

Round table

Water as a Common Good: Local Resilience and Sustainable Development

(July 16, 2026)

Presented at the 2026 World Conference of the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development, this roundtable, organized under the aegis of the World Federation of Scientific Workers (WFSW), examined the major challenges related to access to water, its protection as a common good, and its governance.

Bringing together researchers, representatives of UNESCO-affiliated NGOs, civil society organizations, local communities, and journalists, the event explored how increasing pressures arising from climate change, urbanization, intensive agriculture, industrial activities, and tourism are transforming access to and control over water resources worldwide. Drawing on comparative experiences from France, Morocco, and other regions of the world, participants discussed conflicts over water appropriation, community responses, environmental justice, and sustainable models of water governance.

The discussions also highlighted that women and children are disproportionately affected by the lack of safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as by floods and other natural disasters. Participants emphasized the persistence of gender inequalities in access to safe water and in women's participation in water management and governance, despite the central role they often play in collecting water for their communities.

The roundtable also addressed the growing pollution of water resources, which poses a major threat to human health as well as to biodiversity worldwide. In many countries of the Global South, waterborne diseases—including typhoid, cholera, malaria, and diarrhoeal diseases—continue to cause approximately three million deaths each year. In refugee camps, particularly in Sudan, Gaza, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, contaminated water remains a major cause of disease and the deaths of thousands of people. Participants further stressed the dangers posed by pesticides, many of which are banned in the countries where they are produced but continue to be exported and used elsewhere. Along with microplastics and persistent pollutants ("forever chemicals"), these substances represent some of the most serious threats to drinking water quality.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the participants reaffirmed the following principles:

1. Access to water is a universal human right and must remain so.
2. Women must be both beneficiaries of and decision-makers in all matters relating to water.
3. The current crises associated with water stress result not only from global warming but also from serious shortcomings in water governance.
4. Water use must be reoriented to prioritize the fundamental needs of populations and the preservation of ecosystems.

5. Democratic, transparent, and participatory governance is essential in every country to guarantee the right to water over the long term.

Within this broader framework, the participants called for strengthened dialogue between scientists and political decision-makers at all levels in order to promote public policies and societal initiatives that preserve water as a common good for the benefit of all living beings. At the close of the session, the moderator, Marie-Claude Machon-Honoré (BPW International), encouraged participants to join the UNESCO-WWAP Multi-Stakeholder Platform for Accelerating Gender Equality in the Water Domain.

On the sidelines of the event, several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed. The first was concluded between the WFSW and the coalition supporting the women of the Figuig Oasis in Morocco, represented by Mrs. Samira Mizbar, to promote the preservation of their springs and their recognition as part of the community's common heritage. A second MoU was signed between the WFSW and Coordination Eau Île-de-France, represented by its Director, Mr. Jean-Claude Oliva. A third agreement brought together BPW International and the Global Institute/UNESCO Chair "Eau, femmes et Gouvernance " in Dominica Republic, represented by Ms. Claire Guillemain, with the aim of strengthening cooperation on gender equality and sustainable water governance.

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