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2023 WATER  
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# Water for Sustainable Development

*Valuing Water, Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development*

In the context of the [2023 UN Water Conference](#), this Information Brief highlights some of IUCN's contributions to water-related issues, focusing on the specific themes that will be treated under the [interactive dialogue on Water for Sustainable Development](#).

## What is the UN Water Conference interactive dialogue on “Water for Sustainable Development” about?

The interactive dialogue will explore three interrelated aspects of the international community's water challenges in the context of sustainable development. As the natural resource that is embedded in almost all economic transactions, critical for food production, human health and survival, energy security, biodiversity, and a key driver of our climate, its relevance across many SDGs is clear. This dialogue will review the importance of meaningfully valuing water resources and their services as central to their management and use, and for addressing financing gaps. It will then turn to water's role in global food and energy systems, which are central to sustainable development, but under tremendous stress with rising demand and resource pressures compromising progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Finally, it will consider linkages around urbanization, pollution, and climate change, and the potential for Nature-based Solutions, such as green urban infrastructure, to address several of these issues.

## How does IUCN contribute to this topic through its [Nature 2030 Programme](#)?

Recognizing that many regions of the world are facing water stress, which adversely affects economic growth and the natural resource base, contributing to migration and instability, IUCN is committed to act so that [by 2030, freshwater systems support and sustain biodiversity and human needs](#). To achieve this ambition, IUCN works to secure equitable access to water resources and associated ecosystem services, including for the most vulnerable. The Union promotes decisions around water governance, investment, and law that consider multiple values of nature, including Indigenous knowledge and spiritual and cultural values. Further, it encourages an inclusive, multidisciplinary approach to ensure that conventional or sectorally-limited frameworks are questioned and improved upon to the benefit of people and nature.

## How does IUCN contribute through its Resolutions?

Over the years, IUCN Members have adopted numerous [Resolutions and Recommendations](#) related to water, water governance, and cooperation. Several Resolutions<sup>1</sup> adopted at the last World Conservation Congress in Marseille in 2021 address the interlinkages between water and sustainable development, including on interrelated energy, food, and ecosystems issues. On food and agriculture, [Resolution 7.003](#) calls for transforming food systems through sustainable land management, consistent with multiple SDGs. [Resolution 7.007](#) specifically promotes agroecological practices as Nature-base

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN Resolutions constitute the body of its general policy. They are adopted at the World Conservation Congress every four years through an open consultative process of IUCN's 1,400+ Members (including governments, NGOs, and Indigenous peoples' organisations), and thereby reflect and promote the priorities of the global conservation community.



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Solutions,<sup>2</sup> considering growing pressures on soils and water, while [Resolution 7.045](#) encourages the consolidation and uptake of Indigenous knowledge and traditional aquaculture practices to support sustainable food systems. On energy, Resolutions [7.052](#), [7.111](#), and [7.134](#) urge for caution and the need for robust and inclusive assessments in hydropower developments in different regions, given the potential of such infrastructure projects to negatively impact ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as local communities. Finally, with respect to valuing water, [Resolution 120](#) proposes a series of principles to be considered in developing a policy on natural capital, which call for including the social and environmental benefits of clean water, and strictly protecting irreplaceable and critical water supplies.

### What is IUCN doing concretely on this matter?

IUCN is implementing numerous activities and projects that aim to address water-related issues as they relate to sustainable development, including a variety of initiatives around sustainable water and land management that contribute to improved food systems.

Our portfolio of projects that contribute to integrated water and land management is extensive and covers all areas of the globe. For example, in Tanzania and Mozambique, IUCN is rolling out the [SUSTAIN initiative](#) which focuses on securing the transition to sustainable food systems through integrated landscape management and deploying Nature-based Solutions. In Vietnam, IUCN has implemented [a flood-based livelihood project](#) to help farmers develop

sustainable flood-based agriculture that raises incomes, while protecting the environment and conserving biodiversity.

IUCN is also engaged in the development of metrics to assess land health in productive landscapes and to better account for water use and its contribution to agriculture as well as guidance to support agricultural actors in designing projects and investments that contribute to scaling up Nature-based Solutions. Furthermore, last year, the Union published a report on [Aquaculture and Nature-based Solutions](#), which examines aquaculture in the context of declining wild fishery stocks, and the circumstances under which it could contribute to sustainable development. Both the metrics and the publication make use of the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#).

Finally, in the southern Indus Basin, IUCN is developing and investigating adaptation options and strategies with those managing and living in salinity-affected agricultural landscapes, and it is exploring urban Nature-based Solutions in Bangladesh, including those addressing water holding capacity and water quality in Dhaka.

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<sup>2</sup> IUCN defines Nature-based Solutions as “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.” [Resolution 6.069 Defining Nature-based Solutions](#) (2016).