

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

GEF Project: The Freshwater Challenge: Accelerating Restoration and Conservation of Freshwater
Ecosystems

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Abbreviations

BSP – Business Supporter Program
CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CI – Conservation International
COP – Conference of the Parties
DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo
ERIP – Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program
ESMS – Environmental and Social Management System
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization (of the UN)
FPIC – Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FWC – Freshwater Challenge
GBF – Global Biodiversity Framework
GEF – Global Environment Facility
GRM – Grievance Redress Mechanism
GYBN – Global Youth Biodiversity Network
GYPW – Global Youth Partnership for Water
ILO – International Labour Organization
IPLCs / IPLC – Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
IPs – Indigenous Peoples
IWMI – International Water Management Institute
MEAs – Multilateral Environmental Agreements
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
MOWRAM – Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (Cambodia)
MSP – Medium-Sized Project
NBSAPs – National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
OFPs / OFP – Operational Focal Points (GEF)
PCO – Project Complaints Officer
PMU – Project Management Unit
PSC – Project Steering Committee
SBTN – Science Based Targets Network
SNUC – Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação (Brazil’s National System of Conservation Units)
TBC – To Be Confirmed
TNC – The Nature Conservancy
TNFD – Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures
UN – United Nations
UNCCD – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme
WI – Wetlands International
WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature
WWT – Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
YEW – Youth Engaged in Wetlands

1. Introduction

Based on the [Call for Action](#) to reverse the loss of freshwater biodiversity, the Ministers of Colombia, The Netherlands, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mexico and Gabon launched the Freshwater Challenge at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Montreal in December 2022.

The Freshwater Challenge was then formalised at the [Ministerial event at the UN Water Conference](#) organised by the government of Colombia, DRC, Ecuador, Gabon, Mexico and Zambia with the outspoken goal to restore 300,000 km of rivers and 350 million ha of wetlands and conserve freshwater ecosystems important for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, in line with “30x30” commitments in the GBF and complementary with the efforts of the High Ambition Coalition. It was established as a country-led initiative, governments forming its membership.

More countries attended the event at political level and France, Germany, USA, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, and Romania stated their interest in the Challenge. In 2023, the Freshwater Challenge was chosen as one of the Water Outcomes of COP28 in the United Arab Emirates – providing an ideal platform for governments to commit to the Challenge. Thirty-eight [countries seized the opportunity to join the challenge at a Ministerial event in Dubai, which was co-hosted by the COP28 Presidency](#). The Challenge has continued to build on the momentum generated in Dubai and, along with the European Union, there are 52 country members of the Freshwater Challenge as of July 2025.

This project responds to the requests by FWC member countries to the Supporting Coalition of the FWC. Member countries would like support to integrate freshwater ecosystem objectives into policies and plans across key water-dependent sectors, unlock resources and build expertise to implement freshwater ecosystem restoration and protection in their countries, and inspire and collectively engage stakeholders- like the private sector- to drive strategic basin-level investments and interventions.

This GEF-8 Project: “The Freshwater Challenge: Accelerating Restoration and Conservation of Freshwater Ecosystems”, has the objective to support country-led target setting and prioritization of specific wetland ecosystems in policies and plans, learning, and communications that strengthen their freshwater ecosystem interventions and accelerate progress towards the achievement of their 2030 FWC commitments.

The Project has 4 components:

- (i) Component 1: Supporting Countries and Development Institutions to Monitor Freshwater Challenge Objectives
- (ii) Component 2: Supporting Countries to Operationalize their Freshwater Challenge Objectives from Source to Sea
- (iii) Component 3: Enabling Country Learning to Strengthen National Freshwater Challenge Objectives
- (iv) Component 4: Communicating to Raise the Profile of Freshwater Ecosystems Locally, Nationally, in Transboundary Basins, and Globally

2. Regulations and Requirements

Freshwater Challenge Member Country Governments' Policies and Regulations

A comprehensive assessment of legal policies and regulations pertaining to stakeholder engagement, including public consultation and disclosure requirements, will be carried out during the planning phase with support from the Freshwater Challenge Core Partners responsible for implementation in the respective country (Brazil - WI, Cambodia – CI and Tanzania – TNC).

WWF Standard on Stakeholder Engagement

The WWF GEF Agency requires all GEF projects to comply with GEF and WWF standards on Stakeholder Engagement, specifically the WWF [Standard on Stakeholder Engagement](#) and the associated [Procedures for Implementation of the Standard on Stakeholder Engagement](#). Stakeholder engagement is an overarching term that encompasses a range of activities and interactions with stakeholders throughout the project cycle and is an essential aspect of good project management.

The WWF Standard on Stakeholder Engagement requires the Executing Agency to engage stakeholders throughout the life of the project; communicate significant changes to project stakeholders and consult on potential risks and impacts; establish a grievance redress mechanism and register, and respond to grievances throughout project execution; and disseminate information in a way that is relevant, transparent, objective, meaningful, and easily accessible. The Standard on Stakeholder Engagement promotes an inclusive process to support the development of strong, constructive and responsive relationships that help to identify and manage risks, and which encourage positive outcomes for stakeholders and project activities.

IUCN Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement

In IUCN stakeholder engagement is one of the eight principles that govern the Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS). The principle highlights the importance of meaningful, effective and informed participation of stakeholders in the development and implementation of projects. Engagement is critical to understanding the views and interests of different stakeholders on issues related to the project, flagging gaps and opportunities, establishing a constructive relationship or project roles with relevant parties and enabling stakeholders to take ownership of the project; it is also a vital element for promoting transparency and accountability, effective participation and inclusion.

[IUCN's Stakeholder engagement in the ESMS Manual](#) is well aligned with WWF's [Standard on Stakeholder Engagement](#) and also reflects requirements and good practice [recommendations on stakeholder engagement](#) and on information disclosure put forward by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

GEF requirements on Stakeholder Engagement

The GEF has in place two instruments on stakeholder engagement: [Policy on Stakeholder Engagement \(2017\)](#), and [Guidelines on Implementation of the Policy on Stakeholder Engagement \(2018\)](#), which further defines the policy and resources necessary for implementation. These instruments have in place mandatory requirements and procedures for GEF Partner Agencies and recipient government agencies to ensure transparency, inclusion, accountability, integrity, and effective participation of stakeholders and public for all projects financed by the GEF.

As spelled out in the policy, the intention of these instruments is two-fold: to strengthen the design and implementation of GEF-Financed activities through effective stakeholder engagement thereby reducing risks and addressing the social and economic needs of affected parties; and to ensure country ownership of the project and developing stronger partnerships with civil society, local communities,

private sector through harnessing their knowledge, experience and capabilities of affected and interested individuals and groups throughout the project cycle.

The policy outlines six requirements for governments and other executing partners implementing GEF financed activities, which are:

- Stakeholders are identified early in project and engaged throughout the project cycle.
- The engagement of stakeholders should include mechanisms that allow stakeholders to express their views and receive feedback on project plans, benefits, risks, impacts, and mitigation measures that may affect them.
- The engagement of stakeholders be gender responsive; free of manipulation, interference, coercion, discrimination and intimidation; and responsive to the needs and interests of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- Throughout the project cycle, a public register of stakeholder engagement is developed, maintained and disclosed. In cases where confidentiality is necessary to protect stakeholders from harm, statistical information is recorded and made publicly available.
- Stakeholders to the project are given access to timely, relevant and understandable information about activities implemented, and there are clear procedures in place to request information.
- Where GEF-financing supports an activity implemented by the Agency, such support is clearly identified and related non-confidential information is made publicly available and easily accessible.

The GEF recognizes that effective Stakeholder Engagement and meaningful consultation enhance the transparency, accountability, integrity, effectiveness and sustainability of GEF governance and operations by, *inter alia*, strengthening the design and implementation of GEF-Financed Activities, reducing risks and addressing the social and economic needs of affected parties. In addition, effective Stakeholder Engagement and meaningful consultation promote country ownership by forging stronger partnerships, particularly with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, communities and the private sector, and by harnessing the knowledge, experience and capabilities of affected and interested individuals and groups.

There are several key elements to “meaningful consultation”. It is a two-way process that:

- Begins early in the project identification and planning process to gather initial views.
- Encourages stakeholder feedback and engagement in the project development and design process.
- Continues during the development and implementation of a project GEF Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines (SD/GN/01)
- Is based on the prior disclosure and dissemination of relevant, transparent, objective, meaningful and easily accessible information in a timely manner and culturally appropriate format.
- Considers and responds to feedback.
- Supports active and inclusive engagement with project affected parties.
- Is free of external manipulation, interference, coercion, discrimination, and intimidation; and
- Is documented and disclosed.

3. Project Stakeholders

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan acknowledges that the Freshwater Challenge has its origins in 2022 and has grown into a global initiative with sets of different partners that have agreed amongst themselves to fulfil clearly defined functions and roles. This includes mechanisms of coordination and communication. A description of the Form and Function of the Freshwater Challenge can be found publicly at www.freshwaterchallenge.org

The GEF-8 Project: The Freshwater Challenge, includes several key stakeholder groups summarised below, a full Stakeholder Analysis can be found in Annex 1.

- *Freshwater Challenge Country Members:* The Freshwater Challenge Members consist of a group of currently 52 countries and the European Union. Additional countries may join the FWC by making an equivalent commitment to establish quantifiable targets (in hectares and/or kilometres) by 2025 within their national plans to restore and conserve freshwater ecosystems, thereby contributing to the achievement of national and/or global commitments by 2030. Each country member needs to designate a dedicated Freshwater Challenge Focal Point within its respective ministry.
- *Freshwater Challenge Core Partners:* There are eight Core Partners of the Challenge: Conservation International (CI), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Wetlands International and WWF. The Core Partners have been involved from the Challenge's inception. They supported the creation of the FWC with a set of leading countries and provide assistance and a coordinating role within the Challenge at global and national levels. Each Core Partner Organisation has a designated Global Focal Point. The Core Partners will serve as Global Project Steering Committee (PSC) and will be the highest decision-making authority for the project.
- *Freshwater Challenge Global Supporting Partners:* Global Supporting Partners are non-state actors recognized as organisations supporting the achievement of the FWC objectives in one or more countries or globally. Being a Global Supporting Partner of the FWC does not imply official membership or a direct and/or bilateral partnership with any FWC Core Partner or Member Country. The first Global Supporting Partners to join were UN Water and FAO. Civil Society Organizations, youth groups, associations, river basin organisations and others are invited to become supporting partners.
- *Business Supporting Partners:* Businesses have a critical role to play to help member countries achieve the ambitious goals of the FWC. As collective action will be key to driving progress, the Challenge has launched a Business Supporter Program (BSP) to that offers an opportunity for companies to contribute directly to global water goals; reduce water-related impacts, risks and dependencies; align with emerging sustainability frameworks, and government plans and strategies; build on existing initiatives and platforms; and demonstrate leadership in protecting and restoring critical natural resources.
- *Pilot Countries:* While Components 1, 3, and 4 are designed to involve all Freshwater Challenge partners at the global level, Component 2 operates at the country level and must engage national and local stakeholders to support the pilot countries Brazil, Cambodia, and Tanzania in operationalizing their Freshwater Challenge objectives from source to sea at the national scale. For each pilot country a different core partners serves as the head Country Partner

Organisation (Brazil – Wetlands International, Cambodia – Conservation International, and Tanzania – The Nature Conservancy)

- *Indigenous Communities and Local Communities:* IPLCs have not yet been identified or engaged in the Freshwater Challenge. As part of activities in pilot countries, an IPLC assessment will be completed within the first 18 months of the project, and communities will be engaged and involved in consultation, stakeholder participation, project implementation and decision-making accordingly. For project outputs at global level on indicators, knowledge and communication, relevant IUCN Indigenous People’s member organisations will be consulted and IUCN’s [ESMS Standard on Indigenous Peoples](#) followed.
- *Women:* In accordance with the [GEF’s Policy on Gender Mainstreaming](#) and [WWF’s Statement of Principles of Gender Equality](#), and [IUCN’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy](#) which recognize that a more systematic inclusion of gender aspects in projects could create positive synergies between improved environmental impact and greater gender equality, a Gender Analysis and Action Plan was conducted to inform and guide the development of the Freshwater Challenge project with specific focus on the three pilot countries.
- *Youth:* Youth play a vital role in the management and conservation of freshwater ecosystems, bringing energy, innovation, and a strong sense of urgency to addressing water challenges. Outlined in the [IUCN Youth Strategy](#) IUCN commits to ensuring meaningful engagement of young people to bring together different generations to join efforts in reversing biodiversity loss, conserving nature and managing natural resources sustainably. In recent years, youth engagement on water has grown significantly, marked by the emergence of global networks such as the Global Youth Partnership for Water (GYPW) and Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW), who are invited to join the FWC as supporting partner to help amplify young voices and actions for freshwater ecosystems worldwide. This momentum is also visible at the local level in the three pilot countries where youth groups and young leaders are actively contributing to freshwater conservation and restoration effort and are part of project activities in the pilot countries.

4. Summary of any previous stakeholder engagement activities

Launched in 2022, the Freshwater Challenge has since undergone extensive consultations on its form, function, focus areas, and priorities. Through regular meetings, a structured communication framework between Core Partners, Supporting Partners, and country members has been established. These exchanges have directly shaped the project’s design, ensuring it is well-positioned to accelerate progress on the Freshwater Challenge.

A key milestone was the first Freshwater Challenge Country Member in-person workshop, held in Gland, Switzerland, in May 2024. Designed by the Core Partners, FAO, and an external facilitator, the workshop brought together representatives from 32 member countries and other leading organisations, with a few participants joining online. The stated aim of this first country meeting was “to co-develop the next stage of the Freshwater Challenge”—including defining priorities (based on country needs), approaches, and next steps for operationalization. Prior to the meeting, a questionnaire was sent to all member countries to capture their expectations for the Freshwater Challenge, a summary of results can be found in Annex 3.

Following the Gland workshop, several regular coordination meetings, working groups, and structured consultation rounds were formalized to review and advance progress on the Challenge. In November 2024, the GEF Secretariat announced its support for the Freshwater Challenge through a Medium-

Sized Project (MSP). Since then, targeted discussions on project design and specific outputs have been held, particularly with the three pilot countries. A summary of consultations per stakeholder group following the GEF announcement is provided below.

The Freshwater Challenge Core Partners increased the visibility of the Freshwater Challenge by hosting events at several global high level events including:

- **UN 2023 Water Conference** — 22–24 Mar 2023, *UN Headquarters, New York.*
- **UNFCCC COP28** — 30 Nov–13 Dec 2023, *Dubai, United Arab Emirates.*
- **World Water Forum 10** — 18–25 May 2024, *Bali, Indonesia.*
- **AWS Global Water Stewardship Forum 2024** — 5–6 Jun 2024, *Edinburgh, Scotland.*
- **Stockholm World Water Week 2024** — 25–29 Aug 2024, *Stockholm & online*
- **UNGA / Climate Week NYC 2024** — Climate Week: 22–29 Sep 2024;
- **CBD COP16** — 21 Oct–1 Nov 2024, *Cali, Colombia;*
- **UNCCD COP16** — 2–13 Dec 2024, *Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.*
- **One Water Summit** – Dec 2024, *Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.*
- **UNFCCC COP29** — 11–22 Nov 2024, *Baku, Azerbaijan.*
- **AWS Global Water Stewardship Forum 2025** — 22-23 Jun 2025, *Edinburgh, Scotland.*
- **Stockholm World Water Week 2025** — 24–28 Aug 2025, *Stockholm & online.*
- **Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) COP15** — 23–31 Jul 2025, *Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.*

Core Partners

Core Partners meet as a full group at least once a month. Updates about the GEF development phase are a standing item during these meetings and partners can voice their questions and concerns.

On 25 March 2025, Core Partners convened in Ede, the Netherlands, for an in-person workshop as part of their regular engagement process, which includes monthly full-group meetings with standing updates on the GEF development phase. During the workshop, WWF-US, acting as the GEF Agency, presented the project plan and clarified the roles of each Core Partner, who will serve as Implementing Agencies or partners. A key discussion point was the role of pilot countries, with clarification that these would be primarily engaged in Component 2, while other components would benefit a broader set of FWC member countries. Partners expressed general agreement on three of the four provisional pilot countries—Tanzania, Cambodia, and Fiji, there was some discussion about whether to include Mexico or Brazil. It was agreed that country-selection criteria would be re-circulated and that partners would consult in-country colleagues to assess readiness before outreach to OFPs. The group also discussed revisiting co-finance estimates, which had been based on 2025 spending, in light of the project's 2026 start date, with each partner to identify ongoing work in both pilot and non-pilot countries that could be counted as co-finance.

Supporting Partners

Supporting Partners are engaged regularly through quarterly Freshwater Challenge (FWC) calls with countries and through working group meetings. FAO participates actively in both the Technical Assistance Working Group and the Policy and Advocacy Working Group. On 27 July, during the Convention on Wetlands COP15, FWC Core Partners met with Supporting Partners WWT, BirdLife, and IWMI to discuss their roles in the initiative, clarify expectations, and explore opportunities for engagement in the GEF project. All three organisations bring extensive networks of global and local partners, which can be leveraged for advocacy and communication. They also implement on-the-ground projects and can contribute valuable data for indicator tracking, as well as knowledge and materials to support country learning. WWT has established the World Wetland Network for wetland surveys and data collection, maintains strong links to the Ramsar Convention's CEPA Programme, and has extensive experience in youth engagement and wetland education programmes.

Working Groups

During the first Freshwater Challenge workshop in Gland four working groups were established which are open to all FWC members and partners. Each working group meets regularly, has agreed upon TORs for the group and develops an annual workplan, generally groups meet on a bi-weekly basis. Specific objectives of the different working groups have informed GEF Project development and when relevant have been integrated as activities within the project.

Governance and Hosting

The main goal of this group was to establish a structure for the Freshwater Challenge, providing all members and partners with a non-binding framework to advance the initiative. This effort led to the development of the Function and Form paper, which is publicly available on the Freshwater Challenge website (www.freshwaterchallenge.org). The group also led the development a Core Partner Memorandum of Cooperation, Terms of Reference for the Supporting Partner and guidelines for partners to engage with countries. The group concluded its work in March 2024.

Resource Mobilisation and Implementation

The primary goal of the Working Group is to serve as a catalyst for engaging multiple stakeholders and mobilizing significant financial support to help member countries implement robust freshwater restoration initiatives. Some of the group's objectives, discussed during its formation, have directly informed the development of the GEF Project and have been incorporated into it. Key goals of the Working Group include:

- Developing a comprehensive database of funding opportunities relevant to freshwater ecosystem restoration, protection, and management, building on existing resources.
- Providing one-on-one advice to countries on resource mobilization strategies and action plans, where requested and capacity allows.
- Acting as a liaison between countries and donors, facilitating introductions and initial discussions as needed.
- Collaborating with countries to develop concepts, proposals, and initiatives, including through peer learning, whenever opportunities arise.

Business

In March 2024 a Working Group was established to facilitate business engagement in the FWC. A milestone for the group was the development of the [Business Supporter Programme](#) which was developed following consultations with at least 70 business during Stockholm World Water Week and New York Climate Week in 2024 followed by an in-depth consultation with 15 businesses. The group continues to work on growing business support, facilitate and convene between business and government around FWC goals and priorities.

Policy and Advocacy

This group was formed in March 2025 to connect Freshwater Challenge country members with other working groups, with a focus on providing technical assistance to support national freshwater target setting. It also collates policy and legal guidance to help members establish and implement effective policy measures. In addition, the group works to enhance the global visibility and advocacy of the Freshwater Challenge, including at major international forums such as the Rio Convention COPs, Ramsar Convention COPs, Stockholm World Water Week, and New York Climate Week.

Technical Assistance Group

This Working Group is responsible for advising on technical and policy matters for member countries and, where needed, for other Working Groups. Its roles include curating guidance materials and overseeing knowledge exchange activities in support of the Freshwater Challenge (FWC) goals. In line with the principle of remaining lean and efficient, the Technical Assistance Working Group (TA WG)

prioritizes directing member countries to existing tools and guidance rather than producing numerous new FWC knowledge products. The group has defined several key objectives, some of which have been directly incorporated into the GEF project. It has also taken the lead in hosting a webinar for country members on national freshwater target setting.

Member Countries

Member countries have been consulted on the key priorities for the Freshwater Challenge through multiple channels: during the Gland meeting in May 2024, via a questionnaire developed for that meeting, and through a survey sent to all FWC member countries between March and May 2025. Since October 2025, a total of five virtual country meetings have been held. These meetings, open to country members, Core and Supporting Partners, and other interested observers, provided updates on the FWC GEF Project and its development. They also offered a platform for countries to ask questions, share concerns, and identify priority areas for the project. As national freshwater target-setting is one of the project’s key outcomes—alongside building capacity to integrate freshwater into national planning—a dedicated webinar on target-setting was held in July 2025.

Pilot Countries

The three pilot countries have primarily engaged in-country with at least one core partner each. Core partners agreed that one partner would take the lead in each country (Table 1) where they have the strongest engagement. At least one online pilot-country consultation workshop has taken place per country (see Annex 2). Each country was asked to fill out a questionnaire as part of development of the FWC as an initiative.

Table 1 Core partner lead, presence of other partners

Country	Lead Core Partner	Other Core Partners	FWC Contact Point Ministry	GEF OFP Contact Point Ministry
Brazil	WI: Breno Melo	WWF - Edegar Oliveira ; Michel Santos TNC - Karen Oliveira Claudio Klemz; Samuel Barreto WI : Paula Martinelli IUCN - James Dalton and Isabel Wallnoefer	Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Iara Bueno Giacomini	Ministry of Finance (Dr. Daniela Faria)
Tanzania	TNC: Emmanuel Mpina John Komakoma; Lucy Magembe	WWF - Christian J. Dr. Amani Ngusaru - Zachy Wambura - TNC - Flavia Loures Irene Farrow, Megan Westby WI - Julie Mulonga; Paula Martinelli; Sheilah Ruto IUCN - Davison Saruchera	Ministry of Water (Robert Sunday) Assistant Director of Water Resources (Transboundary Waters)	Director of Environment, Vice President’s Office (Ms. Kemilembe Mutasa)
Cambodia	CI: Sony Oum	CI - Jackson Frechette Nathan Conaboy WWF - Dipankar Patnaik Marc Goichot IUCN - Jake Brunner	MOWRAM focal point, H.E. Dr Chantha Oeung /Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM; Mr. Kim Mongsreang)	Ministry of Environment (H.E. San Vanty)

During the project preparation phase, discussions were held between WWF-US, core partner country offices, the Freshwater Challenge government focal points, and the respective GEF OFP Ministry Contact Points, along with other relevant ministries. At a meeting during the Ramsar Convention COP15, the Ramsar Focal Points and the Freshwater Challenge Focal Points from Brazil, Tanzania, and Cambodia presented and discussed their in-country project ideas and opportunities.

Other engagement activities

While general consultations on the Freshwater Challenge have been taking place since its initiation—including private sector engagement events during Stockholm Water Week in August 2024, the UN General Assembly in September 2024, and side events at Rio Convention COPs—specific discussions on the GEF project have occurred during the project preparation phase with private sector actors and youth. For more details, see Annex 2.

5. Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The purpose of this Stakeholder Engagement Plan is to ensure appropriate, meaningful and consistent involvement of project stakeholders at different levels and in every stage of the project implementation, supporting effective and inclusive communication and working relationships. The executing agency will be responsible for facilitating stakeholder engagement throughout project implementation to ensure that delivery of project components integrates the views and addresses the needs of project stakeholders, maximising long term impact.

Consultation and engagement processes will continue throughout the project as required by the nature of the Freshwater Challenge, ensuring growing ownership of beneficiaries and maintaining inclusive and diverse representation, including government agencies, civil society, youth, men, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, multilateral development banks, and the private sector among women and men in target communities. The executing agency will ensure that the information disclosed, the format, language and the methods used to communicate the information will be tailored to each stakeholder group and the stakeholder engagement plan is adapted as need be.

Proposed methods to receive feedback and to ensure ongoing communications with stakeholders

The overall structure of Freshwater Challenge governance and coordination mechanisms will be maintained as it was during the project preparation phase, including as described in Working Group ToRs and the Core Partner MoU. This structure serves as a key stakeholder engagement mechanism for the project.

As outlined in the Function and Form paper, the structure of the Freshwater Challenge remains flexible, partners can agree to change meeting frequency, working groups can be formed or dissolved in agreement with other core partners, country members and the PMU needs to be informed as soon as possible.

Global level

There are several engagement modalities built into the project (Table 2) to keep different stakeholder groups informed and engaged. Other means of communication and stakeholder engagement include bilateral meetings, consultations, workshops, webinars, emails and social media. The Freshwater Challenge Website with integrated FWC Learning Hub remains the central point of global communication. As this is a global initiative, language constraints must be addressed. Key learning

materials should be available in English, French, and Spanish, while case studies or highly localized content may also be provided in national or local languages.

Each core and supporting organisation designate a global focal point to oversee the activities their organisation undertakes at both the country and global levels. In addition, every Freshwater Challenge member country appoints a national government focal point upon joining the initiative. The PMU, supported by the Core Partners will ensure that lists of focal points are up to date.

The Global Project Steering Committee (PSC) will be the highest decision-making authority for the project. Members of the PSC will include: at least one representative and one proxy member from WWF, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, Wetlands International, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, the UNCCD Secretariat, UNEP, a FWC partner youth organization (TBC), Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (Brazil), Ministry of Environment (Cambodia), Ministry of Water (Tanzania), a private sector representative, GEF Secretariat (Observer) and IUCN (Observer/Secretary).

The PSC will meet virtually on a quarterly basis with the IUCN Project Manager attending as an observer to provide PMU Secretariat support in terms of the draft agenda, minutes, supporting materials and coordinating inputs from members and other contributors. A representative of the WWF GEF Agency will also participate as an observer. The Global PSC Chair position will be filled by Global PSC members on an annual rotative basis.

Table 2 outlines methods for stakeholder engagement. For global or regional meetings with member country engagement, translation should be available in at least French, Spanish, and English to ensure inclusivity and address the needs of all countries and participants. For other meetings, translation should be arranged based on specific needs to foster inclusivity.

Country level

In the three pilot countries, the respective Country Partner Organisation (Brazil – WI, Cambodia – TNC, Tanzania – TNC) will oversee project implementation, including engaging stakeholders and keeping them informed. The respective country executing agency is also responsible for coordinating with other in-country core partners (Table 1) and should maintain a record of stakeholder engagement to be shared with the IUCN Project Manager. The Communications and Partnerships Officer will organize an annual national-level meeting to inform stakeholders and decision-makers about project progress.

Table 2 List of methods for stakeholder communication during project implementation

Means of communication/ engagement	Frequency and Chairing	Participants	Description
Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting	Quarterly; annual rotating chair PSC member	FWC Core partners IUCN Project Manager (observer) WWF GEF Agency GEF Secretariat (observer) Private sector representative Youth organisation (TBC)	High-level oversight and strategic guidance for the project
Core Partner Meeting	Monthly, monthly rotating chair	FWC Core Partners PMU (optional)	Exchange between core-partners, updates from working groups
FWC Global meetings	Quarterly	FWC Core Partners FWC Member countries FWC Supporting Partners PMU	Exchange between all FWC members and partners.

FWC working group meetings	Bi-weekly, Fixed chair agreed by group	Representatives from Core Partners, Member countries, Supporting Partners with relevant expertise	Progress on each working group's workplan is discussed
Public webinars	Technical Assistance Working Group, At least one, to be determined	Online, open to the public and widely advertised through all FWC partners and members.	Under Output 1.1.1 A public webinar will be organized when the framework and guidance are ready for sharing; potentially this could be organized in conjunction with GEF IW:Learn.
FWC Learning Hub (integrated in FWC Website)	To be managed by Wetlands International in coordination with IW:LEARN and GEF ERIP	Open to public	Public information and learning platform for all relevant FWC content translated into three languages (including tracker, publications, guidance, case studies etc.)
Freshwater Challenge Exchanges (<i>Output 3.2.1</i>)	Relevant core partner focal point depending on countries, In person or virtual at least 6 Freshwater Challenge Exchanges across project duration plus	Relevant Stakeholders within the exchanging countries	Support country-to-country learning and exchange starting with the selected three countries and bringing in other eligible FWC member countries where clear benefits can be leverage
Post-exchange knowledge sharing events to share learning from exchanges	To be determined	Public	Post-exchange knowledge sharing events to share learning from exchanges
Regular online meetings ("technical clinics") (<i>Output 3.2.2</i>)	To be determined	FWC Member Countries, Technical experts including from FWC core and supporting partners	Participating countries will be brought together virtually and/or in person with additional experts to work on the identified challenge and barriers to restoring freshwater ecosystems at scale,
In-country technical advisory meetings	To be determined, at least 4	FWC Member Countries, Technical experts including from FWC core and supporting partners	Allow participating FWC countries to pose technical requests and obtain guidance from international experts and other countries;
In person and/or virtual peer-to-peer exchange	To be determined	Concerned government agencies and supporting organizations (eg water institutes, NGO partners)	Participating countries will be brought together virtually and/or in person with additional experts to work on the identified challenge and barriers to restoring freshwater ecosystems at scale

Post-event evaluation form	-	Event/activity participants	All events and activities will assess lessons learned through an evaluation form designed in early stages of the project
Regional round table dialogues	At least three	FWC members and partners including at least 10 youth from the host region participate in each of the round table events	Regionally significant themes on the sidelines of related global or regional events in the Africa, Asia - Pacific and Latin America - Caribbean regions;
Relevant global, regional and national events	TBC	FWC members and partners including representatives from youth and IPLCs	Share progress on FWC and knowledge on freshwater conservation and restoration at in person events e.g. GEF International Waters Conference, Rio Convention COPs or similar.
Bilateral meetings, consultations, emails, social media, radio and theatre	-	Diverse stakeholders included in but not limited to Annex 1 with particular focus on women, youth and IPLCs	As needed per project output.

Strategy to incorporate views of Indigenous Peoples

The project will abide by the [WWF policy on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation](#). The WWF Statement of Principles is to ensure that indigenous rights are respected in WWF's work, that indigenous peoples do not suffer adverse impacts from projects, and that they receive culturally appropriate benefits from conservation, this aligns with [IUCN's Indigenous Peoples Standard](#).

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) recognition and procedures differ in the three pilot countries:

In Brazil according to Federal Law No. 9.985/2000, or the SNUC Law, and the decree that regulates it (No. 4.340/2002), the creation of a Conservation Unit must be preceded by technical studies and by public consultations. Citizen participation and prior consultation of Indigenous Peoples is set out in provisions included in international treaties, such as ILO Convention 169 (ratified by Brazil in 2002).

In Cambodia, the new Environment & Natural Resources Code (2023) creates explicit public participation for Environmental Impact Assessments including access-to-information and right to complaints and objections provisions. The Land Law (2001) recognizes Indigenous communities and communal ownership of their immovable property; participation rights appear in Protected Areas and environmental laws.

In Tanzania the government does not officially recognize Indigenous Peoples as a category; customary land rights are recognized via village land laws. The Environmental Management Act 2004 has a dedicated Part XIV: Public participation in environmental decision-making including right of information, public involvement and mechanisms to raise concerns, comments and questions.

In summary, Brazil (ILO Convention 169) requires prior consultation (consent only in defined cases like relocation), while Cambodia and Tanzania have public-participation/village-approval mechanisms but no blanket Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) so engagement must be tailored to local law and context. Finally, all three pilot countries have developed National Biodiversity Strategy and Action

Plans (NBSAPs) at least until 2020, through the Convention on Biological Diversity, which require stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation of conservation activities and projects.

WWF and IUCN will ensure that whenever IPs are engaged during project implementation, prior consultations and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is obtained for any intervention. Throughout the project [IUCN's Environmental and Social Management System Standard on Indigenous Peoples](#) will be upheld, which is consistent with the Global Environment Facility's Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards in its provisions for indigenous peoples and the WWF Policy on [Environment and Social Risk Management](#).

Global level

A consultation process will be initiated through IUCN's Indigenous People's Organisation Members to help define how IPs wish to engage with the Freshwater Challenge. Options may include becoming a supporting partner of the Challenge, being regularly informed of its progress, forming their own working group, joining an existing working group, or identifying another preferred form of engagement.

Country level

Upfront engagement with Indigenous Peoples' organizations (IPOs) during the early stages of national target setting is essential. Lessons learned on target setting will include best practices for incorporating Indigenous perspectives, guided by FPIC principles. For activities within pilot countries the PMU together with the respective Country Partner Organisation will ensure full compliance with the IUCN ESMS Standard on Indigenous Peoples, particularly where (i) Indigenous Peoples are present in the project area, (ii) Indigenous Peoples have a collective attachment to the area, and/or (iii) Indigenous Peoples could be affected by project interventions. This will be informed by a pilot – country stakeholder analysis undertaken as part of

Proposed strategy to incorporate views of youth

Youth are key actors in environmental stewardship and are essential in ensuring the Freshwater Challenge goals will be met. Young people bring innovation, energy, and long-term commitment to tackling environmental challenges, and their voices are essential in shaping sustainable solutions. Youth are increasingly organizing at the global, regional, and local levels through networks such as the Global Youth Partnership for Water (GYPW), the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) and Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW), while also leading grassroots action in countries such as Brazil, Cambodia, and Tanzania. At the same time, youth are often among the groups most affected by environmental degradation and water insecurity, yet they frequently have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that shape their future.

WWF and IUCN will ensure that youth are meaningfully engaged during project implementation and that their participation is not tokenistic but contributes to decision-making, capacity development, and the design of culturally and generationally appropriate benefits from conservation.

Youth are invited to engage with the Freshwater Challenge. Options may include youth-led organisations becoming supporting partners, joining or forming youth working groups, contributing to communications campaigns, or identifying other forms of preferred engagement particularly during round-table events. Specific communications activities and youth-targeted messaging will be co-developed and coordinated with youth. Global and national youth networks will be consulted to co-design activities under output 4.2.2.

Proposed strategy for gender responsive project management

Women are a critical stakeholder group for freshwater target-setting because they interact with water systems in distinctive, often under-recognized ways and hold locally specific knowledge about availability, quality, risks, and workable solutions particularly when it comes to conservation and restoration efforts and sustainable use of freshwater ecosystems. Evidence from natural-resource governance also shows that decisions are more durable and compliance is higher when women help design them; bringing women into target-setting improves feasibility, uptake, and benefit-sharing.

The Gender Analysis and Action Plan outlines mechanisms to ensure equitable, meaningful participation of women and men across all project components and phases.

The Role of the Private Sector in the project;

The project integrates the private sector as a critical partner in advancing the Freshwater Challenge (FWC), acknowledging that businesses both depend on and impact freshwater systems. Companies face mounting risks from floods, droughts, pollution, and regulatory changes tied to water management. Through this initiative, the project aims to harness private sector innovation, investment, and influence to drive freshwater ecosystem restoration and resilience.

Private sector engagement under the FWC focuses on:

- Mobilizing corporate co-finance and technical expertise for restoration actions.
- Building business accountability frameworks aligned with global water stewardship standards.
- Strengthening partnerships with platforms such as the CEO Water Mandate, the Water Resilience Coalition (WRC), and Business for Nature.

The Business Supporter Program (BSP)

A major achievement in expanding private sector collaboration has been the creation of the Freshwater Challenge Business Supporter Program (BSP) in 2025. Developed through consultation with more than 60 companies during Stockholm World Water Week (August 2024) and the UN General Assembly (September 2024), the BSP operationalizes business participation in freshwater restoration.

The BSP is built on the ACT-D framework — Assess, Commit, Transform, Disclose — and encourages businesses to:

1. Assess their basin-level water risks and dependencies.
2. Commit to measurable freshwater restoration targets.
3. Transform operations and supply chains to enhance water stewardship.
4. Disclose progress transparently in line with sustainability reporting systems.

Early members include Reckitt, GSK, EDEKA, and IKEA, representing the consumer goods and retail sectors. These pioneers demonstrate the appeal of linking business resilience to freshwater conservation, with more corporations expected to join in subsequent project phases.

Corporate Contributions and Roles

Companies are providing both financial and in-kind co-financing, including support for high-level FWC events and technical expertise in monitoring, communications, and investment design. Their roles encompass:

- Shaping freshwater investment strategies and reducing water risks.
- Developing practical indicators for corporate contributions to ecosystem restoration.
- Showcasing case studies of private-sector-led or co-financed freshwater actions.
- Expanding financing flows through partnerships with banks, insurers, and development funds.

Through their engagement, private sector actors become amplifiers of freshwater stewardship, helping elevate the FWC within business networks and among policy-makers. The BSP also serves as a mechanism for aligning business actions with national FWC targets and 30x30 biodiversity goals.

Strategic Platforms and Partnerships

The project leverages major international corporate water initiatives to maximize impact and coherence:

- CEO Water Mandate and Water Resilience Coalition — promote basin-scale collaboration among global corporations.
- Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) — provides certification standards and metrics.
- World Economic Forum (WEF) and Business for Nature — facilitate advocacy and high-level corporate engagement.

These alliances foster joint learning, harmonized reporting, and new blended-finance mechanisms to support national FWC implementation.

Rationale for Private Sector Engagement

The private sector's participation stems from recognition that water-related risks threaten supply chains, production continuity, and community stability. By participating in the FWC, companies safeguard their long-term economic interests while contributing to ecosystem restoration and social resilience. Their involvement:

- Reduces operational and reputational risks.
- Enhances compliance with emerging regulatory frameworks.
- Unlocks new sustainability-linked investment opportunities.
- Demonstrates leadership in implementing nature-based solutions (NbS).

Anticipated Outcomes

By the end of the four-year project, private sector engagement is expected to yield:

- Increased corporate adoption of basin-scale water stewardship standards.
- Improved data and indicators for measuring business impacts on freshwater ecosystems.
- Stronger alignment between public and private financing under the Global Biodiversity Framework and national freshwater targets.

Collectively, these efforts aim to normalize private sector participation in freshwater ecosystem restoration — positioning businesses as co-implementers, investors, and advocates for the Freshwater Challenge vision.

Stakeholder engagement per project component

Component 1: Supporting Countries and Development Institutions to Monitor Freshwater Challenge Objectives

This component will be led by WWF-US who will lead consultations with country representatives, bilateral agencies and multilateral institutions for the development of the indicator framework and monitoring methods described in this component. A key mechanism for input is the Freshwater Challenge Technical Assistance working group meetings chaired by WWF-US. Other engagement mechanisms are emails, bilateral conversations and meetings online workshops, online trainings and webinars. The Technical Assistance Working Group Chair will regularly inform the PSC and the PMU, who supports communication between technical experts and country partners to ensure indicator guidance is clearly understood and accessible throughout development and piloting phase.

- **Experts and institutions:** Relevant experts from Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), the scientific community, academia, and earth observation initiatives will be invited to provide input. Key partners include the FAO Expert Working Group on Ecosystem Restoration and the GEF Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program (ERIP). Their role will be to help align existing indicator methodologies and frameworks with the recommendations of the Freshwater Challenge (FWC).
- **Country representatives:** Regular consultations with country representatives will be held through online consultations with Freshwater Challenge focal points during regular FWC country member meetings. National consultations should include relevant government agencies.
- **Development partners:** Bilateral agencies supporting the FWC (e.g., Sweden, Germany, the UK, France, and the European Commission) and relevant multilateral development banks and institutions will be consulted to identify entry points for freshwater ecosystems within their development priorities and frameworks.
- **Private sector:** Representatives from relevant private sector initiatives (SBTN, TNFD, CEO Water Mandate, etc.) will be consulted through the Private Sector Working Group on the co-development of indicators, ensuring that business perspectives and potential contributions are incorporated.
- **Youth participation:** Youth organisations will be encouraged to nominate representatives to join the working group or sub-groups. This will give them first-hand experience in how global indicators are developed and ensure that youth perspectives are reflected.
- **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):** In-country piloting of indicators, data collection, and indicator application must be relevant and meaningful to IPLCs, especially when data are collected on their lands and territories. Their perspectives and consent will be key to ensuring legitimacy and effectiveness. The Country Partner Organisation, together with the national implementing partners will seek FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent).

Component 2. Supporting Countries to Operationalize their Freshwater Challenge Objectives from Source to Sea

In the three pilot countries will lead interventions with support of the respective Country Partner Organisation (Brazil – WI, Cambodia – CI, Tanzania – TNC), including stakeholder engagement. The respective Country Partner Organisation is also encouraged to keep other core and supporting partners that operate in the same country informed. The Country Partner Organisation is responsible for maintaining a record of stakeholder engagement to be shared with the PMU.

As part of the country pipeline and gap analysis, a stakeholder analysis will be undertaken by the respective Country Partner Organisation together with the key government partners. This analysis will verify inputs received from countries during PPG phase (see Annex 8 National Demonstration Activity Proposals). Templates used for this stakeholder analysis can be found as Annex in [IUCN's Stakeholder](#)

[Engagement Guidance Note](#). Youth, IPLC, women and marginalized groups need to be included in the analysis. The resulting country stakeholder analyses will be used to inform all activities under this component. For any activities that involve IPLC, FPIC needs to be ensured, and a risk analysis and correlated mitigation plan needs to be developed, implemented and monitored in the form of an Environmental Social Management Plan.

All activities under component 2, including the development of the pipeline and gap analysis methodology by IUCN and any in-country activities such as setting up advisory committees (Brazil), support for community based organisations in ecosystem management (Cambodia) and convening a multisectoral forums and wetland management (Tanzania) will be carried out in a youth and gender-responsive and participatory manner, informed by the in-country stakeholder analysis.

Component 3. Enabling Country Learning to Strengthen National Freshwater Challenge Objectives

The Freshwater Challenge Learning Hub, managed by Wetlands International with oversight from the PMU will serve as the main external communication channel for the initiative, where all materials will be collected and publicly shared including pilot-country case studies.

Country-to country exchanges will be designed in a stakeholder inclusive manner to ensure relevant in-country stakeholders identified through the in-country stakeholder analysis (Component 2) will take part in these exchanges, with particular focus on ensuring gender balance and youth participation in exchanges. Debriefing reports and questionnaires for each exchange to collect feedback will be made available by the PMU as well as post-learning exchanges.

Examples of how different stakeholder groups will be involved in country learning is outlined per stakeholder group:

- **Country members:** Wetlands International will consult the FWC member countries to clearly understand needs of the end-users of the learning hub. The results from the FWC member country survey conducted in June 2024 will inform the design of the Learning Hub (Output 3.1.1), and the survey will be re-circulated to countries that joined after that date to ensure their perspectives are included.
- **Pilot-countries:** Pilot countries supported by the respective Country Partner Organisation will contribute case studies to the Learning Hub (Output 3.1.2). Learning case studies will be translated into local languages and made available in locally appropriate formats for media such as radio programmes or social media, to promote local uptake of case study results;
- **Programs and projects:** Stakeholders from IW:LEARN, the GEF Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program (ERIP), and the Source-to-Sea Steering Committee will be consulted through online meetings to share lessons and resources and to align the project with ongoing global efforts.
- **Freshwater Challenge Supporting Partners:** These partners will provide input during partner and working group meetings and will directly contribute curated content for the Learning Hub, ensuring that it remains dynamic, relevant, and diverse. They are also invited to join the country exchanges.
- **Experts and institutions:** Prior to national and regional learning activities regional and country-level stakeholder mapping exercises will be conducted to ensure relevant expert groups, national and regional agencies, technical organizations, and committees are invited to participate and contribute.
- **Private sector:** The private sector will be represented through the Private Sector Working Group. Freshwater Challenge Exchanges will be developed in consultation with this group and members of the Business Supporter Programme to enable sharing of lessons learned. The

Business Supporters will be consulted to clearly understand needs of the end-users of the learning hub and source relevant material to populate the hub.

- **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):** Through identified local and country IPLC organizations, IPLCs will be engaged to decide whether and how they wish to co-design and implement every activity in this component particularly the country-to-country exchanges and peer-learning activities. Learning case studies on IPLC engagement are encouraged and should be developed with relevant stakeholders, in line with FPIC principles.
- **Youth participation:** Youth will be engaged through focal points of global youth organisations as well as national-level youth networks to provide input on learning, communications, and mentoring needs. Case studies that feature youth engagement will be prioritised and showcased, including those developed through the Youth Challenge Grants (Output 4.2.2), to highlight youth-led contributions and innovations. Learning from and exchange between youth-led organisations will be ensured through participation of youth representatives in “*Freshwater Challenge Exchanges*” (Output 3.2.1) with dedicated sessions on youth. Youth will be encouraged to participate in the peer-to-peer exchanges (Output 3.2.2) either as expert contributors where they have relevant expertise (e.g., PhD students) and/or as youth champions focused on learning.

Component 4. Communicating to Raise the Profile of Freshwater Ecosystems Locally, Nationally, in Transboundary Basins, and Globally and engagement with IW:LEARN

A central focus of this component is the development of a communications strategy. The strategy will be led by the PMU, with input from relevant stakeholders identified through the global and local stakeholder analyses. These inputs will be gathered using the engagement mechanisms outlined in Table 1. The regional roundtables serve as stakeholder engagement platforms and are an opportunity to engage both members and non-members of the FWC with particular focus on youth participation in all the events with mentorship for youth participants before during and after the events. The Youth Grants will be designed in consultation with the pilot countries and will include a capacity-building component to support applications from interested youth organizations and individuals. Youth engagement will take place through networks of young people already involved in national or international youth initiatives, national youth networks will be identified during the pilot country stakeholder analysis (Component 2).

6. Resources and Responsibilities

WWF is the GEF implementing Agency, while IUCN will serve as the Lead Executing Agency for the project, with the Project Management Unit hosted by IUCN HQ. The IUCN PMU will receive GEF funds from WWF GEF Agency and disburse them as sub-grants for execution of specific project outputs through agreements with the members of the FWC Supporting Coalition (including CI, TNC and WI)

This will include disbursement to the identified Country Partners to collaborate with their country-office counterparts in the selected FWC member countries: Brazil (WI), Cambodia (CI) and Tanzania (TNC) for delivery of the project Outputs at country level.

The WWF GEF Project Agency is responsible for oversight. The IUCN as the Lead Executing Agency is responsible for executing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan together with the sub-grantees and overall compliance with the WWF Standard on Stakeholder Engagement. The PMU staff will support the Country Partners in stakeholder engagement activities including keeping a record of stakeholder engagement.

7. Grievances Mechanism

A grievances mechanism will be implemented as part of the project. These grievances mechanisms are designed to enable the receipt of complaints of affected women and men and public concerns regarding the environmental and social performance of the project. In short, their aim is to provide people fearing, or suffering, adverse impacts with the opportunity to be heard and assisted. As such, the mechanisms are designed to address the concerns of the community(ies) with a particular project, identify the root causes of the conflicts, and find options for the resolution of grievances. Therefore, they constitute an essential tool to foster good cooperation with project stakeholders and ensure adequate delivery of previously agreed-upon results.

The mechanisms are designed to:

- Address potential breaches of WWF's policies and procedures;
- Be independent, transparent, and effective;
- Be accessible to project-affected people;
- Keep complainants abreast of progress of cases brought forward; and
- Maintain records on all cases and issues brought forward for review.

The Project Management Unit (PMU) is responsible for informing project-affected parties about the grievance mechanisms. Contact information of the staff member responsible for the grievance mechanism in the PMU will be made publicly available. Information about IUCN's Grievance mechanism can be found as part of IUCN's [Environmental and Social Management System \(ESMS\)](#).

Given the project's multi-layered structure, with several executing agencies, complaints may be raised at multiple levels within the project framework

1. Project-Level Grievance Mechanism

The project level GRM will be required in the three pilot countries. Any community, organisation, project stakeholder or affected group (consisting of two or more individuals) who believes that it may be negatively affected by project's failure to respect IUCN ESMS principles, standards, or procedures may submit a complaint. Representatives (a person or a local organisation) can submit a complaint on behalf of a community, project stakeholder or affected group. Anonymous complaints will not be considered, however, complainants' identities will be kept confidential upon their written request.

To be practical and cost-effective, resolution of complaints should be sought at the lowest possible level. Therefore, particularly for activities in pilot countries, the respective core partner organisations within the three pilot countries function as executing entity in the respective country (Brazil-WI, Cambodia-TNC, Tanzania-TNC) as described in IUCN's [ESMS Grievance Mechanism - Guidance Note](#). Contact information of the staff member responsible for the grievance mechanism in the respective pilot country will be made publicly available.

2. IUCN (PMU-level) Grievance Mechanism

While recognizing that many complaints may be resolved directly between the executing entity and complainant, the complainant can escalate the concern to the next higher level, if no solution to the complaint is found or the claimant is not satisfied with the response, by contacting the nearest IUCN office (Country Office or Regional Office). The IUCN office will file the claim, inform the PMU and respond to the claimant within 15 calendar days of receipt. The PMU can also be contacted directly.

Also for global project components, IUCN as the PMU IUCN is to be directly contacted. Contact information of the staff member responsible for the grievance mechanism in the PMU will be made publicly available.

A complaint can also be submitted to the Project Complaints Management System in several ways:

- by post to IUCN Head of Oversight, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland;
- by email to projectcomplaints@iucn.org;
- by fax to +41 22 999 00 02 (indicating IUCN Head of Oversight as addressee); or
- by telephone to + 41 22 999 02 59.

A written complaint sent by post, fax or email should include the following information (in any language):

- complainant's name, address, telephone number, fax number and email address and valid proof of representation if the complaint is filled by the representative of a legal person/entity;
- description of the project or programme concerned;
- the harm that is, or may result from IUCN's and/or the project executing entity's failures to respect IUCN's ESMS principles, standards, or procedures;
- the principle, standard, or procedure (if known) allegedly breached;
- actions taken to solve the issue, including previous contacts with the executing entity and
- the nearest IUCN office (stages 1 and 2 of Figure 2) and reasonably detailed explanations why these stages have not provided a satisfactory solution; and
- list of supporting documents and attachments, as appropriate.

A template for the complaint is available on the [IUCN website](#).
WWF GEF Agency Grievance Mechanism

Project-affected communities and other interested stakeholders may raise a grievance at any time to the WWF GEF Agency. Contact information of the WWF GEF Agency will be made publicly available.

A grievance can be filed with the Project Complaints Officer (PCO), a WWF staff member fully independent from the WWF GEF Agency, who is responsible for the WWF Accountability and Grievance Mechanism and who can be reached at: **Email:** SafeguardsComplaint@wwfus.org

Mailing address:

Project Complaints Officer Safeguards Complaints,
World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Complaints may be submitted in the Affected Party's native language and should include the following information:

- Complainant's name and contact information;
- If not filed directly by the complainant, proof that those representing the affected people have
- authority to do so;
- The specific project or program of concern;
- The harm that is or may be resulting from the project;

- The relevant Environmental and Social Safeguards policy or provision (if known);
- Any other relevant information or documents;
- Any actions taken so far to resolve the problem, including contacting WWF;
- Proposed solutions; and
- Whether confidentiality is requested (stating reasons).

The PCO will respond within 10 business days of receipt, and claims will be filed and included in project monitoring.

Stakeholders may also submit a complaint online or over the phone through an independent third-party provider at <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/59041/index.html> or <https://report.whistleb.com/en/wwf>

3. GEF Conflict Resolution Commissioner

In addition to the country-level, PFP-wide and WWF GEF Agency GRMs, a person concerned about a GEF-financed project or operation may submit a complaint to the GEF Resolution Commissioner, who plays a facilitation role and reports directly to the GEF CEO. The Commissioner can be reached at: **E-mail:** plallas@thegef.org

Mailing Address:

Mr. Peter Lallas
Global Environment Facility
The World Bank Group, MSN N8-800
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433-002

Complaints submitted to the Commissioner should be in writing and can be in any language. The complaints should provide at least a general description of the nature of the concerns, the type of harm that may result, and (where relevant) the GEF-funded projects or program at issue.

8. Monitoring and Reporting

Progress against the Stakeholder Engagement Plan will be monitored and reported on throughout implementation.

The IUCN Project Manager, in coordination with the core partners, will ensure that all stakeholders consulted and identified are recorded in a stakeholder register. The register will capture the institution, group, company, organisation, or government office engaged (rather than individual names) and will document the number of participants along with gender disaggregation. The register will be updated regularly to reflect ongoing engagement.

The following comprises the monitoring and reporting activities to be undertaken with respect to stakeholder engagement **by the PMU:**

- The SEP will be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary at an annual Reflection Workshop. The review will ensure that the list of project stakeholders and methods of engagement remain appropriate.
- Activities related to stakeholder engagement will be documented and reported by the PMU, in collaboration with the Freshwater Challenge core partners and PSC, every 6 months in a Project Progress Report (as part of regular reporting). The project Results Framework and

Annual Work Plan and Budget will track beneficiaries of the project and activities related to the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

- Stakeholder Engagement activities and progress will be monitored through the following indicators:
 - GEF Core Indicator 11: Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment
 - Indicator SEP 1: Number of government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector, indigenous peoples and other stakeholder groups that have been involved in the project implementation phase on an annual basis
 - Indicator SEP 2: Number persons (sex disaggregated) that have been involved in project implementation phase (on an annual basis)
 - Indicator SEP 3: Number of engagements (e.g. meeting, workshops, consultations) with stakeholders during the project implementation phase (on an annual basis)

Stakeholder Engagement will be evaluated by independent consultants recruited for the project midterm and terminal evaluations.

The WWF GEF Agency will undertake annual supervision missions to ensure compliance, and report on progress against the Stakeholder Engagement Plan annually to the GEF through Project Implementation Reports.

ANNEX 1: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Type	Description	Interests in the Project	Type of Engagement
Freshwater Challenge Country Members	<p>52 countries and the EU that have committed to quantifiable targets for freshwater ecosystem restoration and conservation by 2025, to be integrated into national/international plans (e.g., NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs, LDN, wetland networks). Additional countries are interested in joining.</p> <p>Thirty-eight of the FWC member countries are GEF recipient countries, including sixteen Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and two Small Island Developing States (SIDs).</p>	<p>Integrating freshwater objectives into policies and plans; unlocking resources; building technical capacity; mobilizing cross-sectoral stakeholders (incl. private sector) for strategic basin-level investments.</p>	<p>Regular engagement through virtual country meetings; access to all materials in learning hub; input into indicator frameworks; policy alignment workshops; capacity-building and peer-to-peer exchanges; regional round tables; participation in demonstration activities (Brazil, Cambodia, Tanzania).</p>
Pilot Countries Government entities	<p>Brazil, Cambodia, Tanzania</p>	<p>Set national targets, integrate FWC objectives into policy, lead operationalization, provide national data & governance support. Implementation of freshwater conservation and restoration on the ground.</p>	<p>Provide policy guidance, strategic priorities and enabling conditions for project interventions and cohesion Develop, endorse and enforce freshwater-related policy or regulatory frameworks Coordinate inter-ministerial interventions and work with development partners Mobilise support to implement UN-related conventions</p>

			In coordination with the lead FWC Core Partners for each of the countries, the country offices will be responsible for delivering the outputs under Outcome 2.1 and 2.2.
Pilot Country Country Partner Organisation	Conservation International - Cambodia Wetlands International – Brazil The Nature Conservancy – Tanzania	Support implementation, align their existing programmes with FWC priorities, contribute resources or expertise, and help strengthen the link between national and global freshwater efforts.	Lead, manage and implement the responsible pilot output’s activities for the respective pilot country Support in-country stakeholder engagement and coordinate with FWC partners in-country.
Freshwater Challenge Core Partners	Coalition of CI, IUCN, TNC, WI, WWF, UNEP, Ramsar Secretariat, UNCCD. Collaboration between Partners is formalized via an MoC (April 2025). Provide coordination, technical support, resource mobilisation, and advocacy for FWC. Work is organised and executed in different working groups (Private sector, Resource mobilisation and implementation, Policy and Advocacy, Technical Assistance	Dedicated funding to continue secretariat functions; strengthen country support; amplify FWC’s global visibility; coordinate partner contributions to country-level results.	Co-lead project components coordinate technical support manage knowledge hub facilitate cross-country learning; guide indicator and monitoring frameworks oversee engagement protocols.

<p>Freshwater Challenge Supporting Partners</p>	<p>Non-state actors supporting FWC objectives at global or country level, coordinated via Core Partners</p> <p>Leverage resources and capacities at global and national levels including financial, technical, and policy - to support member countries to accelerate the implementation of their national targets.</p> <p>Current Supporting Partners: UN Water, FAO, BirdLife, WWT, IWMI</p>	<p>Support implementation;</p> <p>Align actions with FWC priorities;</p> <p>contribute resources or expertise;</p> <p>strengthen alignment between national and global freshwater actions.</p>	<p>Participate in thematic working groups;</p> <p>provide technical input to policies, monitoring, and communications;</p> <p>co-develop guidance tools;</p> <p>align outreach with country priorities.</p>
<p>Private Sector</p>	<p>National/multinational companies engaging in water stewardship, managing corporate risks, assessing dependencies and meeting sustainability commitments via the FWC Business Supporter Programme which aligns business actions with country priorities.</p> <p>Current signatories to the Business Supporter Programme: Reckitt, GSK, EDEKA, IKEA</p> <p>Existing corporate initiatives e.g. CEO Water Mandate, Business 4 Nature, Science Based Targets Network (SBTN), Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), CDP, WRC, UN High Level Climate Champions</p>	<p>Reduce business risks linked to water scarcity/degradation;</p> <p>meet ESG goals;</p> <p>develop new collaboration/financing models;</p> <p>demonstrate corporate leadership in freshwater restoration</p> <p>Complement and learn from (not duplicate) existing initiatives</p>	<p>Formalize commitments under the Business Supporter Programme;</p> <p>co-invest in demonstration sites;</p> <p>share data and align with indicator framework;</p> <p>co-develop innovative financing mechanisms;</p> <p>engage in public-private policy dialogues.</p>

Multi-Stakeholder & Thematic Initiatives	High Ambition Coalition, NBSAP Accelerator, Mangrove Breakthrough, Global Peatlands Initiative,	Advocacy, aligning sectoral goals, knowledge sharing, technical methodologies, scaling best practices globally	Participate in thematic working groups; Consultations to provide technical input to policies, monitoring, and communications;
Philanthropic Organisations	Examples are: Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, Moore Foundation, IKEA Foundation, Coca-Cola Foundation, Bezos Earth Fund, etc. Support FWC-aligned global environmental benefits advancing Rio Conventions goals.	Achieve high-impact conservation outcomes; leverage funding for transformational change; support alignment with climate, biodiversity, and land goals.	Core partners, including IUCN have ongoing engagements and relationships with these organisations. Core partners will work with the relevant philanthropic organisations to develop fundable projects and plans that can contribute to achieving the FWC goals.
Development Banks & Finance Mechanisms	MDBs, Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, bilateral donors (Sweden, Germany, UK, France, EC), philanthropic orgs	Financing and co-financing restoration, integrating freshwater into investment priorities, capacity building for resource mobilization Support integrated restoration initiatives; scale co-benefits for climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable land use; align with MEA targets.	Provide blended finance; co-finance national plans; integrate FWC priorities into investment pipelines; engage in joint monitoring/reporting.
Academia and knowledge management	National universities, Scientific expert networks such as IUCN Commissions, Ramsar STRP, and research institutions. Freshwater Ecosystem explorer (UNEP DHI), Source 2 Sea Platform	Apply scientific knowledge; support monitoring and evaluation; inform policy with robust data; advance research on freshwater ecosystem services.	Partner on indicator development; lead applied research; provide training modules; support knowledge hub; contribute to reporting on FWC

			targets. Potential members of national advisory committees
Communities and Indigenous Peoples	Local communities, federations, and Indigenous Peoples in the four pilot countries and beyond.	Exercise water management rights; lead community-based restoration; protect traditional knowledge; secure livelihoods and cultural values linked to freshwater ecosystems.	Co-design and implement demonstration activities; participate in decision-making; contribute local monitoring data; engage in rights-based conservation approaches.
Youth	Youth organizations engaged in conservation, climate, and water advocacy e.g. Global Youth Parliament for Water, Youth Engaged in Wetlands, Global Youth Biodiversity Network Youth for Water and Climate, National youth organisations	Build leadership skills; amplify youth voices in policy spaces; promote intergenerational equity in water governance.	Communications campaigns; participate in events; contribute to youth-targeted knowledge resources; join peer learning exchanges and benefit from youth grants combined with mentorship for capacity building and participation on project activities.
Women/ women groups and government women's organizations	See Gender analysis and action plan for list of relevant organisations	Integrate women in freshwater resource conservation and restoration and overcome challenges related to water management	Communications campaigns; participate in awareness events; contribute knowledge resources; join peer learning exchanges.
Communicators and News Outlets	Circle of Blue, H2O Global News, Earth Journalism Network, UN High-Level Climate Champions, Geneva Water Hub and others. GEF IW:LEARN, Water Knowledge Hub	Increase visibility of freshwater issues; report on project results; shape public opinion; hold decision-makers accountable.	Co-create media content; host press briefings; run multimedia campaigns; amplify success stories and community voices at national, regional, and global levels.

Program and Projects	<p>GEF 8 Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program (ERIP), GEF IW:LEARN; GEF ID: 11119 - Restoring ecosystems for sustainable development in the Tonle Sap Basin and Siem Reap/Phnom Kulen landscape (Cambodia) GEF ID: 10520 - The Cambodia-Mekong River Delta Aquifer (CMDA) project (Cambodia) GEF ID: 4945 - Collaborative Management for Watershed and Ecosystem Service Protection and Rehabilitation in the Cardamom Mountains, Upper Prek Thnot River Basin (Cambodia) GEF ID 11547 Unlocking the groundwater potential of the Kilimanjaro Water Tower (Tanzania) GEF ID 10388 Biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and enhanced water security in Lake Tanganyika basin (See annex 8 for more projects)</p>	<p>GEF IW:LEARN Project, shares knowledge and innovations across GEF's International Waters portfolio. Additionally, the project will coordinate closely with the GEF 8 Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program (ERIP), led by CI. As part of country selection, the project has considered ERIP countries (Brazil and Cambodia are participants) and other GEF projects in the country or supporting their transboundary basins, to build on successes while also ensuring there is no direct overlap.</p>	<p>Sharing knowledge through IW:Learn and informing other IW projects. coordinate around freshwater restoration knowledge, tools, and country support.</p>
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ANNEX 2: Systematic Documentation of Stakeholder Consultations

Date (YY-MM-DD)	Description of Consultation	Venue	Objective of the Consultation	Summary of Meeting Outcomes	Participants
2024-05-31	First Freshwater Challenge in-	IUCN HQ, Gland, Switzerland in-	The general country needs and priorities were discussed as well as the set-up and key	Countries emphasized need for technical assistance and willingness to support others; sharing of maturity levels showed potential for	Core Partners, Country representatives from: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, D.R. Congo,

	person Country meeting.	person and online	topic of the Freshwater Challenge: resource mobilization, technical assistance, FWC governance and operationalization	peer-to-peer learning; restoration and protection of freshwater ecosystems seen as central to conventions and national plans; persistent gaps in knowledge, capacity, and financing noted; policies and plans often exist but budgets constrain implementation; cross-ministerial collaboration critical to unlock resources; clear legal frameworks needed to operationalize commitments; FWC support unit could help with matchmaking between tools, resources, and needs; supporting partners to assess how best to leverage opportunities; governance mechanism identified as urgent priority; group of countries volunteered to prepare governance options paper; wider membership invited to share feedback, suggestions, and examples.	European Union, Fiji, France, Gabon, Germany, Guinée, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Norway, Peru, Republic of Moldova, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, The Netherlands, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Zambia Observers to the meeting: GEF, CoP28 Presidency, Kazakhstan, Switzerland
Since 2024-04-ongoing monthly	Freshwater Challenge Core Partners meetings	Online	Provide regular updates on the Freshwater Challenge (FWC) GEF development to Core Partners after the GEF announcement at UNCCD.	Partners stayed informed and connected to the project team; shared country experiences to support pilot selection; asked about linkage to the GEF Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program; reviewed co-finance needs; agreed that a dedicated FWC coordinator (separate from the GEF coordinator) is needed for administrative tasks.	IUCN; WWF International; WWF-US; UNEP; UNCCD; Wetlands International; Conservation International; TNC; Ramsar Convention Secretariat
2024-10–2025-05 (6 mtgs)	FWC Governance WG meeting	Online	Develop the modus operandi for the FWC.	Produced and agreed a FWC Function & Form paper translated in to three languages) serving as a blueprint for the Challenge, with key objectives of resource mobilization and technical assistance; agreed guidelines for joining the FWC and an MoU among Core Partners.	FWC Core and Supporting Partners

Since 2024-04–ongoing bi-weekly	FWC Resource Mobilization & Implementation WG meetings	Online	Identify and map funding sources (multilateral/bilateral donors, private sector, philanthropy, innovative finance); build capacity and collaboration; set guidance and monitoring for raised funds.	Developed a workplan (e.g., funding-opportunity database, support to country project preparation, comprehensive RM plan). Noted limited partner capacity/time. The workplan directly informed Component 2 of the GEF project.	FWC Core and Supporting Partners
Since 2024-04–ongoing bi-weekly	FWC Private Sector WG meetings & business consultation	Online	Develop the FWC Business Supporter Program; convene and grow business support.	Program developed through extensive consultations (Aug 2024–Mar 2025). Defines how businesses engage and the benefits of freshwater protection/restoration; fosters public-private collaboration and alignment with national strategies/plans.	FWC Core/Supporting Partners
Since 2024-04–ongoing bi-weekly	FWC Technical Assistance WG meeting	Online	Progress on: (1) Toolkit for freshwater conservation/restoration; (2) Benefits assessment; (3) Site prioritization/selection; (4) Indicators & monitoring; (5) Knowledge sharing; (6) Ad-hoc advising.	Priorities informed the GEF project. Central focus on an indicator framework; tools for monitoring to feature on the knowledge hub; draft indicator lists (restored hectares, river-kilometers) under preparation; alignment with GEF’s ecosystem restoration framework; benefits study underway.	FWC Core and Supporting Partners
Since 2025-01–ongoing	FWC Policy & Advocacy WG meetings	Online	Global advocacy/visibility; guidance to FWC members to integrate freshwater ecosystem restoration/conservation into international and national policies.	Regular GEF briefings (incl. country consultations and Ramsar COP/World Water Week side events). Emphasized strengthening the Challenge’s climate narrative, which will be central to the communications component.	FWC Core and Supporting Partners

2024 - 08-28	Stockholm World Water Week Engagement Event	In-person and online	Information session to private sector about the FWC and draft Business Supporter Program (BSP) was presented. Break-out sessions to receive input and feedback were held	General support towards the FWC and interest from business, FWC fills a clear gap in current corporate water stewardship landscape. Supportive of connection between business and government and whole-of society delivery of national plans. BSP needs to integrate existing frameworks and clarity on how business contributions will be counted needs to be outlined. Exploring new finance and partnership models will be key to successfully restore and protect FW ecosystems. Businesses and countries need to inspire each other to drive towards greater action and progress	Core Partners, 43 private sector representatives, mostly corporates, and Business initiatives AB Inbev, AGWA, Agua Segura, Alliance for Water Stewardship, AnteaGroup, ARUP, AstraZeneca, Carlsberg, Danone, Deltares, Diageo, Femsa, GAP, Global Water Partnership, Google, GWF, H&M, Heidelberg, IKEA, Inditex, Join for Water, Meta, Nestle Waters, OECD, Pacific Institute / CEO Water Mandate / Water Resilience Coalition, Pepsi, Primark, Reckitt, Royal Haskoning DHV, Salesforce, SIWI, UN High Level Climate Champions, WBCSD, Water Resource Action Programme
2024 -09-24	New York Climate Week	In-person	Information session to private sector about the FWC and draft Business Supporter Program (BSP) was presented. Break-out sessions to receive input and feedback were held	The session showed strong business support for the FWC, recognizing its role in filling a gap in the water stewardship landscape. Participants stressed the need for clearer guidance on how contributions will be counted, alignment with existing frameworks, and standardized metrics to track progress. Public-private collaboration, innovative finance models, and stronger partnerships were highlighted as key to scaling action and inspiring basin-level impact. Catchment-level focus, governance and capacity challenges, the role of AI, the connection between biodiversity and water and site selection and supply chain issues were mentioned.	Core Partners, 23 private sector representatives, mostly corporates, and Business initiatives AB Inbev, Apple, AstraZeneca, BCG, Business for Nature, Cadence, Ecolab, Global Climate Fund, Global Water Partnership, Globescan, GSK, Grundfos, Microsoft, Nike, Oceanwell, Pepsi, Reckitt, Suntory, Syensqo, WBCSD, Xylem

2025-03 until 2025-05	Target setting survey	Online (survey)	Understand the status of FWC member-country target setting.	Targets exist across diverse policies/plans; countries value M&E frameworks/indicators; >50% report capacity gaps (resources, technical assistance, local staffing). See annex 3	FWC Member Countries (19 responses)
2025-03-10	Bilateral conversation	Online	Explore IKEA's potential support to the Freshwater Challenge via the FWC Business Supporter Programme (pre-launch).	IKEA emphasized the need for a common framework, indicators, and monitoring/reporting methodology for freshwater ecosystem restoration and protection; urged alignment between private-sector and country reporting; strongly supportive of the GEF MSP, especially Component 1.	Inter IKEA Group; WWF
2025-03-25	Core Partners Workshop	Wetlands International office (Ede, Netherlands)	Present GEF project timeline, process, components, objectives, and a shortlist of pilot countries; agree partner coordination for implementation.	Clarified pilot-country role (mainly Component 2; other components are multi-country). Provisional agreement on Tanzania, Cambodia, and Fiji; TNC suggested Brazil instead of Mexico for LAC. Country-selection criteria to be re-shared; partners to consult in-country colleagues before contacting OFPs. Co-finance estimates to be revisited as the project starts in 2026.	Flavia Rocha Loures (TNC); Francesca Antonelli & Paula Martinelli (Wetlands International); Isabel Wallnöfer & James Dalton (IUCN); Philip Leonard & Christine Colvin (WWF International); Derek Vollmer (WWF-US); Maira Bezerra (Conservation International, remote)
2025-04-04	Source-to-Sea Partners meeting	Online	Periodic S2S partners meeting on the platform's future.	IUCN provided an organizational update and status of platform handover; briefed on the GEF FWC project to inform the S2S Action Platform Strategy 2026–2030.	IUCN: James Dalton (Chair), Maria Lindelien (S2S Focal Point); Tom Panella (S2S SC Chair); Karine Caussé (French Water Partnership); Louise Heegaard (DHI); Tim Jennerjahn (ZMT); Thecla Keizer (Plymouth Marine Laboratory); Clive Mitchell (NatureScot); Claudette Spiteri (IW:LEARN); Veronica Relano & Christian Fischer (One Water); Damian

					Indij (Cap-Net); Astrid Hillers (GEF); Alex Pires (UNEP)
2025-05-27	Consultation with Brazil Government	Online	Overview of project history/strategy/objectives; pilot-country engagement/selection; next steps (letter of endorsement, co-finance); national freshwater priorities.	Discussed the project with the Ministry of Environment. Clarified questions about project structure and project location. Wetlands International to lead engagement with MMA; Brazil invited to Ramsar COP Standing Committee; MMA to designate a technical focal point; Paula Martinelli confirmed as the main focal point. Priorities are: systems approach (climate–ecosystems–water), Water Adaptation Plan, concrete on-the-ground actions; address reduced funding for water resources management; partners to assist and accelerate targets.	Ministry of Environment and Climate Change; Wetlands International; WWF-US; WWF-Brazil; Wetlands International; TNC, TNC Brazil
2025-06-12	Consultation with Cambodia Government	Online	Overview of project history/strategy/objectives; pilot-country engagement/selection; next steps (letter of endorsement, co-finance); national freshwater priorities.	Discussed the project with the Ministry of Environment. Clarified questions about project structure and project location. Priorities are Tonle Sap Lake, fishing particularly migratory fish population, climate change, sustainable water resource management and regional cooperation and community-based conservation particularly to wetlands	CI-Cambodia, WWF-US, CI, IUN Cambodia, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology
2025-06-09	Consultation with Tanzania Government	Online	Overview of project history/strategy/objectives; pilot-country engagement/selection; next steps (letter of endorsement, co-finance); national freshwater priorities.	Discussed the project with the Ministry of Environment. Clarified questions about project structure and project location. the team discussed concerns about project overlap with existing initiatives in Malagarasi and Moyowski areas, ultimately deciding to proceed with the current project due to budget efficiency and scope considerations.	TNC, TNC Tanzania, WWF-US, Ministry of Water, Division of Environment, Tanzania, WI Tanzania

2025 - 06 until 2025 - 09	Questionnaire sent share with pilot countries with request for input	Questionnaire	This form completed by the FWC Country Partner Organization assigned to lead the GEF project intervention in collaboration with the national government.	Annex 8	Brazil – WI, Cambodia – CI, Tanzania - TNC
2025-06-23	Business Supporter Program presentation	Online webinar	Launch the FWC Business Supporter Program.	Presented the program; businesses asked about value-add and the commitment required; an FAQ section was added to freshwaterchallenge.org. ~25 attendees, including FWC Private Sector WG, Danone, and IKEA.	25 attendees incl. FWC Private Sector WG; Danone; IKEA
2025-07-03	Target-setting webinar	Online	Showcase country examples of setting national freshwater targets (Moldova, Brazil, Nepal, Liberia); how the FWC can support target setting.	Liberia: Workshops with government/civil society; freshwater in NDCs slowed by funding gaps; IUCN dialogue improved understanding of freshwater for adaptation/mitigation. Moldova: Pre-existing freshwater targets refined after joining FWC; aligned with UNCCD/CBD; stressed local data/stakeholder coordination. Nepal: Targets in NAPs, NDCs, SDGs; advised sub-national targets and cross-agency harmonization with water as a “connector.” Brazil: Translated FWC target nationally with priority areas; coordination across UNFCCC/UNCCD/CBD/SENAI/Ramsar; emphasized local people’s role and River Basin Committees.	FWC Core & Supporting Partners; Country members incl. Liberia, Moldova, Brazil, Nepal, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Zambia, Kazakhstan, Greece, Germany, Zambia
2025-07-27	FWC Core Partners meeting with new Supporting	Convention on Wetlands COP15, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe	Present FWC structure (Working Groups; Terms of Participation) and discuss engagement opportunities for	Discussed national-level implementation, clarified country-selection, and mapped Supporting Partner presence (WWT: Cambodia; BirdLife: Brazil, Tanzania, Cambodia, Fiji). Noted knowledge platforms: BirdLife Data Zone; WWT	Flavia Rocha Loures (TNC); Francesca Antonelli & Paula Martinelli (Wetlands International); Isabel Wallnöfer & James Dalton (IUCN); Christine Colvin (WWF International); Crawford

	Partners (IWMI, BirdLife, WWT)		Supporting Partners; present GEF project structure.	Learning Zone (education curricula); IWMI data repository and hosting of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water. Shared youth-program information.	Prentice & Sarah Davidson (WWF-US); Tomos Avent (WWT); Megan Eldred & Nina Mickander (BirdLife International); Chaturangi Wickramaratne (IWMI)
2025-07-28	Ramsar COP pilot-country meeting	In person (Ramsar COP15, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe); Brazil remote	Workshop for pilot countries in the WWF GEF Project to review/validate the draft GEF Freshwater Challenge Project Document.	Tanzania, Brazil, and Fiji presented draft plans; Cambodia's delegate could not travel; Dr. Ly Sophanna (Ramsar Focal Point) joined. Guidance to budget ≈USD 300k; countries revised proposals accordingly. Concerns about scope vs. budget; plan further in-country consultations; emphasized enabling-environment and livelihood/economic benefits of freshwater restoration. Co-finance clarified. Burkina Faso joined the meeting as an interested FWC member by invitation of Tanzania raised language concerns; partners noted translation costs are included in the GEF budget.	Sarah Davidson (WWF-US); Christine Colvin (WWF International); Crawford Prentice (consultant, WWF-US); Isabel Wallnöfer & James Dalton (IUCN); Flavia Rocha Loures (TNC); Brazil: Iara Bueno Giacomini; Fiji: Mr. Marau Vuli; Cambodia: Dr. Ly Sophanna Ramsar National Focal Point; Tanzania: Dr. Salimu Lyimo; Burkina Faso Ramsar National Focal Point
2025-07-31	Consultation with Youth Engaged in Wetlands	In person (Ramsar COP15, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe)	Discuss synergies and opportunities with Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW) and the FWC.	Introduced FWC and Supporter Program; YEW present in all four pilot countries and connected to diverse youth organizations; welcomed communications component to boost climate/wetland literacy; noted small-grant access barriers where youth must be affiliated with CSOs. Small grants should come with mentorship	YEW members: Julieta Nazareth Gamboa Cutz; Veronica Mulenga; Simon Connolly; Matthew Tabilog; Thandeka Ndlela
2025-08-05	Consultation with Cambodian Government	In-person workshop Cambodia	Consultation meeting with Ministry of Environment and a number of NGO partners to collect input and validate the priority intervention.	All of the participants are very supportive to the work, especially wetland experts in the Ministry of environment actively engaged in the meeting.	Ministry of Environment Cambodia, Ramsar Focal Point; NGO partners led by CI-Cambodia (Kelli Kaesberg)

ANNEX 3: Freshwater Challenge FWC Country Meeting May 2024 – Presentation country questionnaire outputs

Questionnaire - Recap: 6 areas were touched upon



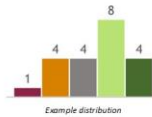
The questionnaire aimed to understand better your countries' status-quo, challenges and need for support in the areas of:

- Policies and Strategies
- Data, Science and Knowledge
- Governance and Stakeholder Coordination
- Resource Implementation
- Prioritised Freshwater Ecosystem Protection and Restoration Projects
- Institutional Arrangements

23 countries submitted their responses ahead of the meeting - we highly value your contributions

Scoring ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

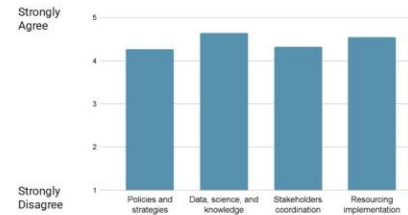
Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree, nor disagree Agree Strongly Agree



Focus areas: All 4 deemed relevant for FWC



Slight bias towards Resourcing implementation & Data, Science and Knowledge



Availability of financing (enabling) mechanisms, regulation and partnerships flagged across countries as a key issue

Other areas to potentially focus on that were highlighted include:

- Cost-efficient long-term monitoring & reporting plans (with interventions)
- Implementation of pilot projects
- Harmonising language and indicators (multilaterally), Benchmarking
- Awareness raising/public participation process

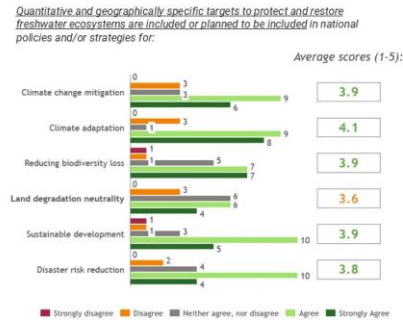
And in general, capacity building and sharing experiences are valued

Policies and Strategies:



Policies largely in place, but not fully aligned yet; Target-setting still maturing

- Countries indicate provisions on FW ecosystem protection & restoration are largely in place (Avg. 4.1 out of 5) in government plans/policies
- But further coherence between national strategies, policies & sectors possible
 - Requires a full inventory of FW embedment in all relevant policies/strategies (see deepdive)

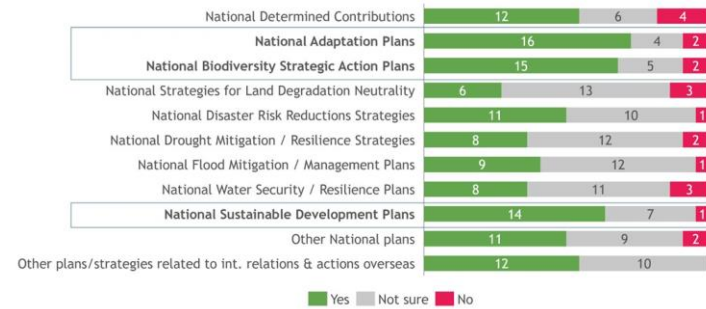


Reporting:



NAPs, NBSAPs, and NSDPs most used for reporting on freshwater ecosystem efforts

My country currently reports on specific freshwater ecosystem restoration and protection goals and achievements in:

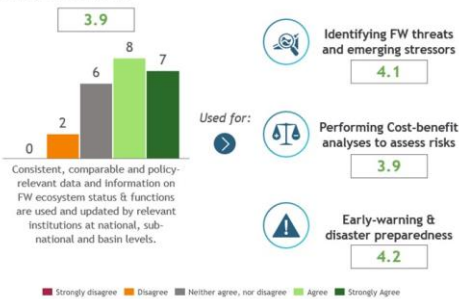


Data, Science and Knowledge:



Data generally available, but further need to integrate/use, incl. in monitoring & planning

Average scores (1-5):



Consistent, comparable and policy-relevant data and information on FW ecosystem status & functions are used and updated by relevant institutions at national, sub-national and basin levels.

Used for:

- Identifying FW threats and emerging stressors (4.1)
- Performing Cost-benefit analyses to assess risks (3.9)
- Early-warning & disaster preparedness (4.2)

Several challenges/gaps highlighted:

- Knowledge gaps exists, mostly in vegetated wetlands/groundwater
 - Low-Medium maturity on identifying the ecosystem services provided and incorporation in monitoring/planning
 - X-sector/collaborative databases
- Potential areas of FWC support:
- Monitoring, reporting and evaluation
 - Harmonising and identifying key indicators, and benchmarking
 - Implementing data in (X-sector) collaboration
 - Tools to assess ecosystem status and function, today and over time (e.g. restoration)

Governance and Stakeholder Coordination:

- National dialogues somewhat in place, with potential to be more inclusive
- Mechanisms to reach out to, and inform stakeholders/investors are set up, but potential for increased availability and use:
 - Especially to further enable (private sector) investment and participation
- Coordination can be improved between national and sub-national efforts/organisations - e.g. by implementing a coordination platform, shared information systems
- Countries highlight a 'coordinating and facilitating' role for FWC, incl. for X-sector efforts:
 - (tools to support) Awareness raising/training of the population (e.g. on functions of Freshwater ecosystems)
 - Public participation processes (E2E support - design to monitoring)
 - Enhance implementation of IWRM and WEFE nexus approaches
 - Institutional strengthening - e.g. of basin/catchment area management programmes

IWRM = Integrated Water Resource Management; WEFE = Water-Energy-Food Ecosystems



Resource Implementation:

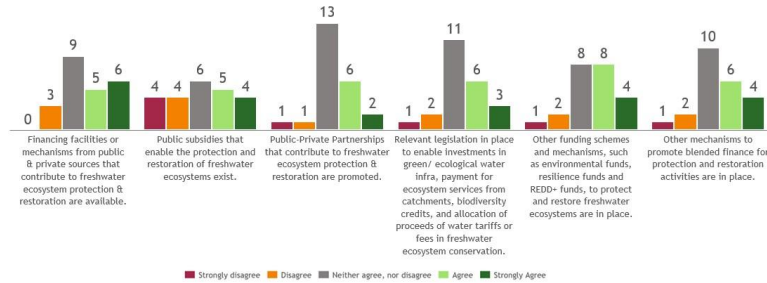


Availability of fit-for-purpose financing (enabling) schemes is a key issue

Average scores (1-5):



While the average score on other (non-finance/resource) maturity indicators is 3.9



Institutional Arrangements: Option Space



Options 1 and 2 largely preferred amongst members vs. setting up new institution

Average score (1-5):

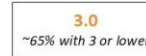
Option 1: Strengthening interoperability and delivery mechanisms of existing conventions and organisations



Option 2: Hosting the Challenge in one or more of the global supporting Partners



Option 3: Setting up a new institution



Proposal for discussion later today: Further explore options 1 and 2 and outline pros/cons, before moving to a decision at a later stage

Deprioritizing option 3 for now



Projects & Prioritization:



- 18 countries submitted priority areas/ projects for protection and restoration
- A relatively large overlap was observed between areas selected for protection and for restoration (often same basins)
- Questionnaire inputs indicate prioritization of specific catchment areas, basins, lakes, etc. for protection is more advanced vs. restoration