



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



ROME WATER DIALOGUE

SPECIAL EVENT ON THE ROAD TO THE



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
22-24
MARCH
2023

29 NOVEMBER 2022
PLENARY HALL, FAO HEADQUARTERS,
ROME, ITALY

SUMMARY REPORT





Introduction

Water is central to agriculture, to many other economic sectors and to all the goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Agriculture alone accounts for 72 percent of global freshwater withdrawals. While there is increasing awareness of water's importance, there is still a **need for more effective, integrated and coordinated actions, coupled with strong political will** in recognizing, valuing, and managing water in a holistic and integrated manner to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is an urgent need to consider **how best to address the manifold interconnections of water with all dimensions of sustainable development and most SDGs.**

In this context, FAO held its Rome Water Dialogue, a special event on the road to the UN 2023 Water Conference, in the Plenary Hall of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) headquarters, Rome, Italy on 29 November 2022.



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The objectives of the event were:

- to raise the awareness of water's role in achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the associated economic, social and environmental aspects;
- to connect the water sector with the largest water user – the agriculture sector;
- to develop innovative solutions and actions for sustainability, water and food security;
- to discuss the contributions of the National Water Roadmap initiative to achieving global commitments and the SDGs at the national level.

The event was led by Dr Lifeng Li, Director of FAO's Land and Water Division, as the Master of Ceremonies. The dialogue comprised a High-Level Opening Segment followed by two Technical Sessions: the first on Water and Food Security, and the second on National Water Roadmaps. Over 700 participants attended the opening session online, and over 80 attended onsite.



Outcomes of the Rome Water Dialogue

- **Knowledge was shared** for better understanding of the importance of water to achieve all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in all three dimensions of sustainable development, and the value of water.
- Current water-related challenges were addressed and **possible solutions to tackle these issues were discussed** among the representatives of Members and experts.
- A number of countries shared their existing national-level water strategies and actions.
- **The importance of the UN 2023 Water Conference** in March 2023 was discussed as the first UN conference on water in nearly 50 years, as a “watershed moment”.
- The initiative proposed by FAO on the **National Water Roadmaps** was elaborated and representatives of Members gave their support to this proposal.
- With the agreement of the FAO Council in December 2022, the National Water Roadmaps would underpin countries’ preparations for the FAO Conference in July 2023.
- The Rome Water Dialogue marked the successful launch of **FAO’s Water Journey**.



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Key messages from the Rome Water Dialogue

- The Rome Water Dialogue marked the successful launch of FAO's new Water Journey.
- 2023 will be a watershed moment for water, with the UN 2023 Water Conference being held in New York in March 2023, and the FAO Conference being focused on water in July 2023.
- Agriculture is the largest water user in all countries, with an average of 72 percent of global water withdrawals, while water is essential to support all the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Climate change is driving a reassessment of the value of water and the risks of water, as water scarcity, droughts and floods become more frequent and severe, currently affecting 2.4 billion people worldwide, while hunger and food insecurity are also growing.
- Integrated management of land, soil and water is needed to develop innovative solutions and actions for sustainability, water and food security.
- The majority of water is lost through mismanagement, leakage, pollution and waste at all points in the distribution and use system, so investment in better water management, storage, treatment and reuse is essential.

- A number of countries from across all the regions shared their existing national-level water strategies and actions.
- Cross-sectoral dialogue is essential for enabling the reallocation of water between sectors and the removal of harmful subsidies where necessary.
- Countries are invited to prepare their National Water Roadmaps, including a costed and prioritized investment plan, with the support of FAO and UN-Water.
- Three elements of success:
 - The National Water Roadmap process needs to be driven by national priorities.
 - The process must take a broad, cross-sectoral approach, namely a whole-of-society approach, not too technically focused on water alone.
 - The process will become an integral part of the UN Sustainable Development framework, so that goals and targets are aligned and tracked through the SDG monitoring process through to 2030.





High-Level Opening Segment

During his opening speech, Dr Qu Dongyu, FAO Director-General, stressed the crucial importance of water for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Water is not only important to the environment and the economy, but to all life on Earth, he reminded the audience. He highlighted severe water-related challenges including water scarcity and droughts, flooding and landslides, and water pollution. The climate crisis is further increasing these risks, and **urgent action is needed to achieve global food and water security as envisioned by the SDGs**, as well as to achieve the four goals of the FAO Strategy: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. Dr Qu Dongyu further pointed out that business-as-usual is no longer an option, and that the circular economy starts with the circular use of water resources. Integrated water-related strategies and policies, focused upon building climate adaptation and resilience, with **concrete actions and strong political will**, are needed. Being the main user of freshwater, the agricultural sector must play an active role in water governance discussions. The Director-General concluded by stressing that **FAO is committed to support countries to find comprehensive approaches to the use of water resources and the management of water risks, through National Water Roadmaps based upon local conditions**. Since good practice examples and innovative approaches exist all over the world, he called for the Rome Water Dialogue to create an open dialogue and debate, needing the strong, efficient, effective, and coherent support of FAO Members, partners and all stakeholders.

The following High-level speakers added to the Director-General's remarks on the importance of water for food security. UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Li Junhua, stressed the need to increase efficiency of water use to improve agricultural output, especially through innovations in irrigation. He elaborated on the objectives of the UN 2023 Water Conference to achieve integrated water resources management in all three dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic. One of the five key themes of the UN conference, entitled "Water for Sustainable Development: Valuing Water, the Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development", will look at the cross-cutting nature of water supporting the SDGs, especially through the lens of food. Mr Li Junhua urged countries to support the preparatory processes for the conference, and highlighted that country-driven National Water Roadmaps, supported by FAO, are leading examples of voluntary commitment.

“
The Rome Water Dialogue today marks an important step on the road to the UN 2023 Water Conference, and FAO's Water Journey
”

*Dr Qu Dongyu,
FAO Director-General*



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Mr Junhua's statement was followed by the statements of the Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the Netherlands, Mr Marcel Beukeboom, of Morocco, Mr Youssef Balla, Mr Mohammed Ahmed M. Alghamdi, Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia and Mr Rodney M. Hunter, Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America. All speakers agreed on the importance of water to achieve the SDGs, and on tackling water related challenges in an integrated and holistic way. Ambassador Beukeboom emphasized that the outcome of the upcoming UN 2023 Water Conference is an action agenda, and that such actions are needed in all sectors and among all stakeholders. To create such action, dialogue is needed to better

“
One in ten people on earth are facing hunger. We must change this, yet agriculture is already the greatest water user
”

*Mr Li Junhua,
UN Under-Secretary-General
for Economic and
Social Affairs*





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understand the complex issues the world is facing in times of climate crisis. Apart from better understanding of current issues, innovative approaches can further help to tackle existing challenges. **Agriculture will need to change, and some forms of agriculture may no longer be possible in the future in certain locations.** While adaptation is necessary, conflicts and tensions may arise and hence dialogue is needed. Water connects all these dots.

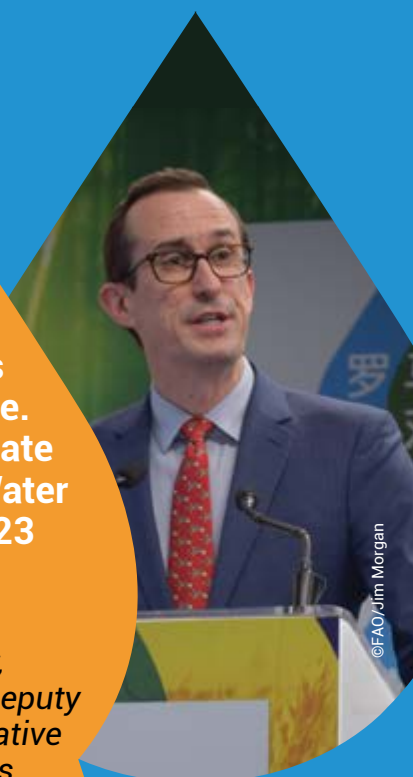
Ambassador Balla stated that water is a priority for Morocco due to climate change, and pointed out that the kingdom has created an Integrated Water Management Plan 2020-2030 as well as an agricultural strategy calling for an increase in irrigated areas, with a costed and prioritised investment plan.

Strong institutions and strategic and innovative approaches are needed to make agriculture more productive and more resilient, and to secure precious water resources. He elaborated on Morocco's experiences with reused wastewater and desalinated water as well as new water treatment plants that Morocco installed with the support of FAO. The Ambassador of Saudi Arabia shared the experiences of his country in coping with the challenges of aridity and water scarcity. Through implementing new water distribution technologies and strengthening governance, the country was transforming its water service sector, with a comprehensive plan for water management and an increase in water reuse of 230 percent over 2016.

Mr Rodney Hunter from the Permanent Mission of the United States of America stated that water and food security are both national security issues for the United States of America. However, **many water challenges such as flooding and drought are global challenges that need to be solved together.**

“
I am happy to see FAO's increased focus on the water issue. This is an appropriate lead-in to the UN Water Conference in 2023
”

*Mr Rodney Hunter,
Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy
Permanent Representative
of the United States
of America*



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Technical Session on Water and Food Security

The morning's technical session was moderated by Mr James Dalton, Director of the Global Water Programme of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and was opened by Ms Julie Émond, Chairperson of FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG) and Alternate Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN Rome-based agencies. Ms Émond stressed the **particular importance of water rights as well as improved governance of water resources to achieve global food security**. FAO's collaboration with other UN agencies to develop water resources management policies as well as water tenure and water related rights as well as broad based participation are crucial, especially in the background of the UN 2023 Water Conference and the FAO Conference. Her remarks were followed by the interventions from Permanent Representatives of China, Ambassador Guang Defu, and South Africa, Ambassador Nosipho Nausca Jean Jezile, and from Deputy Permanent Representatives of Germany, Mr Oliver Mellenthin and Uzbekistan, Mr Nuriddin Kushnazarov. These remarks have further highlighted on the one hand **the importance of finding innovative solutions and applying water saving irrigation technologies** to increase water use efficiency to be able to feed a growing population. On the other hand, the speakers also stressed **the importance of protecting water accessibility, considering water as a global good and stepping up international collaboration** as well as promoting the green economy, protecting ecosystems as well as establishing clear governance rules and water tenure arrangements that should be considered overarching goals and enablers for integrated water resources management. Strengthening FAO's role in addressing





pressing water related challenges to achieve SDG 6, as well as deploying a UN Special envoy on water, were among the solutions discussed.

The remarks by the Permanent Representatives were followed by a keynote presentation by Ms Sasha Koo-Oshima, Deputy Director of the FAO Land and Water Division, providing accurate figures as well as broad background information on the importance of water for agriculture and food security. Ms Koo-Oshima pointed out that **the economic value of water will rise in the future**, and this is one reason why countries now need to develop new investment strategies for water. Her remarks and presentation laid the ground for the panel discussion of the technical session, joined by several water experts.

Dr Mark Smith, Director General, International Water Management Institute (IMWI) highlighted that water is a complex issue and that action is needed among several areas. **Investments, technologies, research and data are important to safeguard water for agriculture.** Looking at nonconventional use of water could be another promising solution to overcome water related challenges. The other panelists agreed by emphasizing that institutions and policies must be accompanied by strong political will to supercharge action for sustainable water resources management to achieve food security. The UN 2023 Water Conference shall provide the opportunity to bring together the water and agriculture sector and their stakeholders to discuss how to better manage water around the world, while considering regional and local contexts, in order to mitigate water risks and conflicts in the future. **Solutions for water related challenges must thus be designed jointly, and be holistic, coherent and context specific.** Focus should be put on smallholder farmers and local markets.

Further interventions of Permanent Representatives during this panel session also elaborated on the importance of water rights and transboundary issues of water, which shall further be discussed during the Conference in March 2023. The first technical session was wrapped up by Dr Ania Grobicki, Senior Advisor at FAO, by highlighting again water's crucial role for all SDGs and stressing that the current watershed moment must be used to prioritize action for sustainable water management. **The National Water Roadmaps could be a promising solution to support countries in preparing their water strategies for the future.**





Technical Session on National Water Roadmaps

After the lunchbreak, the initiative proposed by FAO on National Water Roadmaps was discussed in more depth. The Deputy Permanent Representatives, Ms Caroline Matipira from Zimbabwe and Ambassador Pio Wennubst from Switzerland, provided their opening remarks to this session. In her remarks, Ms Matipira showcased how important sustainable water management was for Zimbabwe, being a country affected by water scarcity and the impacts of climate change. Equitable access to water is crucial to enable rural development, which is led by the water sector in the country. Ms Matipira closed by ensuring Zimbabwe's commitment to collaborate closely with FAO to attain the 2030 Agenda 2030 and SDGs. **Zimbabwe will host a first Regional Dialogue on the National Water Roadmaps**, co-organized with FAO, at the beginning of 2023. Ambassador Pio Wennubst agreed on the importance of sustainable water management and emphasized that **water has to be allocated in a systemic manner**. Dialogue and negotiation on water allocation are crucial, and this goal could be achieved through the National Water Roadmaps. Switzerland could provide valuable expertise to this process, based on its experiences in water provision and allocation. The National Water Roadmaps could provide an important starting point to taking water issues seriously, both at international as well as national levels, and Mr Wennubst stressed that Switzerland is committed in supporting this initiative at both levels.



The high-level remarks of this session were followed by a keynote presentation on the National Water Roadmaps by Dr Lifeng Li, providing figures and information on the importance of water to the Sustainable Development Agenda, as well as elaborating FAO's initiatives in bringing water to the top of the agenda at the UN 2023 Water Conference and beyond. The National Water Roadmaps would contribute to the Water Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda to renew country-owned commitments to achieve food security. **The National Water Roadmaps are national country-owned strategies, including costed and prioritised investment plans, to manage water resources to achieve food security, through the organization of country-led multistakeholder dialogues.** Dr Li concluded by stating FAO's readiness to support countries in preparing their National Water Roadmaps. FAO had just started its own Water Journey, and any comments on the proposed initiative are welcome.

During the following panel discussion, several country representatives as well as water experts discussed the proposed initiative and its implementation. Mr Tony Slatyer, Consultant on Water Policy and Governance from the Water Policy Group, highlighted in his video message the urgency to bring on track the implementation of SDG 6. To do this, water governance is of crucial importance. Several questions on the implementation of water strategies are linked with governance issues: How should water services be priced and paid for? How should water be allocated to competing uses where water is chronically scarce? How to find the balance between the competing interests of water for food, and water for energy production? To answer such questions and find solutions to these critical issues, **multilateral processes are needed.** Such processes should equip national policy makers to make best decisions on water related issues. **"Policy scaffolding"** through the National Water Roadmaps could be a promising way in helping countries to prioritize the sectors that have the biggest urgency and need to bring on track the implementation of the SDGs. Such policy scaffolding would be an excellent outcome of the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Mr Andrew Roby, Senior Water Advisor at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland agreed with Mr Slatyer on the need for coherent governance of water issues. Actions on water will also need investments in water. Therefore, **top leaders and heads of government must be brought to a joint table to discuss water issues,** as envisioned by the upcoming UN 2023 Water Conference. One important argument to bring the important actors of different sectors together is the point that water security is essential for both human and national security.





These inputs were accompanied by the points of Ms Concepción Marcuello, Senior Officer in charge of water international affairs at the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition. Ms Marcuello welcomed the initiative on the National Water Roadmaps as inclusive tools to help governments to establish commitments for the UN 2023 Water Conference. This initiative would furthermore allow all relevant actors to come together at the table to discuss the implementation and adaptation of such tools. Mr Federico Properzi, Chief Technical Advisor at UN-Water shared the UN-Water perspective on the initiative. **UN-Water's role is to support countries at international and national level to link national, regional, and global actions.** The National Water Roadmaps could serve as a catalyst of such actions and would help to position the countries in the Water Action Agenda. Mr Properzi elaborated the three basics ingredients of success for such roadmaps: i) they should be derived from a country-led and country-driven process, ii) they should take a broad cross-sectoral approach by bringing all actors and relevant ministries together, and iii) the roadmaps should become part of the country's sustainable development framework. **The National Water Roadmaps would thus be a great opportunity for national governments as well as an opportunity for the UN.** Mr Properzi called for political attention to be brought to these roadmaps in the preparation of the UN 2023 Water Conference, and for countries to start their dialogue processes through the proposed National Water Roadmaps.

The statements by the panelists were followed by a panel discussion with the audience in the room and online. Topics of subsidies for water resource allocation and for agriculture as well as the importance of data collection and management were discussed, and experiences from different country representatives were shared on how to best bring together important national actors into a promising dialogue. **The discussions will be taken forward during the UN 2023 Water Conference.**

The second technical session on the National Water Roadmaps was also wrapped up by Dr Grobicki.

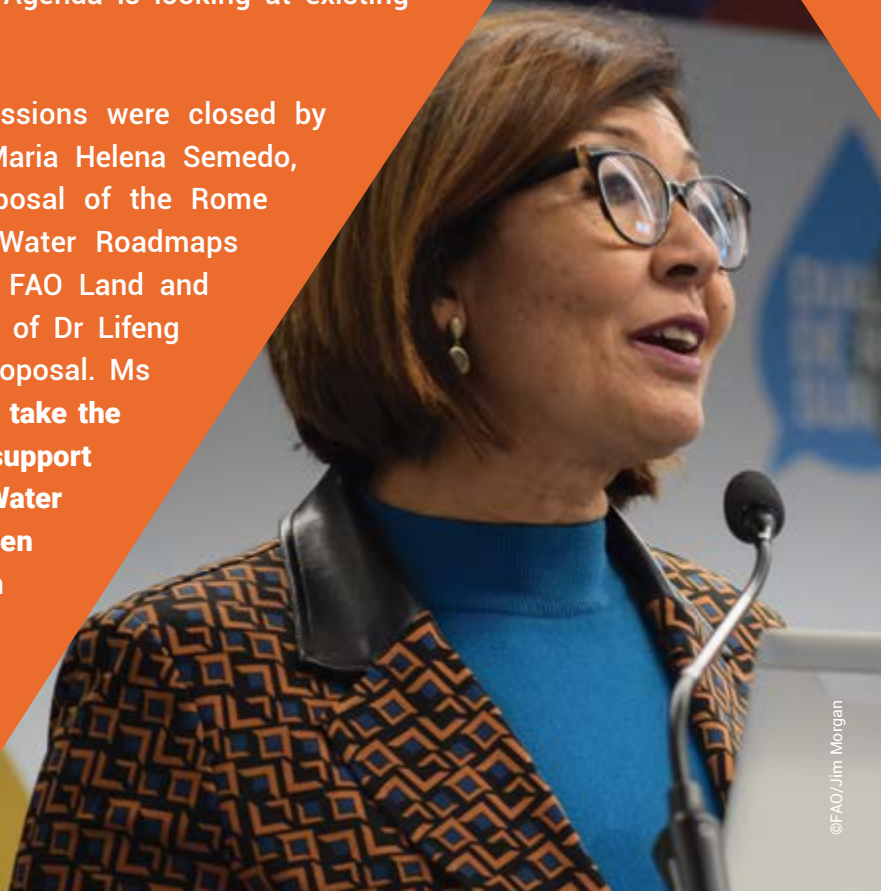
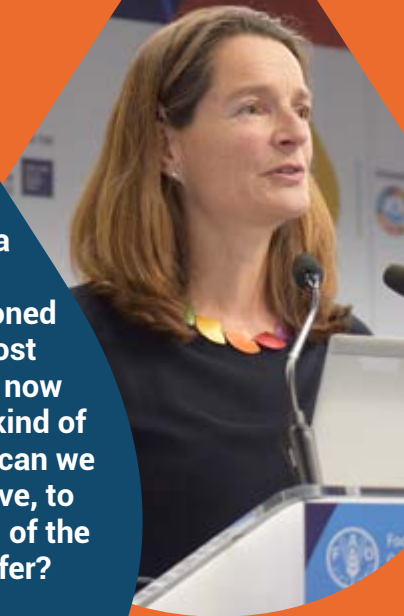
The final speaker in the Rome Water Dialogue was Ms Nathalie Olijslager, Programme Director for the UN 2023 Water Conference, speaking on behalf of the two co-host countries of the Conference, the Netherlands and Tajikistan. Ms Olijslager highlighted that **the discussion around water has to be held at FAO, since agriculture was the largest water user globally.** There is a need to create systems that allow for **fair water allocation and distribution:** "We need to realize how much water we have. The word "scarcity" was mentioned a lot today, and the word "distribution" was also mentioned a lot. I think these are the most important messages that I am now taking back to New

York. What kind of system can we create? And how can we change the systems that we have, to have a good and fair distribution of the water that the world has to offer?" **Water must be discussed both at national and international level** in order to achieve the changes needed to overcome the manifold water related challenges. Ms Olijslager ensured that the discussion of the event on future commitments will be taken to New York for the UN 2023 Water Conference, while the Water Action Agenda is looking at existing commitments made by countries.

Finally, the successful day's discussions were closed by FAO Deputy Director-General, Ms Maria Helena Semedo, who looked back to the first proposal of the Rome Water Dialogue and the National Water Roadmaps and congratulated the team of the FAO Land and Water Division under the leadership of Dr Lifeng Li for the progress made on this proposal. Ms Semedo **reaffirmed FAO's support to take the discussions of the event forward, to support countries in developing National Water Roadmaps and to further strengthen the intersectoral water collaboration efforts on this important FAO Water Journey,** to which the Rome Water Dialogue provided a crucial milestone.

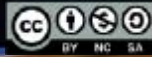
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*Ms Nathalie Olijslager,
Programme Director for the
UN 2023 Water Conference*





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