

# Why IWMI must align with global processes: An engagement playbook for IWMI scientists

## Water Resilience Tracker

*Just Transitions for Water Security – the Water Resilience Tracker for National Climate Planning*

- Project Partners and their roles
  - International Water Management Institute (IWMI) - Accountable Grant Agreement (AGA) Holder and Implementing Partner
  - Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA) – Technical Lead
  - ARUP – Implementing Partner (Private Sector)
  - Deltares – Implementing Partner
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Global policy negotiations, or processes, often characterized by complex language and lengthy deliberations, play a pivotal role in addressing water security. While these processes may seem removed from day-to-day realities, they set the course for national policies, financial priorities and strategic actions that impact the planet. Thus, IWMI's active participation in and knowledge of these processes is integral to ensuring a water-resilient future and maximizing the utility and impact of IWMI's scientific work.

This note is a starting point for IWMI science to align with, influence, and support key global processes. It highlights: (i) the value of IWMI's past engagements; (ii) pathways of support for IWMI science to pursue; and (iii) opportunities to advance IWMI's global impact.

## Context

There is now broad agreement and substantial evidence that climate change and water are inextricably linked, with climate change even described as primarily a water crisis. Yet, challenges remain in fully articulating or addressing the centrality of water under the various key global climate commitments.

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), [the Paris Agreement](#) includes global processes like the [Global Goal on Adaptation](#) and the [UAE-Belem Framework for Global Climate Resilience](#), which focus on enhancing and measuring adaptation and resilience capacity, and the [New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance](#), which seeks to mobilize and expand climate finance to support developing countries.

Processes such as the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are also central to IWMI's work. While the UNFCCC, UNCCD, and CBD have different mandates, they tackle interconnected challenges—climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss—that directly impact water in terms of availability, quality and management.

At a country level, several processes exist under global agendas regarding national plans or commitments. These include [National Adaptation Plans](#) (NAPs) and [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement; plans related to Sustainable

Development Goals; and Disaster Risk Reduction strategies under the [Sendai Framework](#).

Although water is recognized in various capacities within these global and national processes, its central and interconnected role across these processes is not given sufficient emphasis.

**IWMI's expertise lies precisely at this nexus, making our engagement in these forums essential, so that water is acknowledged as the critical resource it is and afforded due attention.**

## What has IWMI been doing, thus far?

### At UNFCCC COP

IWMI, to date, has been most involved in the UNFCCC Climate COPs, starting with a small role at COP25 and evolving to a leadership position at COP26 where we contributed to supporting the first Water Pavilion. Since 2022, IWMI has steadily built its reputation as a key player at Climate COPs by developing key policy messages on water to help put water on the climate negotiating table. IWMI has also successfully showcased innovations, developed new partnerships and strengthened the capacity of country delegations in water-related negotiations. In past COPs, IWMI has partnered on strategic ministerial engagements with the COP presidency and with bilateral partners we have co-convened and designed events together. This has reinforced IWMI's commitment to water security and climate resilience as well as helped position IWMI as a leading voice in addressing water challenges within the broader context of sustainable development.

### At CBD COP

IWMI participated in the Biodiversity COP for the first time in 2024, contributing to multiple side events—many of which were coordinated by the CGIAR working group. Moving forward, IWMI plans to apply for observer status and engage more closely with the CBD processes and the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (GBF).

### At UNCCD COP

UNCCD COP 16 marked the first time IWMI had a 'dedicated' presence with the aim of understanding the opportunities and gaps for IWMI over the longer term. IWMI hosted and participated in over 35 sessions including alongside Ministers and government officials, as well as representatives of IFIs, academia, donor organizations, advocacy groups and NGOs. Scientists presented on a range of topics such as the application of AI in wastewater treatment and re-use, nature-based solutions for drought and flood management and multidimensional understandings of land, water and community fragility and resilience pathways. Presentations had a global outlook, with the launch of the [Drought Action Catalyst](#), and there was a strong MENA orientation given the event's location in Riyadh and IWMI's rapidly developing MENA portfolio. As part of the [International Drought Resilience Alliance](#), IWMI contributed to the [Riyadh Action Agenda](#) at COP16.

### At Ramsar COP

Since becoming an International Organization Partner (IOP) of Ramsar in 2005, IWMI has mostly participated as an observer at Ramsar COPs, although actively contributed to various working groups of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) with some involvement in side-events, negotiations and communications.

## Important lessons from IWMI's past engagements

Water is a connecting thread between these different COPs and IWMI should aim to develop a wider strategy on leveraging its work to support these conventions. Clarifying IWMI's institutional role will further enhance its presence and impact in these global forums. The following successful lessons learnt from our past participation, mostly in the UNFCCC COPs, can serve as useful recommendations.

## Crafting Strategic Partnerships

Collaborating with well-established water partners as a member of the Water Steering Committee for the [Water for Climate Pavilion](#) has enabled IWMI to unify and amplify the voice of the water community and to access strategic spaces within the climate COPs. Aligned with key initiatives like the [Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action](#), IWMI is regularly invited to contribute to, and therefore influence,



Chiara Christina Colombo speaking at a Water Action event at COP29 (photo: IWMI)

high-level events. Strong relationships with not only country representatives in IWMI-active countries but also FCDO, USAID, and the IFI community at large further position IWMI as both a participant and design partner in high-level events.

### ***Elevating our profile among influential stakeholders through project exposure***

IWMI's key partners and donors have a deep-rooted presence across the various COPs through their own pavilions, high-level events, and strategic project showcases. IWMI's strong history at the Climate COP of being approached by donors to plan events relevant to its projects in pavilions—such as those in Pakistan, Nepal and Zambia—demonstrates the trust and recognition it has earned. Moreover, IWMI researchers are frequently invited to participate in panels, allowing them to present their work and evidence strategically. By leveraging these opportunities, IWMI continues to amplify its voice and impact at the Climate COP.

At COP29 in Azerbaijan, IWMI's Al Murunah portfolio gained significant visibility through a [direct "shout-out" of Al Murunah+](#) by UK Minister Anneliese Dodds, who publicly recognized IWMI's role in advancing women's leadership in locally-led climate adaptation. This high-level endorsement, along with strategic engagement at UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh—where Al Murunah co-hosted an [event with the Islamic Development Bank](#)—and participation in a closed-door FCDO roundtable, has helped catalyze partnerships and donor interest, contributing to the growth of Al Murunah into a robust portfolio now exceeding USD 20 million.



Minister Anneliese Dodds recognizing IWMI's NBS delivery in the MENA at UK Pavilion event (photo: IWMI)

### ***Getting invited to the 'party'***

To strengthen its impact, IWMI has taken steps to enhance its relationships with key parties, aligning its research and advocacy efforts more closely with national priorities. Last year, IWMI was a part of seven party delegations to the climate COP—Jordan, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Nepal

and Sri Lanka. By embedding researchers within national delegations, IWMI ensures that its evidence-based insights directly inform negotiations and policy development. This approach bridges global frameworks with on-the-ground realities, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of global commitments.

### ***Supporting UNFCCC submissions***

Submissions are important because they build on processes and partnerships that progress beyond COPs and enable IWMI science to be showcased in the process. It is important for IWMI to prioritize and choose the right engagements based on our strengths and technical capacities.

In the past, IWMI's submissions have been strengthened by being part of strong partnerships. The African Group of Negotiators Experts Support is a critical platform for amplifying Africa's voice in global climate negotiations, with whom IWMI had a collaborative submission to the [Standing Committee on Finance on the Doubling of Adaptation Finance](#), supporting the integration of water security into the group's advocacy efforts. Similar efforts include IWMI's submission to the [First Global Stocktake](#), as well as the Joint UN- Water submission to the [UAE-Belém work programme](#) related to water resilience indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation framework. Such efforts not only strengthen IWMI's partnership and positioning but also lead to more impactful submissions increasing the chances of our positions influencing and shaping impact.

### ***Promoting evidence-based solutions***

IWMI has established areas of work and expertise across multiple agendas (i.e., drought resilience, irrigation, adaptation approaches, etc.) which can directly influence these global processes. By providing evidence-based solutions in these areas, IWMI can help provide actionable pathways for countries to fulfill global commitments while addressing national and local water security challenges.

IWMI has provided input for various CBD COP side-event submissions related to agroecology, rights of nature, fisheries



Rodrigo Ordóñez, Chiara Christina Colombo, Darshini Ravindranath and Vidhisha Samarasekara at the Water for Climate Pavilion (photo: IWMI)

and urban wetlands, and will co-convene these events with other Intergovernmental Organization Partners (IOPs), FAO, TNC, among others. IWMI also supported the Sri Lankan government in submitting a resolution on the “rights of wetlands,” though the government withdrew the resolution due to significant opposition.

Through the Water Resilience Tracker (WRT), one of IWMI’s flagship projects that helps countries integrate water resilience into their national planning processes, IWMI is ensuring that national climate strategies are robust, adaptable, and inclusive. IWMI, through WRT, is currently engaged with Nepal’s updated NDC consultations and provincial governmental consultations. Through this relationship from WRT, IWMI will also support Nepal’s international negotiations and ensure water resilience is adequately incorporated in global processes. WRT has also supported NAP formulation in Brazil.

### KEY STRATEGIES FOR IWMI

As IWMI advocates for water resilience and the inclusion of local and underrepresented priorities in global processes, the following strategies should guide the ongoing development and strengthening of our institutional engagement:

**Strategic Engagement & Resource Mobilization for Processes:** Approach engagement with the four relevant global processes as we would involvement with a structured program, i.e. with a clear strategy, resource allocations budget and value for money considerations, while advocating for increased, dedicated funding for water-related initiatives within global frameworks.

**Enhance Science-Policy Integration:** Strengthen IWMI’s presence in national delegations, embed researchers for continuous knowledge transfer, and translate complex research into clear, actionable policy recommendations to support evidence-based decision-making. For example, IWMI should build on successes like enhancing science-policy integration with Nepal at COP29 and in the lead-up to their participation.

**Strengthen Collaborative & Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:** Deepen global, regional, and local partnerships, enhance collaboration across climate, biodiversity, and land sectors, and amplify underrepresented voices to prioritize water security in global processes. For example, while important for IWMI to participate in water finance discussions at COP30, rather than leading these efforts alone, we should focus on where we can collaborate with existing leaders. This will allow IWMI to gradually establish a presence in evolving spaces and secure a foothold in new, high-priority areas.

**Strengthen Communications Strategy Around Global Processes:** Develop a proactive communications strategy that begins at least two months ahead of major events like COP, with clear prioritization of key messages, programs, and articles to ensure maximum visibility and alignment across teams. Post-engagement, implement a structured follow-up plan to maintain momentum, capture outcomes, and engage target audiences—recognizing that communications fatigue can be mitigated with planning and dedicated resourcing.

### KEY ACTIONS FOR IWMI RESEARCHERS

Engaging with global processes will be mutually beneficial for IWMI scientists, as this will provide an avenue to expand IWMI’s impact, furthering our mission of research for development. Recognizing this presented below are key takeaways for IWMI scientists:

IWMI scientists should have at least a basic understanding of the issues at stake at the COPs and how their work aligns. This includes making reference to them in project proposal development.

By following developments leading up to the COPs, IWMI scientists should work on producing pieces (such as opinion articles or general news pieces) highlighting their projects and initiatives that align with the COP’s goals, especially those supporting Parties. They should be making reference to these goals in communications with Country Government counterparts.

At the COPs, IWMI scientists should actively work to influence the processes by providing data from their projects and other sources that can assist the Parties attending the COPs—essentially, equipping them with data and facts to support positions on water.

In this way, IWMI’s work will actively contribute to the development of joint key messaging for governments and policymakers on water issues that can be utilized by those in positions of power.



Rodrigo Ordóñez, Darshini Ravindranath, Vidhisha Samarasekara, Charity Osei-Amponsah, Mohsin Hafiz, Giriraj Amarnath and Santosh Nepal at COP29 (photo: Santosh Nepal/IWMI)

### Conclusion

Global policy negotiations are essential for advancing water security as a cornerstone of climate resilience, land restoration and sustainable development. IWMI’s strategic engagement must continue to effectively bridge the gap between cutting-edge water research and impactful policy decisions, ensuring that evidence-based solutions inform global priorities and translate into tangible regional, national and local implementation.

## Authors

**Tanisha Reddy**, Intern, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Vidhisha Samarasekara**, Strategic Program Director – Water, Climate Change and Resilience, and Al Murunah Project Director, IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Darshini Ravindranath**, Research Group Leader – Climate Policies, Finance and Processes (CPFP), IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Chiara Christina Colombo**, Policy & Engagement Advisor, IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka

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## Project

Water Resilience Tracker (WRT) is a multi-year initiative under the Just Transitions for Water Security (JTWS) programme that supports countries to strengthen water-centric climate resilience through improved policies, planning and investment readiness. WRT is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and jointly implemented in partnership with the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA), ARUP and Deltares. <https://www.iwmi.org/projects/water-resilience-tracker/>

## Contact

Darshini Ravindranath, Water Resilience Tracker Project Leader ([d.ravindranath@cgiar.org](mailto:d.ravindranath@cgiar.org)).

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**International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**

### Headquarters

127 Sunil Mawatha, Pelawatte, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka

### Mailing address:

P. O. Box 2075, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94 11 2880000

Fax: +94 11 2786854

Email: [iwmi@cgiar.org](mailto:iwmi@cgiar.org)

[www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)