

Accelerating Multilateral Action for Global Water Security

Recommendations for the UK
and International Organisations

Water is our most vital shared resource – fundamental for food security, energy production, socio-economic development, environmental integrity, and human health. Yet global water systems are under unprecedented pressure. Rising demand, land-use changes, pollution, and climate change are all accelerating a **global water crisis**. Immediate, coordinated policy action is essential because billions of people face escalating water-related challenges: deteriorating water quality, severe shortages, and increasingly extreme flooding. These pressures will trigger cascading impacts across societies, ecosystems, and the global economy.

The next decade is pivotal for course-correcting towards a water secure future. However, the growing complexity and interconnectedness of the water crisis requires cohesive international action – integrated across sectors, disciplines, communities, generations, and scales.

Harnessing the power of **multilateralism** to connect scientists, policymakers, practitioners, and communities, can accelerate **equitable, evidence-based solutions** needed to transform water governance across scales. This approach will safeguard ecosystems and water security for a more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable future for all.



\$5.6 trillion

By 2050, floods, droughts, and storms could cause \$5.6 trillion in cumulative losses to the global economy.

Source: Aquanomics
by GHD

This policy brief sets out recommendations for UK and international organisations to advance collective action on current and emerging global water challenges.

Authored by the following members of the UK Committee for International Hydrology. Produced by the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH).



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2.1 billion

1 in 4 people globally still lack access to safe drinking water.

Source: WHO/UNICEF

Recommendations for UK Organisations

1. **Leverage multilateral investment through UK influence.** Use multilateral platforms to channel international investment into shared water challenges. Expand UK leadership in international initiatives to help align global efforts with UK priorities.
2. **Mobilise UK expertise for global impact.** Position UK research, education, and industry as global leaders in water solutions, driving innovation and cross-sector growth.
3. **Incentivise projects designed and delivered through multilateral initiatives to support more inclusive and equitable scientific partnerships.** Use multilateral organisation's long-term frameworks and co-development models to enable sustainable outcomes.
4. **Co-invest with other nations in shared scientific infrastructure for scalable solutions.** Support international hydrological infrastructure – from observatories to digital platforms – to advance evidence-led, accessible, and scalable solutions.
5. **Empower youth as global water leaders.** Embed youth participation and leadership in domestic and international water forums. Equip the next generation to shape water policy, research, and innovation, ensuring long-term UK influence and leadership.

Recommendations for International Organisations

1. **Embed water in global agendas.** Integrate water security into climate, health, food, biodiversity, and energy agendas. Recognising water as a cross-cutting enabler in global policy frameworks will maximise impact and resource alignment.
2. **Strengthen inter-agency coordination on water-related challenges.** Reduce fragmentation by clarifying roles, providing clear entry points, and aligning activities with the strengths of each organisation for more coherent global action.
3. **Focus on convening nations and setting the global water agenda to drive progress on urgent issues.** Facilitate widespread support amongst national bodies tasked with addressing water issues, over bilateral partnerships which may not deliver impact at scale.
4. **Strengthen engagement and cooperation with the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organisations, and non-profit organisations** leveraging diverse expertise, partnerships, and finance to co-create new approaches needed to transform water governance for greater equity, sustainability, and long-term viability.
5. **Develop a shared vision for the local to global science infrastructure needed to push the frontiers of hydrological science.** Such infrastructure could enable real-time collaboration, unlock predictive capabilities, and drive transformative innovation. Tackling global water challenges demands the same level of ambition, scale, and cooperation seen in climate and space science.



50%

Half of the world's countries have degraded freshwater systems.

Source: UN-Water and UNEP