



The Climate Solution Must Include Human Rights to Water and Sanitation- SWA Civil Society Joint Messaging¹

The climate crisis is a water and sanitation² crisis- it threatens existing systems and natural resources, as well as efforts to increase services for [3.6 billion people](#) who lack safely managed sanitation and [2 billion people](#) who lack access to safely managed water services. Climate change will, and [already does](#), undermine the enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation by [intensifying floods and droughts](#), changing precipitation and temperature extremes that result in water scarcity and increased competition for water resources, disrupting sanitation systems, contaminating drinking water, and exacerbating the spread of disease.³

Despite having contributed least to climate change, people with poor quality water and sanitation services will find themselves at the receiving end, all too often without the resources, capacity, or support to respond or adapt. Moreover, without secured access to safe water and sanitation, their ability to mitigate the impacts or adapt to changing climate is undermined. To ensure the rights to water and sanitation are respected, protected, and fulfilled, climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies should be implemented and become an integral part of national development, health and economic recovery and poverty reduction. Furthermore, the voices and experiences of the most impacted – vulnerable communities – should inform and contribute to policy and strategies to ground them. In short, climate action can also create opportunities to rethink how governments and partners can increase access to more sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services.

SWA Civil Society partners comprising more than 140 networks and organizations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean regions, call attention to the human rights dimensions of water and sanitation to highlight the impacts of climate change on individuals and communities, thereby putting a human face to a problem that might otherwise seem distant. This document is designed to build a rights-based climate narrative for the water and sanitation sector to strengthen the advocacy efforts of the Civil Society constituency across the partnership and in the 50 countries in which they operate as SWA partners. SWA CSO partners will be using these messages as talking points with ministries responsible for water and sanitation, the ministry of environment, and global leaders for advocacy at COP26 and in preparation for the [2022 SWA Sector Ministers' Meeting](#).

Message 1: Climate Action and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene must go hand in hand

Despite the undeniable link between combatting climate change and ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene, there is still a weak link in national climate commitments and policies.

¹ This advocacy document is built on SWA Key Messages on '[Climate and WASH](#)' for COP26, a Position paper by the Independent Expert on Human Rights Obligations related to Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, on '[Climate Change and the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation](#)', SWA Briefing paper on '[Adapting to climate change and fostering a low carbon water and sanitation sector](#)', Water Integrity Network and GIZ policy brief- '[Water Integrity as Opportunity for Climate Finance](#)' and WRI's Article-'[Mainstreaming Climate Change Adaptation: The Need and Role of Civil Society Organizations](#)' among other resources referenced as hyperlinks throughout the document.

² It is often quoted that climate crisis is a water crisis. However, that narrative overlooks the sanitation systems that are fundamental for [human health and sustainable development](#). Therefore, this document attempts to broaden that narrative as it is critical to increasing the understanding of sanitation and climate change linkages among stakeholders.

³ The recent release of the [IPCC Working Group 1 Climate Report](#) paints a bleak picture of a world in crisis and issues an urgent clarion call for concerted action to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called it unequivocally a "code-red for humanity."

This represents the first barrier for practical government-led implementation of climate-resilient water, sanitation, and hygiene action on the ground. We, therefore, recommend national governments to:

1. Align water, sanitation and hygiene policies with climate commitments and ensure their reflection in national emissions-reducing and adaptation plans known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs)⁴. If NDCs do not incorporate water, sanitation, and hygiene, then it is easy for these critical issues to fall off the climate policy radar. Conversely, national water, sanitation, and hygiene-specific policies and programs should consider the future climate impacts and risks as well as climate mitigation and adaptation measures.
2. Put in place inter-sectoral frameworks and tools that ensure inter-sectoral cooperation and policy alignment between water, sanitation and hygiene, water and waste resource management, water security, infrastructure planning/investments, social protection, and climate action for building climate resilience. It is, therefore, crucial that National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) include attention to climate-resilient water, sanitation, and hygiene services.
3. Build capacity and knowledge of water, sanitation and hygiene decision-makers and other stakeholders in key climate concepts and processes (including a more robust understanding of technical aspects like water cycle), as well as identifying potential adaptation and mitigation interventions for their sector for an informed political prioritization of water, sanitation and hygiene and climate action.
4. Undertake robust risk assessments of future climate impacts on their water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services to ensure that both long-term benefits and return on investment are achieved.

Message 2: Integrate human rights to water, sanitation and hygiene into climate policies and strategies

Climate change impacts people's rights to water and sanitation by causing floods, droughts, changes in precipitation, and extreme temperatures that result in water scarcity, contamination of drinking water, damaged facilities, and the spread of diseases that have rippling effects on livelihoods and economic productivity. We, therefore, call on national governments to:

1. Recognize the pivotal role of human rights to adequate access to safe water and sanitation in climate change adaptation and risk mitigation measures towards resilience building and achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, the Preamble of the [Paris Agreement](#) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change emphasizes that all States "should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights".
2. Assess the overall available water resources in their respective countries, dwindling in many places as a result of climate change, and ensure that in prioritizing allocation of different water uses, the water needed for the realization of human rights, including drinking water and sanitation, is the first need that is met. This would also help highlight the strong linkage between climate action and ensuring water security and integrated water resource management to guarantee sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene services - as climate change can increase water demand and scarcity, adversely impacting both affordability and quality, especially when sanitation systems are compromised by extreme weather events, or do not exist.⁵

⁴ Although the NDCs are non-binding, they indicate national priorities and interests of a contributing country related to mitigation and adaptation.

⁵ Additional measures to be considered are environmental restoration and reforestation (hydrology and eco-system recharging); protection and diversification of all available water sources to be accessed, used and managed in more sustainable ways (promoting nature-based solutions); and improvements in water quality assurance.

3. Integrate a human rights-based approach into NAPs and give special attention to the obligations of States to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including to safe drinking water and sanitation⁶, water security, and safe and healthy environments. NAPs should consider normative requirements of the human rights framework for water and sanitation, i.e., availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and quality, as far as the social and economic implications of climate policy and strategies are concerned. States have both negative and positive obligations in guaranteeing the rights to water and sanitation; refraining from interfering with existing access to water and sanitation; and ensuring that adaptation measures do not negatively impact the rights to water, sanitation and hygiene. Where people do not have access to water and sanitation, they must put in place policies, strategies, and funding to gain access to services.
4. Ensure active, free, and meaningful participation of all affected groups in connection with decisions that affect them, considering the values of non-discrimination and equality as reflected in international human rights law. Solutions to the problems of availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of water, sanitation, and hygiene in the context of climate change must be designed with the participation of the concerned communities, for example, women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, internally displaced persons, among others. Information regarding access to services, including plans to improve access, must be available to all affected people.
5. Develop and support the functioning of accessible, affordable, timely and effective mechanisms of redress, including judicial, quasi-judicial and administrative mechanisms, to help safeguard individuals against violations of the human rights to water and sanitation at the national level arising from climate risks management and climate resilience related policies and strategies.

Message 3: Put communities in the driver's seat

Technology and policy alone will not be able to provide sustainable solutions. Appropriate and inclusive processes, partnerships and systems need to be put in place, and therefore, we recommend governments to:

1. Rethink the top-down approach to service delivery and climate adaptation as these are less effective than working with communities at the local level. Local agencies and partner CSOs, closest to the challenges and potential local solutions, are best suited to developing innovative (and diversified) adaptive capacities within communities to risk mitigation and adaptation planning while engaging local groups and institutions.
2. Promote and facilitate innovative financing mechanisms at the local level, including access to adaptation financing for community-driven design, planning and implementation of climate resilient and inclusive community-based systems (including ancestral practices in Latin America) in coordination and partnership with local governments and other key development stakeholders.
3. Promote inclusive governance mechanisms and human rights institutional arrangements to support community-led context analysis, co-design of innovative water, sanitation and hygiene solutions, planning, implementation, management and monitoring of water, sanitation, hygiene investments (including water quality), where communities and local leadership can play strategic roles, have a voice in decision-making and hold leaders accountable.
4. Invest in empowering and building the capacity of CSOs, local stakeholders and community-based organizations (including water, sanitation, and hygiene committees) to efficiently engage and contribute in the NDC/NAP process and play a significant role in raising awareness, policy

⁶ In 2010, the [United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The Human Rights Council reaffirmed this recognition](#), and 122 countries formally acknowledged the Human Right to Water and Sanitation. To protect the human rights to water and sanitation from the impacts of climate change, governments must integrate them into climate-related policies and strategies.

advocacy, mapping vulnerabilities and assets, identifying and piloting context-based resilient and inclusive solutions that can further inform revisions and updates to the NDC/NAP.

5. Leverage investments in water supply and sanitation infrastructure to create livelihood opportunities for residents in the target areas and contribute to economic recovery from the start, participating in capital works, service management, maintenance and operations, oversight, quality monitoring, and related and complementary activities.

Message 4: 100% Transparency and Climate Action – against Corruption

Global climate finance flows are expected to increase over the next few years in response to climate change. Unfortunately, marginalized communities disproportionately bear both the impacts of climate change, as well as corruption. Without integrity and strong governance standards, climate finance can be diverted from vital prevention and adaptation activities into private bank accounts and vanity projects, often leading to catastrophic effects for vulnerable countries and communities. We, therefore, recommend governments to:

1. Put in place good processes to undertake early measures to curb corruption and strengthen integrity as the climate finance architecture in many countries, as well as globally, is still under development.
2. In the context of multilateral climate funds, national designated authorities and accredited entities should improve their respective capacities to strengthen integrity and address specific corruption risks. A zero-tolerance approach and targeted finance readiness support can positively affect water, sanitation, and hygiene projects.
3. Strengthening meaningful participation of marginalized and vulnerable communities and civil society in prioritization, planning, funding allocation, and implementation of projects through the right institutional arrangements and governance structures that could help reinforce their role concerning monitoring and oversight. It is also vital to ensure access to updated and adequate information for citizens.
4. Adhere to human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to information, accountability, and sustainability should inform all actions that government officials take to ensure that they act with integrity and professionalism.
5. Review contractual policies to consider that all capital/infrastructure government contracts include a percentage of overall project cost directed to incorporating nature-based and risk mitigation solutions, including leveraging these investments as collateral and/or towards accessing additional funds for projects.

MAKE CLIMATE FINANCE FAIR

Under the Paris Agreement, developed nations have jointly committed to mobilizing USD 100 billion per year to address the climate adaptation needs of developing countries, but most are yet to follow through on this commitment. Therefore, it is crucial that all sectors work together to help "grow the size of the climate pie" but also slice it fairly to refocus on the most marginalized and vulnerable people and groups.

Only 0.3% of climate finance goes to ensuring basic water, sanitation, and hygiene, and almost all the top 20 recipients are middle-income countries, rather than low-income ones, where the impact of climate change will be most acutely felt, and the proportion of the population with access is lowest. Most of this

finance also goes to support economic competitiveness efforts in cities rather than to meet the needs faced by the most vulnerable communities in informal settlements, peri-urban and rural areas, with lower levels of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and infrastructure that is less resilient to climate shocks.

Governments and businesses in developed countries need to live up to their longstanding financial commitments to deliver USD 100 billion per year by 2020, including USD 50 billion annually for adaptation measures, such as drought and flood prevention for emerging economies.

Message 5: Water, Sanitation and hygiene must be central to any response to the current triple climate, health, and economic crises

The world is at a crossroads – uncertainties caused by climate change and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic have enduring and evolving implications on livelihoods, jobs, economies, and every facet of daily life. Unfortunately, the most severe consequences are borne by those most vulnerable and the least equipped to respond. We, therefore, recommend national governments to:

1. Prioritize investments in water, sanitation, and hygiene in integrated crisis recovery strategies, focusing on the climate, the economy and public health. Investments in the provision of resilient water services can provide up to 21 times more value than expenditures, and are a necessary step towards universal, safely managed, climate-resilient and inclusive access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.
2. Prioritize water, sanitation, and hygiene services in institutions as a prerequisite to recovery from natural disasters or in humanitarian emergencies. Ensuring healthcare facilities, schools, and community centres have running water, wastewater treatment options, and adequate sanitation is critical to ensuring health services can be safely delivered to people after natural disasters and crises.

Key Facts and Figures

- [90% of climate change is happening through weather-related events](#) that profoundly impact the hydrological cycle, often resulting in too much water or too little water.
- Almost [600 million children](#) are projected to be living in areas of extremely high water stress.
- [Recent analysis](#) reveals that while around 9% of global NDC activities relate to SDG 6, they mostly refer to improving water management. By mid-2020, only 2% of NDCs were linked with access to sanitation and 3% to wastewater treatment.
- Potential return on investment of achieving universal access to resilient water, sanitation and hygiene is in the [order of trillions of dollars](#) over the next twenty years.
- Under [1% of the billions pledged](#) to address climate change goes to protect water services for poor communities, who are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their locations and lack of investments.
- Every dollar spent on strategic flood resilience upgrades could [avoid at least US \\$62 in flood restoration costs](#). Flood resilience is a highly cost-effective investment for flood-prone areas, with costs significantly lower than those of disruption and repair.
- Upgrading basic services to safely managed water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure will yield net benefits of [US \\$37–86 billion per year](#), avoiding up to 6

billion cases of diarrhoea and 12 billion cases of helminths between 2021 and 2040, with significant implications for child health and nutrition.

- The incremental cost of ensuring that new water, sanitation, and hygiene assets are climate-resilient amounts to just 1% of total infrastructure investment - but would [reduce the risk of damage to the new infrastructure by 50 per cent](#).

WORKING DOCUMENT