities.

Strengthening the Nexus Approach to address the climate change effects on shared water resources and ecosystems [Session code: WS-D3-05]

Coordinators: Mauricio Cerna, Organization of American States (OAS); Barbara Willaarts, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA); Paula Roberts, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB); Piotr Magnuszewski, Centre for Systems Solutions, Paolo Campo, Centre for Systems Solutions

Key priority messages:

1. It is necessary to develop and implement participatory and inclusive tools & processes that facilitate integrated policy planning, as well as the joint identification of transboundary challenges, to provide technical support for the TDA-SAP methodology. One such tool to consider for strategic planning and negotiations in transboundary basins is the Collaborative Design of Pathways to Sustainability (CoSMoS) methodology.
2. The water-energy-food nexus approach is fundamental to promoting integrated water resource management in transboundary basins in Latin America and the Caribbean, fostering intersectoral policies and strategies. However, in light of the challenges posed by climate change, it is essential

that the nexus approach explicitly incorporates disaster risk management and human rights, given the impacts of hydro-meteorological phenomena on vulnerable populations.

3. Regional organizations that promote the management of shared water resources and ecosystems, such as the Trifinio Plan and the ACTO, play a crucial role in building and operating water governance. To achieve this, it is vital that they drive processes related to the development of financial, regulatory, and decision-support mechanisms within an intersectoral framework.

Summary of session outcomes:

- Strengthening the connection between water, ecosystems, and climate: The Trifinio Region represents an ecosystem shared by three countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) that is managed integrally through the Trinational Commission of the Trifinio Plan. The legal and institutional framework for this is the Treaty between the Republics of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras for the Implementation of the Trifinio Plan. This framework establishes a model focused on conserving natural resources and improving socio-economic conditions through regional integration. In this context, the Master Plan for the Trifinio Region includes six priority areas aimed at promoting the region's socio-economic development toward a cross-border, inclusive, coordinated, sustainable, and balanced model. In this regard, the need to strengthen integrated management mechanisms for natural areas and watersheds in the context of climate change is emphasized. This leads to the suggestion that watershed management should include tools that reduce climate vulnerability and increase ecosystem resilience to ensure the sustainability of the services they provide.
- By replicating real-world challenges and decision-making processes, the simulation game developed for the session offered participants a strategic perspective on the interconnectedness of water, energy, food, and ecosystem policies.
- By adopting different roles, participants also gain a better understanding of the complexities involved in balancing competing goals across sectors and stakeholders. The simulation underscores the importance of stretching collaboration and fostering innovative partnerships and cooperative strategies to achieve sustainable and equitable solutions.
- Development of hydrological platforms to simulate and model the water-energy-food nexus: Since 2021, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank have supported the first phase of building a hydrological platform to simulate and model the water-energy-food nexus. This platform will be based on changes in renewable energy sources (solar and wind), smart irrigation systems, and crops resilient to climate phenomena such as droughts. In this context, the platform serves as a tool that helps implement a cross-border diagnostic analysis, which highlights issues like water quality, deforestation, biodiversity loss, extreme hydrometeorological events, and insufficient actions in integrated water resource management, among other challenges that require a comprehensive approach.
- Human well-being must be more visible within the nexus approach: The nexus approach, as it is designed to promote intersectoral water management in transboundary river basins, aims to enhance population well-being. However, it does not sufficiently highlight the people and fundamental rights that must be guaranteed in the face of social gaps that could be amplified by

climate change. In response, an important area to expand is the inclusion of human rights, gender, interculturality, and youth issues within the regulatory and institutional frameworks of the nexus approach. In this way, it would encourage the development of a water-energy-food-climate-rights approach.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Promote the development of tools and technological platforms that allow for the simulation of real negotiation scenarios in transboundary river basins, within the framework of capacity-building processes and territorial planning.
- Enhance the development or update of regulatory and institutional frameworks, using a nexus approach that explicitly includes a human rights dimension.

IW Clinics

How to strengthen Marine Conservation Through the Blue Economy, Tourism and Nature-based Sports [Session code: IWC-D3-01]

Coordinator: Christian Lavoie, Conservation International

Key priority messages:

1. Nature-based sports and tourism can be a catalyst to support conservation effort yet there remain untapped opportunities especially with the large-scale tourism sector to make commensurate contribution.
2. There needs to be a careful oversight on potential negative impacts that a booming nature-based sports and tourism sector can make. Positive effects can be overshadowed by negative ones, e.g. too much nature-based practitioner can exceed the carrying capacity of a site.
3. Engage the private sector and establish financial mechanisms to ensure sustainable initiatives are timely, enabling investments in conservation and improvements in management. As well as local communities' integration though the process

Summary of session outcomes:

- The session’s objective aimed to shared experiences and future pathways and initiatives linked with nature-based sport and tourism, specifically the surf activity, in support of blue economy and conservation.
- The majority of the session’s participants initially self-reported as knowing very little about the topic of the intersection of nature-based sport and conservation.
- Through panellists’ presentations and engagement with audience, a rich conversation and sharing of knowledge, experiences and thoughts was made possible. Through interactions with participants, new connections were made.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

The clinic's presenters concluded from inputs received that initiatives like the one presented focused on surf ecosystems could be scaled up in future GEF investments as well as expanded to other nature-based sports.

How to develop sustainable legal and institutional arrangements for transboundary water cooperation [Session code: IWC-D3-02]

Coordinator: Lucia de Strasser, UNECE

Key priority messages:

1. **The Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation | UNECE is available to all GEF IW projects.** It outlines the "building blocks" of an agreement, providing the building blocks with concrete examples of the content of agreements. It also provides guidance on the process of developing an agreement, helping to navigate complex negotiation discussions.
2. **Experience from previous processes that supported agreements in shared basins can be transferred.** Key lessons from development of transboundary cooperation agreements in the BUPUSA basin included: political buy in, extensive stakeholder engagement, consensus on issues to include in the agreement, evidence based negotiations, careful composition of negotiators (who remained with the processes until the end), capacity building of negotiators, a sense of ownership for the negotiators, country teams taking a lead to take the agreements through the various processes, joint monitoring and joint studies for transparency, regular meetings, and use of secondary data where data was not available, with provision to revisit and refine the details of the agreements later on.
3. **Political will is key for the development of agreement.** From the riparian country perspective, to enter into agreements negotiation, there should be a compelling cause, with support for engagements coming from the political level, e.g. for BUPUSA ministers came together and agreed to form a Joint Water Commission. In addition, accession to the Water Convention enables access of resources to support the development of agreements.

Summary of session outcomes:

- Getting to the process of developing agreements on transboundary waters is an important achievement of stakeholders discussing priorities, and possible means for cooperation.
- Key ingredients of successful agreements include benefit sharing – there must be a way that each country is marginally better off for the agreement; compliance and enforcement – to ensure a mechanism for implementation of the agreements; adaptive management – e.g. revisiting and reviewing the agreement after every 5 years.
- There is practical guidance and support available from the Water Convention.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- From the GEF project management angle, transparent process facilitation, agile adaptive management, and agreement on technical approaches are some of the key elements for successfully managing a negotiation process.

- GEF Projects can support the development of agreements using available guidance (e.g. the Practical Guide) and learning from best practices globally and previous experiences (e.g. as BUPUSA) and taking advantage of relevant national processes, such as accession to the Water Convention.

How to foster innovative instruments for Water Security in Transboundary Water Systems [Session code: IWC-D3-03]

Coordinator: Fabiana Bianchi, CAF – Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean

The session discussed the challenges and opportunities to foster innovative instruments for water security in transboundary waters: constraints and opportunities of Latin America and the Caribbean & West Africa, particularly, on innovative instruments for the sustainable management of transboundary resources.
In this context, this session provided a space to:

i. share experiences and lessons learned in transboundary waters, discuss the needs and opportunities in terms of governance and financing for transboundary water management and the role of transboundary cooperation as an investment facilitator;
ii. propose recommendations for new ways forward.

How to navigate Conjunctive Management of Surface and Groundwater [Session code: IWC-D3-04]

Coordinators: Jose Luis Martin Bordes, UNESCO-IHP; Sebastián Izquierdo, UNDP

Conjunctive management of water resources in developing countries lacks robust public policies, often addressed based on local needs (water supply or agroindustry). Capacity building remains essential, given the high cost of water resource studies and the need to enhance technical, political, and diplomatic competencies at all governance levels. This is particularly relevant in coastal areas, where many human activities interfere with natural active processes at the land-sea interface, and where surface and groundwater resources tend to lose their distinctive characters in the transition to the marine environment, hence requiring conjunctive management approaches.

This IW Clinic Session aimed at promoting participatory processes to involve stakeholders in national or transnational dialogues to discuss potential solutions for Conjunctive Management of Surface and Groundwater. The session built on the preliminary results of three on-going GEF projects within the IW portfolio:

i. Results from 5 national dialogues held in Albania, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro and Morocco organized by UNESCO in the framework of the UNEP/GEF MedProgramme

ii. Results from the Zarumilla and Tulcán-Ipiales Aquifers project led by GEF/UNDP, a cornerstone of transboundary water management between Ecuador and Perú; and Ecuador and Colombia where a comparative analysis of both cases can develop conclusions and recommendations on the main challenges of aquifer management in Latin America, and,
iii. The Guarani Aquifer System (GAS) project led by UNESCO with a presentation of the conclusions and results coming from the cooperative work developed with and by the 4 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

How to leverage NBS to enhance synergies and scalability for Transboundary Water Resilience [Session code: IWC-D3-05]

Coordinators: Mary M. Matthews, UNDP; Christian Susan, UNIDO; Flavia Rocha Loures, The Nature Conservancy; Giuliana Moreira, Pacific Institute

Nature-based solutions (NBS) utilize the power of healthy ecosystems to address a wide range of challenges, offering sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to conventional grey infrastructure. In transboundary contexts, NBS can foster collaboration, enhance resilience, and deliver multiple benefits for people and nature.

This IW Clinic, co-organized by UNDP, UNIDO, The Nature Conservancy, and the Pacific Institute, delved into the meaningful implementation of NBS in GEF IW projects across diverse basins and across freshwater and marine systems. Co-organizers shared their experiences, highlighting what worked and lessons learned, and introduce approaches and tools to identify and measure the benefits and financial and economic cost- efficiency and return on investments of NBS approaches. Furthermore, the possibilities to be supported under the GEF CC funded UNIDO-IISD project ‘‘Using systemic approaches and simulation to scale Nature Based Infrastructure for climate adaptation was shared. This was followed by a facilitated discussion to tackle challenges experienced by the participants and identify potential solutions and explore strategies for replicating and scaling NBS approaches in various geographic and institutional settings.

How to increase coral reef resilience [Session code: IWC-D3-06]

Coordinators: Joelle Albert, University of Queensland; Jacquelyn Beattie, WWF

<u>Key priority messages:</u>

1. Need an organization to lead/champion national multi-sectoral working groups or bodies to influence policy, including for development of government priorities or NAPs
2. When creating multi-sectoral working groups to influence policy you must consider existing groups and organizations to avoid duplication of efforts and form synergies and partnerships

3. Government support and involvement in multi-sectoral working groups needs to be present to ensure integration of results from the working group into policy and create transformational change

Summary of session outcomes:

- Audience asked questions about, and learned about, the development of the National Hubs in Fiji and Indonesia and how to implement these successfully.
- Audience was interested to learn about community involvement and peer-to-peer championing of the national hubs
- For longer-term sustainability there is a need to formalise National Hubs and National Action Plans to ensure there is a process and timeframe for review and implementation. Ongoing funding mechanisms and integration with other initiative are essential.
- Challenges to implement National Action plans include access to funds and ensure integration of community knowledge

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Projects need to consider the need for long-term financing for multi-stakeholder/multi-sectoral platforms beyond the initial project
- Exploring regional/international coordination with existing mechanisms/working groups
- IW could provide a living list or database of working groups or bodies that focus on international waters theme to avoid duplication of efforts and increase coordination across different project to share learning.

How to apply environmental DNA monitoring at scale in freshwater and marine systems [Session code: IWC-D3-07]

Coordinators: James Dalton, IUCN; Benjamin Barca, NatureMetrics; Vere Ross-Gillespie, NatureMetrics

The session explored the challenges and opportunities of applying environmental DNA (eDNA) monitoring at scale in freshwater and marine systems. Starting with a short introduction, it then went on to highlight practical experiences and lessons learned with keynote speakers from IUCN, ORASECOM, ICPDR and NatureMetrics, followed by an interactive session with participants to explore integration of these methodologies into their projects and best practices for early project development.

How to unleash the power of knowledge [Session code: IWC-D3-08]

Coordinators: Konstantina Toli, UNESCO-IOC; Viktoria Varga Lencses & Qingqing Wang, FAO

This clinic aimed to empower participants with practical tools and approaches for harnessing knowledge effectively to drive action in international waters. The session provided a platform for participants to exchange best practices for capturing, developing, and applying knowledge and explore innovative

solutions, including experiences shared by one of the GEF flagship global program-Common Oceans Program.

Key priority messages:

1. Effective knowledge management is essential for maximizing the impact of GEF projects. Transforming technical information into accessible, actionable knowledge helps improve stakeholder awareness and decision-making, enhances project visibility, and drives better project and environmental outcomes.
2. Knowledge should be shared in a format and through media appropriate to the targeted audience.
3. Knowledge should be inclusive, with inputs from various sources and not only from the project itself.

Summary of session outcomes:

1. Participants gained a deeper understanding of how knowledge can be effectively used to address ocean and water challenges and achieve sustainability goals.
2. Participants were inspired to implement new knowledge management strategies within their organizations and projects.
3. Participants familiarized themselves with arrange of options for capturing and disseminating knowledge, varying from traditional publications to digital and visual products and new means to increase outreach to targeted audiences.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

1. In a changing landscape flooded by information, new formats and channels for capturing and sharing knowledge should be explored.
2. Wider collaboration among agencies and projects working on the same subject to coordinate knowledge management and avoid fragmentation should be pursued.
3. Investing in knowledge-sharing practices strengthens project outcomes. Project should have dedicated resources for knowledge management and engage regularly with IW:LEARN to share knowledge generated by their project and increase outreach to a wider audience.

How participatory, multi-stakeholder processes can contribute to effective Regional Ocean Governance in Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) [Session code: IWC-D3-09]

Coordinators: Timothy Andrew, UNEP-Nairobi Convention; Sibongile Mavimbela, Southern African Development Community

Key priority messages:

1. Multi-stakeholder involvement from the outset is critical to ensure ownership of project outputs and products.

2. Best practices from previous projects need to be built on when designing new GEF-funded initiatives.
3. Anchoring ocean governance strategies into existing institutional arrangements is important to ensure political support if these already exist, especially when it comes to implementation.

Summary of session outcomes:

- There was general agreement among participants on the need for multi-stakeholder engagement in the development of regional products to ensure that it is owned by stakeholders.
- Where suitable existing mechanisms exist, they should be used to anchor regional ocean governance products.
- If suitable regional mechanisms do not exist, efforts to ensure political anchoring and support need to be a primary focus of ocean governance processes.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Include the requirement for extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement using tried and tested methods in the development of regional products in support of ocean governance.
- Refer to previous processes such as those used in the western Indian Ocean as best practices to follow.
- Promote the use of virtual engagement mechanisms where possible to ensure that a cost-effective process is followed by IW projects.
- Encourage projects from different regions to share their experiences on stakeholder engagement to enhance global practices in this regard.

How to use Participatory-Citizen Science to improve knowledge and engagement: opportunities and limitations for IW projects [Session code: IWC-D3-10]

Coordinators: Luis Pabon, Adventure Scientists; Glen Hearns, Adventure Scientists

Key priority messages:

1. Scaling Up Participatory Citizen Science (PCS) in GEF IW Projects: PCS has the potential to become a powerful tool for local involvement, empowerment, and input in decision-making within GEF IW projects. Scaling-up its use will enhance community engagement in water management, improving both project outcomes and local ownership.
2. IW LEARN can play a key role by providing essential resources, such as toolkits, guidelines, and training sessions. These resources will help projects integrate PCS more effectively, paving the way for greater community involvement and more informed, localized decision-making.
3. Establishing a centralized platform to share best practices, case studies, and real-time updates will enable knowledge exchange and foster the growth of PCS. This platform can empower local communities to take on more active roles in project design and implementation, furthering their influence in GEF IW projects.

Summary of session outcomes:

- Session highlighted that PCS is important for: Sustaining and enhancing community engagement; Improving education, awareness and livelihood opportunities for community members (particularly those that participate in the collection and analysis of data) ; Improves community pride and ownership over nature – including community law enforcement ; Increasing the geographical area that can be covered by projects; Producing faster time-sensitive data over a large area; Cost savings to obtain quality data; Improved data quality with new technologies such as eDNA, use of Artificial Intelligence, wireless technologies – including phone apps, etc.
- IWLEARN and the GEF can help advance and overcome challenges in implementing PCS appropriately. There should be a standard set of principles developed for PCS in GEF projects - including how to share benefits with the public, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- GEF IW could enhance its support for citizen science by developing specialized toolkits, guidelines, resource websites, and trainings that focus on integrating citizen science into water management projects.
- Encouraging discussions on the role of citizen science in International Waters projects is essential, alongside exploring innovative funding mechanisms that can sustain these initiatives over the long term.
- Strengthening regional cooperation in transboundary water management through citizen science can foster better collaboration and shared goals across borders.
- A key unresolved issue is how to effectively engage local communities in long-term citizen science efforts, while empowering them to manage and sustain these initiatives independently.
- We recommend GEF IW create a centralized platform for sharing best practices, materials, and updates on citizen science projects, enabling real-time access to valuable resources.
- Hosting region-specific workshops on citizen science challenges would facilitate stronger collaboration and capacity-building among teams, enhancing local project outcomes.
- Providing guidance on securing sustainable funding specifically for citizen science initiatives is critical for ensuring their long-term success.
- Platforms that facilitate knowledge exchange between successful citizen science projects would be invaluable for sharing lessons and strategies.
  Offering workshops or webinars that focus on best practices in citizen science data collection, validation, and community engagement would strengthen these initiatives and enhance their effectiveness across regions.

How do Governance and Management Strategies tackle Transboundary Water Pollution in freshwater and marine ecosystems [Session code: IWC-D3-11]

Coordinators: Viviane Kinyaga, ORASECOM; Laura Piñeiros, IUCN

Key priority messages:

1. The need for harmonization of policies and strategies at regional level (combining all RBOs/LMEs/RSBs in the region). This should standardize monitoring, data sharing etc. as opposed to current duplication being done by RBOs/ marine institutions. International best standards and best practices in place can serve as guidance.
2. Partnership building with various stakeholders should be the corner stone of all projects especially with the private sector including agriculture, industrial and extractive sectors. Citizen science and academic institutions can play an important role database.
3. Political will and commitment are still a stumbling block in the implementation of project interventions and their sustainability.

Summary of session outcomes:

- Governance plays a key role in the implementation of measures to address challenges related to pollution. The right tools can only be sustainable with the right enabling environment
- Governance and management complement each other in a continuous process to address pollution challenges. The process is iteratively refined taking into consideration learning and improvements.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Overarching projects that propose regional policies and strategies to harmonize data monitoring and sharing at basin level and transboundary marine environments.
- Ensure participation of government institutions, private sector, communities for grant co-financing, up-scale and expansion of national projects that address pollution, including at the transboundary level.
- Investments in the implementation of tools and actions that address pollution and link lessons learned to improve governance instruments (feedback loop between governance and management).

How to improve communication and outreach using contemporary means and tools [Session code: IWC-D3-12]

Coordinators: Olivia Rempel, GRID-Arendal; Hélène Masliah-Gilkarov, ICPDR

Key priority messages:

1. **Hands-On Communication Tools**: As a follow-up and continuation from the pre-conference COMMs workshop, the clinic provided participants with practical resources for their Communication Toolbox, which included:
    - A fact sheet template for interacting with journalists and media.
    - An elevator pitch outline to help participants craft concise, persuasive messages about their organization and/or a project.

- An organizational structure overview template to visually represent roles and responsibilities within their organization.
- A social media campaign outline with detailed steps to develop successful campaigns.
- Comprehensive notes from the workshop that combined theoretical and practical insights.

These tools help participants improve their communication strategies in real-world scenarios.

2. **Tailoring Communication Styles**: Through the interactive Coffee and Communication presentation from the ICPDR, participants learned how communication styles should be adjusted based on their target audience and specific circumstances, much like how you would choose a coffee drink depending on your mood, time of day, or personal preferences.
   Just as you consider different factors when choosing coffee, the same applies to selecting the right communication approach to make your message effective and engaging for various audiences.
3. **Accessible Communication**: The importance of making communication accessible to all audiences, including the deaf and hard of hearing, was emphasized in the session. Tips were shared on how we can actively improve accessibility within COMMs, such as incorporating captions, using sign language interpreters, and choosing appropriate colors and fonts.

<u>Summary of session outcomes:</u>

The COMMs Clinic provided participants with practical, hands-on tools to enhance their communication strategies going forward. Co-led by GRID-Arendal and ICPDR, with contributions from the ATSEA-2, and Ivan Zavadsky of GWP-CEE, the session focused on addressing different communication challenges and offering practical solutions.

The clinic was structured into two 40-minute blocks, allowing participants to revisit and refine the communication tools developed in the pre-conference workshop. One of the standout activities was the Brew Your Perfect Communication Coffee exercise, where participants learned to tailor their communication styles to fit various audiences, similar to how one selects a coffee based on different preferences.

The highly engaged audience was regularly asking questions and sharing anecdotes. They also learned some tips and tricks of how to take better photos, capture better video, and record good audio. One of the key messages here was the importance of being intentional, know your audience and know what you're trying to say with the media you create.

Participants were also provided with insights on accessibility in communications, with Tharā Gabriel presenting strategies to ensure inclusive communication practices, particularly for individuals with hearing or visual impairments. She emphasized the importance of using captions, transcripts, and other accessible formats to ensure that everyone, including the deaf, hard of hearing, and blind communities, can fully engage with the content.

By the end of the clinic, participants left with personalized communication tools and a deeper understanding of how to apply them in real-world scenarios, enhancing both their strategic thinking and their ability to craft effective, audience-specific messages.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Encourage Accessible and Inclusive Communication
- Support Continuous Learning in Communication
- Foster collaboration between IW projects by creating a shared space for teams to exchange COMMs materials across projects

How can I effectively integrate gender equality and social inclusion and achieve gender equality outcomes in my GEF-IW project(s) [Session code: IWC-D3-13]

Coordinators: Verona Collantes Lebale, GEF; Laura Veronica Imburgia, UNESCO WWAP; Pamela Castillo, WCS

Key priority messages:

- **Integrate gender perspectives/involve women and gender experts** in the development of the TDA/SAP
- **Incorporate activities and outputs that contribute to women's/women's groups' self-enhancement** (e.g., micro-finance schemes, grant programs, credits, loans, for women in fishing communities,
- **Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Participation**: Monitor project impacts on women and men, ensure women's participation in decision-making, and use gender-responsive indicators.

Summary of session outcomes:

- Shared experiences and questions compiled and inform GEF's capacity-building and knowledge-sharing workplan on gender and social inclusion for 2024-2025.
- Feed into the GEF Gender Partnership's discussions on gender indicators and strategic reflection of gender perspectives in GEF projects.
- Better understanding of gender mainstreaming and social inclusion among participants.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Foster collaboration to share best practices in gender mainstreaming and project implementation (IW gender leads among agencies, to be invited to join the GEF Gender Partnership)
- UNESCO-WWAP to lead in engaging agencies interested, and the GEF Secretariat, in the work related to indicators, developing knowledge products, updating the IW:LEARN website gender page
- Identify opportunities to collaborate in raising awareness, build capacity on gender mainstreaming, gender analysis in IW project development, as well as in capturing and disseminating gender-specific results.

How to Incorporate High Integrity Blue Forest Solutions into GEF Projects [Session code: IWC-D3-14]

Coordinator: Steven Lutz, GRID-Arendal

Diving into the evolving world of blue carbon markets, this dynamic IW Clinic session focused on how high integrity nature-based solutions (NbS) can be realized though blue carbon and blue forests projects. Drawing from the UNEP Blue Forests Project, this session highlighted key lessons and best practices for designing and implementing blue carbon and blue forests initiatives that are not only effective in sequestering carbon but also ensure long-term ecological and socio-economic benefits.

The session began with a short video and presentation from an expert speaker who provided an overview of the UNEP Blue Forests Project and its impact on blue carbon markets. The presentation covered critical aspects such as developing robust methodologies, ensuring transparency, and achieving measurable outcomes. The speaker also discussed the importance of high integrity NbS in enhancing the credibility and sustainability of blue carbon projects.

Following the presentation, the format shifted to an interactive discussion. During this time, the presenter facilitated a conversation among participants, inviting them to share their experiences, challenges, and insights related to implementing NbS within blue carbon projects. This discussion aimed to foster a collaborative environment where attendees can learn from each other and develop practical strategies for enhancing their projects.

How to develop GEF IW projects following STAP guidance on good project design [Session code: IWC-D3-15]

Coordinators: Virginia Gorsevski, GEF STAP; Susanne Schmeier, GEF STAP

This session began with a short presentation on STAP's screening guidelines and a brief explanation of what STAP looks for when screening GEF projects and how projects are rated by STAP, providing participants with an understanding of what criteria STAP applies in its work and what this means for project proposals/PIFs. The remainder of the session was interactive by walking through each section of the GEF-9 PIF template with participants, using generic examples from the IW portfolio to illustrate concepts and working with specific examples participants are invited to bring to the session.

Stream 3 - Transforming the Future: Opportunities and challenges

Transforming the future for a Healthy Planet, Healthy People

Plenary Session

Navigating the Future: Transforming IW with Innovation and Technology – Talk show

The first part of the plenary session on the last day of the conference, delivered by GEF STAP, investigated:

i. the need for innovation and transformation in IW
ii. what has been done in last years but why is this insufficient and
iii. push factors/conditions for more transformation.

Key messages

Water Conflict Transformation Approach: Susanne Schmeier introduced a framework for transforming water conflicts, developed by Aaron Wolf at Oregon State University. This approach focuses on **transforming conflicts** into lasting peace, rather than merely resolving or mitigating them.

Four-Step Process for Transformational Change: The process for achieving transformational change in international waters (IW) involves:

- **Assessing the state of the system**: Understanding current conditions, pressures, and identifying key actors, including those resistant to change.
- **Changing mindsets**: Moving beyond political boundaries, understanding the costs of inaction, and planning for long-term transformation.
- **Generating joint benefits**: Focusing on people's needs rather than interests, ensuring that solutions benefit all stakeholders.
- **Ensuring sustainability**: Strengthening institutions, developing capacity, and securing financial resources for lasting change.

Relevance to GEF Projects: The approach is compared to the **Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA)** process used in many GEF International Waters projects. Both processes involve assessing the state of a basin or ecosystem, identifying challenges, and planning for improvement.

Challenge of Achieving Lasting Transformation: Despite many TDAs and similar initiatives, the text questions how many of these processes have led to **genuine transformational change**, suggesting that the real challenge lies in translating these analyses into long-term, sustainable solutions.

In the next segment, Nagaraja Harshadeep from the World Bank highlighted the role of **technological innovations** in addressing challenges in transboundary water management, emphasizing their potential to integrate various perspectives and improve decision-making processes.

Figure 14: Nagaraja Harshadeep, World Bank

He outlined three key areas where technology can play a crucial role:
1. Data Value Chains: Technological advancements in data collection and analysis, such as sensors, satellite Earth observation, and drones, can improve the gathering and processing of data. These technologies, combined with big data analytics and AI, enable the transformation of raw data into actionable knowledge and decision support systems for planning and operational management in transboundary basins.
2 Hardware Innovations: Focus on the growing importance of hardware innovations, such as new materials, automation, and robotics, which can provide more efficient and cost-effective solutions. Examples include 3D-printed housing and sensors, which significantly reduce costs compared to traditional methods while enabling real-time monitoring of water systems.
3. Integration Across Sectors: There is an increasing need for a more integrated, holistic approach to managing international waters, where technology can help overcome the fragmented
Overall, Nagaraja Harshadeep placed **technological innovations** at the heart of improving the management of international waters by enhancing data collection, enabling better analysis and decision-making, and providing cost-effective hardware solutions for monitoring and intervention.

A video by UNDP OIC, titled "Co-creating a Sustainable Future for Our Shared Waters with Innovations", served as a segue into the second part of the session.

Fostering inclusivity in IW – Talk Show

The GEF fosters inclusivity by prioritizing stakeholder engagement across all stages of its programming cycle, particularly in the areas of project development, execution, evaluation, and governance. It emphasizes the involvement of diverse groups, including women, indigenous peoples, youth, local communities, and people with disabilities, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Through initiatives like constituency workshops and partnership forums, the GEF actively strengthens its engagement with these key stakeholders, recognizing their vital role in shaping and implementing effective environmental projects.

The second part of the plenary session of the last day focused on youth engagement, Indigenous Peoples, gender equality and social inclusion in IW projects. The session took the form of a talk show/interview with prepared questions on how to foster inclusivity.

Figure 15: Panel - Fostering inclusivity in IW

Eliana Harrigan, from One Water, highlighted effective ways to involve young people in the implementation process and decision-making related to international waters by recognizing them as legitimate stakeholders and actively including them in discussions. This can be achieved by engaging them as both listeners and speakers, ensuring information is communicated in ways that are relevant to them. Youth should be given platforms to share their perspectives, such as through interviews or documentaries, which can influence decision-makers directly. Additionally, fostering inclusive environments that prioritize respect, dialogue, and storytelling has been shown to lead to better policy outcomes and meaningful change.

Raymond Schuster travelled us to the Pacific, where youth inclusion is being prioritized through projects that bridge traditional knowledge with modern water management practices. These initiatives engage young people in activities such as social cultural surveys and water resource monitoring, allowing them to reconnect with the value of groundwater, traditionally managed by older generations. The project *Managing Coastal Aquifers in Selected Pacific SIDS* aims to address the knowledge gap by involving

youth in decision-making, building their capacity for water management, and empowering them to become leaders in their communities, ensuring the integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary solutions for water security and climate adaptation.

Lucia Samaniego, from the GroundWater Youth Network, also shared several innovative ideas to involve young people in the IW decision-making procedures:

1. **Cultural programs in universities and study centers**: These programs can raise awareness of water management challenges and the importance of sustainable practices.
2. **International collaboration**: Creating projects and agreements that bring together young people from different countries, especially those sharing common water resources like aquifers, can foster dialogue and cooperation.
3. **Dedicated spaces for expression**: Organizing forums, workshops, and other platforms where young people can present their ideas and proposals related to water issues encourages active participation.
4. **Volunteer opportunities**: Offering volunteer roles in organizations focused on water issues allows youth to gain practical experience and contribute to real-world water management activities.
5. **Digital tools development**: Involving young people in creating applications or digital platforms that promote efficient water management and raise awareness is a powerful way to engage them in innovative solutions.
6. **Competitions and challenges**: Organizing competitions that challenge youth to develop innovative solutions to water-related problems can stimulate creative thinking and problem-solving.

Lastly, the Guarani Kaiowá Indigenous Leader, Valdelice Veron, provided the following key messages to the International Waters community regarding the meaningful engagement of Indigenous peoples, particularly women:

1. **Respect for Indigenous Knowledge and Spirituality**: Indigenous peoples, particularly women, hold deep spiritual and traditional knowledge of natural resources, such as water, which are integral to their culture and identity. Their role as guardians of water, like the Kaiowá women who protect sacred aquifers, should be acknowledged and respected.
2. **Inclusion of Indigenous Voices**: Indigenous communities, including women, have a unique and essential perspective on water management, deeply rooted in their connection to the land and their ancestral territories. Ensuring their participation in decision-making processes is vital for effective and sustainable management of water resources.
3. **Autonomy and Self-Determination**: Indigenous peoples must be allowed to maintain autonomy over their territories and resources, and their rights to protect their sacred lands and waters should be upheld. This includes respecting their role in managing and safeguarding water resources for future generations.
4. **Respect for Traditional Territories**: The protection and preservation of traditional territories, where Indigenous peoples' ancestors rest and where they continue to live, is crucial. These territories are not just land but integral to their cultural and spiritual practices.

5. **Building Mutual Respect and Collaboration**: Engaging with Indigenous communities requires building deep mutual respect, listening to their voices, and learning from their wisdom, which is crucial for harmonizing modern water governance with traditional environmental stewardship practices.

Interactive Sessions

Theme D: Sustainable Fisheries & Aquaculture Management: Integrating Ecosystem Approaches for Resilient Resources and Livelihoods [Session code: IS-D4-D]

Coordinators: Lorenzo Galbiati, FAO; Charlotte de Fontaubert, The World Bank

Hosted by FAO and the World Bank, this interactive session brought together representatives of the University of West Indies, UNEP, GEF Secretariat, General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), African Development Bank, FAO and the SWIOFish3 project of Seychelles.

The first part of the event comprised a series of questions and answers, which, together, provided some important lessons on the need for regional approaches, integrating the climate change dimension into fisheries management, and the foremost importance of community co-management.
The University of West Indies then presented a new game they have created, where participants need to guess the fisheries management concept that is suggested with the use of synonyms. The game was played, to great effect and enthusiasm, which led to the discussion of important sustainable fisheries management concepts.

<u>Session outcomes:</u>

1. The REBYC II CLME+ Project aims to address the unsustainable practice of bycatch in tropical fisheries, where millions of tons of unwanted fish are discarded annually. The project focuses on introducing sustainable fishing gear modifications and practices that improve gear selectivity, reduce bycatch, and enhance the survival rates of released fish. It also tackles the issue of abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear (ghost gear) that entangles marine life and damages ecosystems. A key example of a solution being tested is the use of green LED lights in gillnets in Trinidad and Tobago to reduce leatherback sea turtle entanglements. While initial trials showed no turtle captures but a loss of fish catch, fishers are optimistic about further testing and potential modifications to improve both safety and catch rates. The project emphasizes an ecosystem-based approach, balancing conservation and livelihood needs, especially in small-scale fisheries.
2. Fisheries Refugia are designated marine areas aimed at protecting fish stocks and their habitats, allowing fish to reproduce, grow, and recover. These safe zones help restore fish populations, which benefits surrounding fisheries and supports the sustainable blue economy by promoting eco-tourism, aquaculture, and marine conservation. Unlike traditional fisheries management,

which focuses on individual species, the refugia approach considers the health of entire ecosystems, balancing conservation with sustainable human activities. Coastal communities play a crucial role in the success of this approach, contributing their traditional knowledge and engaging in the management of refugia to protect marine resources and sustain their livelihoods.

3. Women's empowerment is a key component of GEF sustainable fisheries and integrated water resources (IW)-related projects because women play a crucial yet often invisible role in the fisheries value chain, especially in small-scale fishing. They contribute significantly to fish catches and the economic value of the sector but face gender-based constraints, including limited access to resources, decision-making, and economic opportunities. By incorporating gender equality interventions, such as the Coastal Fisheries Initiative in Latin America, GEF projects can enhance their outcomes by improving women's skills, market access, and economic participation. Successful initiatives include providing training in administration, finance, and sustainable fisheries management, establishing women-led enterprises, and promoting women's leadership in governance. Key practices for ensuring gender equality in these projects include addressing women's contributions across the value chain, improving leadership representation, and conducting gender analysis and stakeholder mapping to guide gender-transformative actions.
4. Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) play a crucial role in scaling up national fisheries management strategies into a cohesive, ecosystem-based approach at the regional level by providing a framework for common strategies, scientific advice, and decision-making. They facilitate coordination with other governance frameworks, such as environmental bodies, ensuring a holistic approach. The GFCM, responsible for the Mediterranean and Black Sea, has successfully reduced overexploitation of commercial fish stocks from 86% to 58% through adaptive, inclusive, and participatory management plans. The FishEBM MED and BS projects contribute to this success by addressing key gaps and ensuring the sustainability of the ecosystem-based approach. To foster resilient management in the face of challenges like climate change, engaging stakeholders and promoting ownership, supporting complementary livelihoods (e.g., aquaculture), and integrating social protection policies are essential. Continued support for RFMOs and proven frameworks is also vital for long-term success.
5. AfDB projects have significantly contributed to enhancing community resilience to climate change impacts on fisheries by improving food security and nutrition through fish farming and access to fish as a "superfood." These projects also promote integrated livelihoods, empowering women and strengthening value chains, while fostering eco-tourism. Community-based watershed management, including early warning systems and climate adaptation measures, helps communities cope with climate variability and extreme weather events. To address overfishing while maintaining economic viability for local fishers, the AfDB focuses on reducing fishing effort, monitoring maritime flows, and supporting mangrove habitats and climate resilience. The Bank has also invested in sustainable fisheries productivity and value chain activities, such as ecolabeling. Key partnerships with international financiers, conservation groups, UN agencies like FAO, and centers of excellence like WorldFish have been crucial for the success of these initiatives.

6. Seychelles' 2018 issuance of its first sovereign Blue Bond supports the SWIOFish3 project's goals of sustainable fisheries management and strengthening value chains. The bond raised USD 15 million, with USD 3 million allocated to the Blue Grants Fund (BGF) for conservation, overfishing reduction, and sustainable business models. The remaining USD 12 million went to the Blue Investment Fund (BIF) to help scale fisheries businesses. These funds support SWIOFish3's focus on marine protection, sustainable governance, and community resilience. The project implemented an ecosystem-based approach by developing Fisheries Management Plans, expanding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and revising regulations to ensure sustainability. It also engaged local communities and fishers in decision-making, balancing ecological health with economic growth. Fisheries co-management was achieved by forming committees led by fishermen's associations, ensuring active participation in decision-making. Regular consultations, capacity-building, and exchange visits helped strengthen local ownership and commitment to sustainable practices.

Theme E: Fostering inclusivity: Gender and Youth engagement in IW projects [Session code: IS-D4-E]

Coordinators: James Dalton, IUCN; Michela Miletto, UNESCO/WWAP; Laura Veronica Imburgia, UENSCO/WWAP

Key priority messages:

1. There is a demand among project managers, country representatives and government personnel of acquiring the know-how to properly integrate gender and inclusion considerations and develop action plans *before* implementing actions. Countries often lack adequate skills while GEF projects have advanced demands on gender and inclusion.
2. The level of funding for gender and inclusion in GEF projects is usually not commensurate with the amount of work required, outcomes committed and project partners' expectations.
3. Inclusion is not only about engagement and participation; it should also directly help communities and indigenous groups through actions that help with economic opportunities, empowerment and influence.

Summary of session outcomes:

- There is an important and increasing demand of including gender, youth and indigenous groups considerations in GEF projects, however, there is still an important need of strengthening knowledge, skills and funds for properly doing it.
- There are useful tools and good practices that are being developed by different projects on the ground. It will be useful to link them together and develop more instances for discussion and exchange. The interest of participants during the session in discussing longer and openly is a sign of this need.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- There is a need to count on a repository of good practices and tools related to stakeholder analysis and planning, and the use of gender-responsive impact indicators – optimization of IW:LEARN on this regard.
- To establish a moderated community of practice within IW:LEARN that engages gender and inclusion focal persons.
- Consider regular updates of identification/mapping of stakeholders during project preparation and inception, especially when there are project delays.
- Include early career researchers to be present at key project annual meetings.

Theme F: Looking into the future: Ensure robustness to future change [Session code: IS-D4-F]

Coordinators: Raúl Muñoz Castillo, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB); Arunkumar Samuel Abraham, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Key priority messages:

1. **Mobilizing sustainable finance for climate resilient IW projects:** innovative financial mechanisms are essential for sustaining adaptation projects and climate resilience efforts beyond the project lifecycle.
2. **Best practices for private sector engagement:** Successful projects integrate private sector through transparent mechanisms, which enhances financial flows and provides scalability for adaptation projects.
3. **Public-Private Collaboration for long-term water security solutions:** Cross-sectoral partnerships, particularly between governments and industry, are critical in securing long-term financing for nature-based solutions and water security adaptation measures.

Summary of session outcomes:

- **Innovative mechanisms and instruments for sustainable financing**: Participants discussed strategies to mobilize and implement sustainable financing mechanisms, with a focus on the role of public-private partnerships in enhancing both financial stability and resilience efforts. For example, the Adaptation Benefit Mechanism was presented under the representation of the AfDB and, as other successful case, the Med Programme (UNEP/MAP) was presented, showcasing how the public-private collaboration is being applied under different stages. CAF also intervened showcasing its experience mobilizing finance for adaptation and resilience in a sustainable manner.
- **Showcasing best practices for climate adaptation projects**: Several projects highlighted their best practices in private sector engagement. Two main examples were covered. Firstly, we heard from IMO (GloNoise Project and GloFouling Project) how different industry partners are being mapped and contacted, and from TNC, how private partners are part of Water Funds structures and governance mechanisms for water security. In addition, ADB presented the Healthy Oceans Action Plan for Sustainable Blue Economies.

- **Collaboration and knowledge exchange**: This outcome is focused on the importance of fostering collaboration across industries, governments, and NGOs to exchange knowledge and best practices, ensuring that innovative solutions are scalable and applicable across different regions, and its funding is sustainable across project-cycle.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Innovative financial mechanisms were a topic of major interest between the audience. Further specific workshops on the matter are strongly recommended, also with the possibility to regionalize them and tailored to countries' needs.
- Private sector involvement is still a relevant challenge that many participants highlighted. From participating in the financing structure to being an external co-financer, private sector entities can play a different role and in different stages of the project-cycle. Since water adaptation projects can highly differ in scope and technical aspects, mapping and degree of involvement have been identified as challenges. It is recommended to deepen the understanding of this topic, including clear guidance on what to expect in the design and execution of IW Projects and invite more private sector partners to follow up meetings.

Workshops

Striving for Social and Economic Equity in LME & MPA Management [Session code: WS-D4-01]

Coordinator: Lihla Noori, Blue Nature Alliance

Key priority messages:

1. **Facilitation of authentic community engagement and prioritization local knowledge** is paramount to project success, durability and equitable benefit sharing.
2. **Must invest in capacity development**- need the right human resources, skills and attitudes on both sides (project and community) to co-create and expand opportunities for community participation, buy-in and trust building- especially in colonized communities.
3. Project funds must be **flexible so that they can be reached by local organizations** who support execution and to **compensate those whose local and traditional knowledge,** guidance and advice help inform and steer project scope, design and approach. Furthermore, **access to project funds should be consistent**, gaps between projects hinders the ability to work with communities and practice social equity principles because **relationships and trust are lost when the project disappears for several years and then restarts**.

Summary of session outcomes:

Expanded IW:LEARN GEF Community's understanding for how to ensure the durability and legitimacy of marine conservation, when the following overarching social principles are sufficiently resourced and applied in LME and MPA management :

- Recognize and respect the dignity and diversity of local people;
- Employ and elevate participatory decision-making and good governance.
- Promote the equitable distribution of benefits and costs; and
- Champion collaborative and effective management of the marine environment.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Long term durability of project outcomes and transfer of knowledge depends on a project's ability to plan for and resource adaptive management, including lessons learned development, sharing and an action learning agenda that can help inform other conservation and multi-sector projects.
- Recommend GEF requires each project to clarify and well resource explicit community benefits and intentional stakeholder inclusion activities from project design through to completion. Identify mechanisms to compensate for community participation and knowledge sharing.
- As this is a new space for many, consider if GEF could offer a Social Equity primer that includes a list of Human Dimensions and Social Equity practical guidance available or other means to support project development for GEF Grantees to ensure this is prioritized in every project.

Data and Information Management (DIM) in IW projects and programmes [Session code: WS-D4-02]

Coordinators: Claudette Briere Spiteri, UNESCO-IOC; Vladimir Mamaev, UNDP; Khristine Gudczinski, UNDP; Isabelle Vanderbeck, UNEP

Key priority messages:

1. **A longer-term approach to Data and Information Management (DIM) is required** - one that institutionalizes DIM at the portfolio level, looking beyond individual projects.
2. **Visualization is a key aspect –** "Keep it simple, get away from detail, allow for additional detail if needed".
3. **There's a mismatch between available and needed data,** compounded with the challenge of identifying fit-for-purpose impact indicators.

Summary of session outcomes:

- This workshop served as a continuation of the first DIM workshop held on June 5, 2024, and designed to resume activities under the DIM workstream after a five-year hiatus.
- The first session on setting the scene highlighted the key issues of data swamp, interoperability needs, sustainability, visualization, the revival of the DIM Working Group and the Knowledge Management and Learning Strategy of GEF.
- This was complemented with experiences from projects and partners, including the achievements and challenges faced.
- The three breakout discussion focused on the role of DIM in effective project management, environmental assessments and global reporting efforts.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

- Develop a portfolio-level DIM framework that provides guidance on common standards, protocols, and goals applicable to all projects, through the support of the DIM Working Group
- Improve data accessibility and understanding through simplified and flexible visualization techniques
- Enhance the sharing of best practices, case studies and process reports on DIM, also through the update of the DIM metadata catalogue
- Facilitate real-time collaboration and peer-to-peer exchanges through e.g. online forum, twinning programmes etc.

Shared Basin, Shared Destiny: Fostering Collaborative Water Governance for a Sustainable Future through the RBO Game [Session code: WS-D4-03]

Coordinator: Hélène Masliah-Gilkarov, ICPDR

Key priority messages:

1. Institutional/legal and financial effectiveness is one of the key precursors of the sustainability of the GEF IW Focal Area projects impact
2. Successful past GEF IW projects proved the assumption above – when projects invested in building strong institutions, environmental benefits were generated, and cooperation persisted over time
3. GEF IW projects should be flexible and creative in their design/implementation in assisting beneficiary countries to set-up sustainable RBOs, taking into account local conditions and key principles stipulated in existing global water conventions and/or basin-specific treaties

Summary of session outcomes:

The session showed strong interest from GEF IW constituency in the design and functioning of an efficient RBO. It also provided ample of examples of good practices but also several barriers in doing so in regions, where trust and cooperation among countries sharing the basin/aquifer is missing or is difficult built in the short time, provided by the GEF IW project.

Proposals for way forward for IW:

The GEF IW FA should put stronger attention to one of the basic principles of the GEF IW Operational Strategy (1995) to design projects to support the building trust and strengthening cooperation of countries sharing the water system via joint institutions, which are pre-conditions for delivering global environmental benefits through sustainable management of the shared water systems while preventing conflicts and generating peace co-benefits.

Closing message from the GEF CEO

''I'm really honored to address you on behalf of the Global Environment Facility. First, I would like to extend my thanks to the government of Uruguay for their kind hospitality and support and the hosting of this conference. Your efforts and warm welcome have set the scene for the meaningful exchanges and dialogues over this past week. The International Waters Conference is a unique event and the cornerstone of focal area's effort to foster collaboration, share knowledge and build capacity across our global community. It is a critical platform for cross sectoral learning and experience sharing. The GEF International Water Focal Area has been dedicated to promoting transboundary and multi country sustainable management practice to protect and restore the planet's marine and freshwater resources. The GEF International Waters community should be proud of the last 30 years with more than 470 projects benefited 157 countries representing 3 billion worth of grants that have leveraged almost $20 billions of co-financing. More than ever, the fragile ecosystems that have sustained life for millennia are threatened by changing climate and the negative consequences of human activities, in particular pollution, all kinds of different pollution. Freshwater and marine environments are critical to prosperous human society and vibrant biodiversity. It is essential for the GEF to continue to invest in their preservation and conservation. Neither the ocean nor the climate recognizes borders, languages, flags or any other limitations to their natural dynamics. The successful conclusion of this 10th International Waters Conference illustrates the importance of transboundary collaboration to put nature first. The IW:LEARN project has been instrumental in this mission, providing an essential hub for knowledge exchange, capacity building and the dissemination of best practices. With IW:LEARN and through all your strong participation over the years, we have created a vibrant community of practice that spans the globe and is an internationally recognized benchmark. This unique network of project managers, country officials, scientists, practitioners, implementing agencies and partners is essential for sharing success, failures and lessons learned, and to drive innovation in their efforts to achieve impactful results. Looking forward, your important discussions and dialogues that took place during this week's conference will be taken on board to help us shape the next phase of our work on GEF-9 and beyond. Our Healthy Planet, Healthy People framework continues to underpin how we work. It is integrated within projects and programs and addresses important cross-cutting issues like gender, youth and the private sector engagement. The GEF International Waters Focal Area will continue to be pivotal in the implementation of this framework as there is no life without water and there is no green without blue. We need to accelerate collective efforts to address the triple planetary crisis through greater policy coherence, integration and innovation, leading to greater impact and supporting a whole of society approach. The GEF is firmly committed to supporting your projects and your programs that address the most pressing regional and transboundary challenges facing our planet. We continue to learn and evolve, and we'll work together towards a future where our natural resources are managed sustainably for the benefit of all. Thank you and safe travels.''

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

Technical Site Visits

Itinerary 1

Wastewater treatment facilities

Montevideo wastewater treatment facilities provide valuable insights into the innovative approaches adopted by Montevideo, fostering a deeper understanding of the region's water management practices. During the visit, attendees will have the opportunity to witness the effective transportation and treatment facilities that have contributed to this remarkable impact on water management.

The facilities consist of a series of infrastructures that fulfil the function of properly conducting the water from the sanitation networks of the west and north of the city, which come from the basins of the Miguelete and Pantanoso streams and the Cerro and Casabó neighbourhoods. This is equivalent to 44% of Montevideo's effluents.

Figure 16: Group photo at the Wastewater treatment facilities

At the plant, a pre-treatment of the water is carried out consisting of a system of grates, sand traps and sieves that allow solid waste to be separated from wastewater.
The waste removed in the process is conditioned by compactors and sand dehydrators to be transported to the city's Final Waste Disposal Site. In addition, the plant carries out a biological gas treatment, which prevents the annoying odours released by the wastewater received and protects the installed equipment. The pre-treated waters are finally discharged properly into the Río de la Plata through an underwater outfall that disposes of them more than 2 kilometers from the coast.

Montevideo Old City

The Old City, or "Ciudad Vieja," in the heart of the capital, is a captivating blend of colonial architecture, bustling markets, and an artistic flair.

Figure 17: Group photo in Montevideo Old City

Highlights:

1. Walk though cobblestone streets lined with stunning buildings that date back to the 18th and 19th centuries.
2. Discover some iconic landmarks, like the Teatro Solis, the oldest theatre in South America, and the impressive Palacio Salvo,
3. “Ciudadela Gate” part of a wall used for defensive and commercial purposes.
4. Old Port Market building, designed in 1885 with the goal of creating the largest market in South America.

Santa Lucia Wetlands

The Santa Lucía Wetlands are a protected area located in the west of Montevideo, near the town Santiago Vázquez. They are shared between the departments of San José and Canelones, and they have a total area of 86,517 hectares.

Figure 18: Back photo in Santa Lucía Wetlands

The Wetlands are characterized by being composed of different ecosystems: native forest and scrub, grassland, associated forests to wetlands, exotic forests and urbanization. They are transition ecosystems: they are between an earthly environment and an aquatic one.

The Wetlands offer key ecosystem services to fulfill environmental functions of great relevance: they are reservoirs of fresh water, prevent erosion, regulate and control the effects of floods, contribute to the mitigation of climate change, contain high biodiversity, are ecological filters, and have great socioeconomic value.

Itinerary 2

Rocha Lagoon (Laguna de Rocha)

Rocha Lagoon or Laguna de Rocha is part of the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP) of Uruguay, as a "protected landscape".

Figure 19: Snapshot from the visit in Rocha Lagoon

It has approximately 22,000 hectares, which includes 7,200 of water, hills, plains, the coastal and part of the oceanic platform. It was also declared a National Lake Park and a world biosphere reserve for UNESCO in 1977. Since 2015, it has been part of the list of wetlands with international relevance prepared by the Ramsar Convention. Like the Garzon Lagoon, it periodically communicates with the Atlantic Ocean through a natural system of opening and closing sandy bars. This Lagoon particularly serves as a home and refuge for threatened birds, where they are home to more than 220 species. Feeding, nesting and resting site for birds, both resident and migratory. It is one of the few places in Uruguay where the flamingo lives and its population of black-necked swans is one of the largest in the world.

Garzón Lagoon

Laguna Garzón is on the border between the departments of Rocha and Maldonado and is part of the Area for the management of habitats and species, a protected area of Uruguay. The zone, of great richness for its biological diversity, covers 9596 hectares of land surface and 27332 hectares of marine surface. It communicates with the Atlantic Ocean by a sand bar that opens periodically, naturally or artificially by human action. This process favors biological productivity, as it is the breeding site for a significant number of resident and migratory bird species, fish, mollusks and crustaceans. This gives the area of the lagoon a great economic, ecological and landscape value.

The lagoon is also known for being a place to practice aquatic activities such as kitesurfing.

Figure 20: Snapshot from the visit in Garzón Lagoon

Itinerary 3

Black Lagoon (Laguna Negra)

The Black Lagoon or Laguna Negra is the largest lagoon in Uruguay. It has an area of 17,500 hectares and is 7 meters deep in its deepest part. It does not have contact with the sea, being maintained with rainwater. Laguna Negra is one of the Protected Areas of Uruguay, managed by PROBIDES.

Laguna Negra is also part of the Merin Lagoon Basin and Coastal Lagoons GEF Project. The objective if this project is to strengthen public and private sector capacities in Brazil and Uruguay for joint and integrated water resource management (IWRM) in the Merín Lagoon Basin, with emphasis on the sustainable and efficient use of water, preservation of ecosystems and their services, and adaptation to climate change, through the development of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme.

Figure 21: Black Lagoon

Santa Teresa Fort

The history of the Fortress dates back to 1762, when the Portuguese, foreseeing a new conflict with Spain, decided to fortify the point, then called Castillos Chicos. Its walls were built of a double wall of ashlar stone and joined by abutments. The space between the two was filled with earth and rubble to form the walkway and resist the vibrations of enemy artillery fire. Inside this monument you can experience centuries of history. In 1927 it was declared a National Historic Monument.

Figure 22: Santa Teresa Fort

Punta del Diablo Village

Punta del Diablo is a small fisher´s village in the east of Uruguay. It is surrounded by rocks and transparent ocean water.

Figure 23: Punta del Diablo Village

Itinerary 4

Lobos Island (Isla de Lobos)

Isla de Lobos is located in the Atlantic Ocean at 8.5 km from the coast. Here you can find the largest colony of sea lions in South America: more than 180,000 sea lions, the most important worldwide. 20 thousand sea wolves and 12 thousand sea lions of different sizes and ages cohabit peacefully in the 41-hectare rocky mass of granite that has no vegetation. This Island has a lighthouse built in the year 1906, its beam on the sea level is the most powerful in all South America. The native flora on this island is represented by two species of cactus and a species of fern called Calaguala.

Figure 24: Lobos Island

Wastewater Treatment Maldonado - Punta del Este

The Project, which was financing by CAF, will increase sewerage service coverage from 53% to 96%, benefiting a projected population of 417,000 inhabitants by 2035.

With the completed Project, the sanitary infrastructure was adapted to the growing demand of this important tourist area, improving the environmental quality of the inhabitants of Maldonado and other neighboring towns. The most relevant actions are:

- Construction of a wastewater treatment plant with secondary treatment (advanced physical-chemical treatment including mechanical sand traps, flocculation units, sedimentation, anaerobic digesters, UV disinfection, anaerobic sludge digestion and mechanized dehydration by centrifuges, pumping stations, among others).
- Construction of an outfall pipe (4 km on land, 1 km underwater).

The Hand Monument (La Mano)

The Hand (La Mano) is a sculpture in Punta del Este by Chilean artist Mario Irarrázabal. It depicts five human fingers partially emerging from sand and is located on Parada 1 at Brava Beach in Punta del Este, a popular tourist town in Uruguay. It is also known as either Los Dedos (The Fingers), or Hombre emergiendo a la vida (Man Emerging into Life).

Figure 25: The Hand Monument

It is a famous sculpture that has become a symbol for Punta del Este since its completion in February 1982 and in turn has become one of Uruguay's most recognizable landmarks.

IWC10 Marketplace

A tradition of the GEF Biennial International Waters Conferences is the Marketplace—the exhibit opportunity where GEF IW Projects can display their results, unique approaches and catalytic outcomes, with emphasis on how these may be replicated and how they can be used to sustain international waters cooperation.

Figure 26: IWC10 Marketplace

List of participating booths:

Organization	Description	GEF Project ID
Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization	The Amazon Basin Project's multiple approaches (source-to-sea, Nexus, IWRM), sectors, countries and voices	9770
Centre for Systems Solutions	Collaborative Systems Mapping tool for sustainability challenges	10374 (partner)
Global Environment Facility IW:LEARN	GEF IW Story map	10374
Global Water Partnership	Innovative approaches followed in GWP-executed projects (Limpopo, IncoMaputo, Bupusa, Drin)	6224, 11180, 9593, 10881
Inter-American Development Bank	The development of policies and norms concerning IWWM (Integrated Water Waste Management)	9601

International Maritime Organization	Successful interventions to tackle marine environment issues through the GloBallast, GloFouling and GloNoise projects	9605
Nile Basin Initiative	Nile Water Cooperation for a Peaceful and Sustainable Future	9912
The Nature Conservancy	Live demos of the NBS Benefits Explorer Tool - Building the Business Case for Nature-Based Solutions	N/A
The Pacific Community	A 3D-printed scale physical model of an atoll in Tuvalu	10041
United Nations Development Programme	Collaborative research on the shared stock of the anchovy resource (southern Peru - northern Chile)	9592
United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization	The Implementation of the Strategic Action Program for the Guarani Aquifer System to foster regional collaboration across Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay	10139
United Nations Environment Programme	Circular economy and green transition in the food and beverage sector	11181
University of Queensland	Coral Reef Rescue	10575
Wildlife Conservation Society	Interactive maps of the Putumayo Içá River Basin	10531
World Bank	Disrupting International Waters with Technology	N/A
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO GEF IW portfolio	N/A
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP GEF IW portfolio	N/A
United Nations Environment Programme	UNEP GEF IW portfolio	N/A

Figure 27: Snapshot from the IWC10 Marketplace

Figure 28: Snapshot from the IWC10 Marketplace

Figure 29: Snapshots from the IWC10 Marketplace

List of participating posters:

Organization	Title	GEF Project ID
Caribbean Biodiversity Fund, ACTO, CTPT, Nairobi Convention, SPREP	Blue Carbon Futures: Innovating Sustainable Finance for Conservation	10782, 9770, 10108, 4940, 10783
Conservation International	People Protect What They Love - And Surfers Love The Ocean	
Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, South Africa	From Waste to Wonder! A low-cost green solution. Combatting climate change in SADC with phycoremediation.	
International Union for the Conservation of Nature	Sustainable management of transboundary waters in West Africa through IW financing	10799
United Nations Development Programme	Integrated Water Resources Management of the Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara, Colombia–Ecuador Binational Basins. 2021-2025	9566

United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan	MedProgramme	9607
United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan	Mediterranean Coast Day 2023	9607
United Nations Environment Programme - Nairobi Convention	The WIOSAP project	4940
United Nations Office for Project Services	UNEP/GEF Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP Project)	5538

Figure 30: Snapshots from the IWC10 Marketplace

Film Festival

An evening film festival that took place on 22 September highlighted selected GEF IW projects at IWC10. Projects and agencies had the opportunity to submit their film by responding to a call for Expressions of Interest, which IW:LEARN launched in March 2024. Below is the list of participating films.

Community-Based Monitoring to Support Water Resource Management in Tuvalu
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Om67egnaksM&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=1
GEF IW Project: Managing Coastal Aquifers in Selected Pacific SIDS
Length: 8.10

Land Management with Bioinputs - Learning by Doing
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COAjbf9U6K4&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=2

GEF IW Project: Towards the Transboundary Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) of the Sixaola River Basin shared by Costa Rica and Panama
Length: 2.10

Common Oceans Program - We Need the Oceans
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xK-p338OzDw&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=3
GEF IW Project: Global Coordination Project for the Common Oceans ABNJ Program
Length: 4.51

The CFI in Action: Sustainable Mangrove Management
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcc2Da12AeM&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=4
GEF IW Project: CFI: Coastal Fisheries Initiative (PROGRAM)
Length: 1.10

Voices of Guarani
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hNaynX6Ihw&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=5
GEF IW Project: Implementation of the Guarani Aquifer Strategic Action Program: Enabling Regional Actions
Length: 12.14

Citizen Science in the Orange-Senqu River Basin
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8oWeAF_o-Y&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=6
GEF IW Project: Support to the Orange-Senqu River Strategic Action Programme Implementation
Length: 7.28

Our Big Ocean
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIa0_Q-NzNQ&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=7
GEF IW Project: Blue Nature Alliance to expand and improve conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems
Length: 4.29

Voices from the Amazon
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bD47M30Lb0&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=8
GEF IW Project: Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme to Ensure Integrated and Sustainable Management of the Transboundary Water Resources of the Amazon River Basin Considering Climate Variability and Change

Length: 4.21

Best Practices of the Blue Swimming Crab Fisheries Refugia in Thailand
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZhCMeZLP1g&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=9
GEF IW Project: Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
Length: 2.01

How Biofouling Management Cuts GHG Emissions
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-JQmDdJ6V8&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=10
GEF IW Project: Building Partnerships to Assist Developing Countries Minimize the Impacts from Aquatic Biofouling (GloFouling Partnerships)
Length: 1.50

Protecting Life Upstream and Downstream: The Putumayo-Içá Project
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hNlPAVi7B8
GEF IW Project: Integrated watershed management of the Putumayo-Içá river basin
Length: 2.52

The IWEco Project - Forging the Future with Sustainable Livelihoods in Caribbean SIDS
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-S-3E3XEXw
GEF IW Project: Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (IWEco)
Length: 3.41

Guyana the Way Forward - Integrating Data and Improving Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9oL4Q7AJPE
GEF IW Project: CReW+: An Integrated Approach to Water and Wastewater Management Using Innovative Solutions and Promoting Financing Mechanisms in the Wider Caribbean Region
Length: 3.58

Journey of Water - New York: From the Catskills to the City
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_LSGIxllmU&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=11
GEF IW Partner: Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)
Length: 12.13

Acting Together for Water and Life

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFOAdOGPvm4&list=PLNu18fISgXf8UEHCY_e4sFQjvty7a-uE1&index=15
GEF IW Project: Integrated Management of Water Resources of the Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara, Colombia–Ecuador Binational Basins
Length: 4.54

Conference participants, via the conference app, determined the **winner ''Acting Together for Water and Life''** which represents the Regional Project *Integrated Management of Water Resources of the Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara, Colombia–Ecuador Binational Basins*, implemented by UNDP.

Transfer of the conference cup

At the closing of IWC10, it was announced that the Asia-Pacific Region will host IWC11. The Asian Development Bank will be caretaker of the conference cup until that time.

Figure 31: Transfer of the conference cup to the IWC11 host region

Conference Evaluation

At the closing of the 10th GEF International Waters Conference (IWC10), participants were kindly instructed to complete an online evaluation of the event. The evaluation survey comprised fifteen questions pertaining to conference planning, implementation and overall feedback. 111 out of 394 participants submitted a completed evaluation form. This accounts for 28% of the conference participants. The IWC10 evaluation response rate is higher than that of IWC9 (25%), and slightly higher than the IWC survey response average (about 26%).

Overall, IWC10 participants considered the event a success, giving it a rating of 4.55 out of 5.0—placing it at the highest evaluation rank for IWCs. The overall organization of IWC10 was highly praised both by experienced audience and by newcomers.

In general, the major features of IWC10 scored higher in comparison to IWC average. Participants found that the knowledge gained through the conference was directly applicable to their current work or functions (4.3). IWC10 scored significantly better than the previous seven IWCs in networking opportunities (4.4), and slightly lower, yet equally well (4.4), in logistics than IWC6 (4.5), with main comment the distance from the international airport to the conference venue, adding to a long travel with limited flight options.

The participants found particularly worthwhile the experience to network and exchange knowledge and resources with agencies and partners implementing GEF-funded IW projects and explore opportunities for future collaboration. Many also reported to have acquired a better comprehension of the GEF role and functions and enhanced their orientation in the IW focal area.

A common comment from several participants was the competition among parallel sessions. Their recommendation for the next conference to have fewer parallel sessions and more conference time to be able to follow all relevant to them sessions. Furthermore, they recommended more time for networking and creating match-making opportunities. Focus on inclusivity and interactivity and less on long presentations and panel discussions.

	IWC10 2024 (Uruguay)	**IWC9 2018 (Morocco)**	**IWC8 2016 (Sri Lanka)**	**IWC7 2013 (Barbados)**	**IWC6 2011 (Croatia)**	**IWC5 2009 (Australia)**	**IWC4 2007 (South Africa)**	**IWC3 2005 (Brazil)**
Response Rate	**111/394 (28%)**	83/333 (25%)	42/299 (14%)	59/208 (28%)	101/328 (31%)	77/293 (26%)	79/314 (25%)	96/293 (33%)
Overall Conference	**4.55**	4.3	4.4	4.1	4.4	3.8	3.9	3.0
Logistics	**4.4**	3.8	3.9	4.3	4.5	3.9	4.2	3.4
Networking Opportunities	**4.4**	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.1	3.6	4.0	3.3
Knowledge Gained	**4.3**	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.1	3.7	3.6	2.8

Figure 32. Comparative table of IWC10 evaluation

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