

# Water at the Heart of Climate Action

Report: World Water Week 2025

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The Stockholm World Water Week 2025 convened under the theme **“Water for Climate Action”** from 24–28 August in Stockholm and online stood out as one of the most comprehensive gatherings in the event’s 35-year history. Hosted by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the week combined packed halls at the Stockholm Waterfront Congress Centre with an open, free-to-join digital platform, enabling broad participation across time zones and sectors. Organizers reported more than 13,000 participants representing 188 countries and territories; nearly 40 percent of attendees were under 35 and gender representation was balanced, underscoring SIWI’s intentional push for inclusive, intergenerational dialogue and knowledge exchange. The hybrid format’s accessibility notably widened the tent for practitioners, policy-makers, researchers, civil society, Indigenous leaders, and business voices who might otherwise be constrained by travel budgets, while the Waterfront venue anchored a dense schedule of seminars, high-level panels, prize ceremonies and partner events.

## From Advocacy to Action:

The opening ceremony crystallized the week’s central message with a keynote from H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi, the UN Special Envoy on Water, who warned that “if we fail on water, we fail on climate,” and urged leaders to make water visible and central to climate policy rather than treating it as a peripheral sector. Framing water resilience as both a frontline defense and an enabler of adaptation, she called for “agility, effectiveness, and



PC: Elias Ljungberg

tangible results,” emphasizing that the status quo cannot meet the accelerating risks of droughts, floods and water quality degradation. These themes echoed through plenaries and sessions, as speakers repeatedly linked water security to climate security and pressed for implementation pathways that translate ambition into measurable progress.



PC: LinkedIn- Helena Thybell

SIWI leadership used the opening to reinforce the institute's role as a convener that turns water knowledge into action. Executive Director Helena Thybell and World Water Week Director Susanne Halling Duffy welcomed participants with a clear emphasis on mobilizing collective action for a peaceful, resilient future, while SIWI Board Chair Tom Panella offered strategic perspectives at the intersection of water governance and climate finance. Their interventions sketched a through-line for the week: elevating water from a technical topic to a cross-cutting organizing principle

for climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and ensuring that knowledge and pilot efforts are scaled through policy, partnerships and investment.

European engagement featured prominently. Jessika Roswall, EU Commissioner participated in the high-level program, bringing the European perspective on linking policy to practice at a time when the European Commission is advancing a Water Resilience Initiative. Throughout 2025, Commission communications stressed that Europe must get onto a “water-resilient path,” build a “water-smart economy,” and ensure clean, affordable water for all messages that dovetailed with World Water Week’s call for mainstreaming water across climate and economic decision-making. Roswall’s portfolio and public statements over mid-2025 reflected the EU’s stepped-up emphasis on water resilience and circularity, signalling stronger alignment between European policy and the global water-climate agenda.



PC: SIWI



PC: UNEP-DHI

UN agencies helped anchor the science-policy backbone of the program. UNEP’s freshwater and wetlands lead, Dianna Kopansky, spotlighted the “Baku Declaration on Water for Climate Action” emerging from COP29, highlighting how biodiversity, wetlands, and healthy freshwater ecosystems must be woven into adaptation and mitigation strategies rather than treated as afterthoughts. The Declaration’s framing; calling for water to be placed at the heart of climate action resonated across World Water Week sessions that stressed ecosystem services, nature-

based solutions, and integrated basin management. UNICEF’s Tom Slaymaker contributed on measurement and equity, underscoring data-driven approaches to track progress in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) with a focus on children and climate-vulnerable populations who shoulder disproportionate risks as extremes intensify.

A second thread running through the week was “means of implementation”, how to finance, govern and deliver water-climate solutions at scale. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) emphasized that climate security is inseparable from water security and spotlighted the investment barriers that low- and middle-income countries still face when building resilient water systems. Bapon Fakhruddin, speaking from the interface of science, risk and



PC: @theGCF

finance argued for pipelines of bankable, resilience-first water investments, clearer risk information, and fit-for-purpose instruments that can de-risk and crowd in private and public capital. This finance-forward lens was consistently paired with multi-stakeholder approaches, connecting national plans to city- and basin-level action, and linking infrastructure upgrades with ecosystem restoration and community-based adaptation.

Private sector stewardship featured in sessions on supply chains and circular water management, exemplified by contributions from IKEA's global sustainability leadership on corporate water stewardship and basin-level engagement. Discussions highlighted how businesses are moving beyond factory-gate efficiency to landscape partnerships that secure shared water resources, mitigate physical and reputational risk, and contribute to local resilience. This shift toward "outside the fence" collaboration with utilities, municipalities, farmers and civil society aligned with the week's emphasis on basin governance and nature-based solutions.

Indigenous knowledge and leadership were intentionally front-and-center. Speakers such as Taylor Galvin Ozaawi Mashkode-Bizhiki from the Brokenhead Ojibwe Nation brought forward governance perspectives rooted in stewardship, reciprocity and intergenerational responsibility. Their contributions made clear that climate-resilient water management depends on inclusive decision-making that respects rights, supports self-determination, and integrates traditional knowledge with modern science particularly in basins where Indigenous Peoples safeguard biodiversity and cultural landscapes.



PC: X @nwmgoi

India's presence was noteworthy and substantive. The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was profiled as a "global inspiration for river conservation," with Director General Rajeev Kumar Mital presenting how Namami Gange has reoriented India's approach to river rejuvenation through basin-scale planning, performance-linked financing, and innovation in wastewater treatment and reuse. He cited a funding envelope on the order of ₹40,000 crore and showcased Hybrid Annuity Model-based sewage treatment plants, solar-powered systems and soil

biotechnology technologies and procurement models intended to improve performance, reduce lifecycle costs and set benchmarks for other river basins. The Indian delegation pressed the point that cities must evolve from passive consumers to active stewards of the basins that sustain them, a theme that echoed across urban resilience sessions throughout the week.

Food, drought and scarcity connected the water-climate agenda to global food security. FAO's technical program highlighted the implications of growing climate variability for water availability, irrigation performance, and agrifood systems, emphasizing demand management, reuse, drought preparedness and innovation to boost productivity per drop without compromising ecosystems. This framing reinforced the need to break silos between agricultural policy, basin governance and climate planning, and to direct finance toward water-efficient, climate-resilient agrifood transformations in hotspots of risk.

International cooperation framed the road ahead. From the UAE, Abdulla Balalaa reflected on preparations for the 2026 UN Water Conference, emphasizing diplomatic choreography and coalitions needed to lift water within multilateral climate and development fora. Senegal's Sherpa for the 2026 Conference, Mohamed C.B.C. Diatta, laid out how co-hosts are structuring inclusive processes to move beyond declarations toward implementable



PC: Emirates News Agency- WAM



partnerships. These interventions reinforced a core World Water Week proposition: that transboundary water, climate adaptation and biodiversity cannot be addressed by any one country acting alone.



PC: Wetlands International

Ecosystem restoration gained momentum, with Wetlands International arguing that wetlands are central to tackling the water and climate crises and presenting its Wetlands4Resilience model approach. Their call for a High-Level Ministerial on wetlands at COP30 sought to further embed freshwater ecosystems in the climate agenda, complementing the Freshwater Challenge and other coalitions pursuing scaled restoration, finance models, and integrated landscape management. The emphasis on wetlands natural infrastructure that stores water, buffers floods, sustains

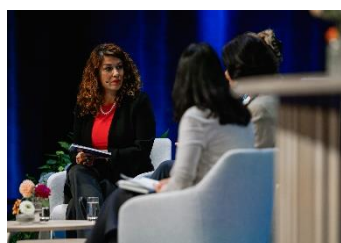
biodiversity and sequesters carbon resonated across sessions linking water cycles to resilience and climate mitigation.

The Stockholm Water Prize; often described as the water sector's most prestigious honour was awarded to Professor Günter Blöschl of TU Wien, recognized as a world-leading flood hydrologist whose observation-based work has advanced understanding of how climate variability and change shape flood behaviour. Presented by H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, the 2025 Prize underscored the week's scientific grounding: robust hydrological evidence is indispensable for planning resilient infrastructure, updating design standards, and protecting communities facing a more flood-prone future.



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Beyond the plenaries, SIWI curated seven flagship seminars that connected the dots across systems and scales. Sessions on the role and value of the water cycle in climate resilience examined aquatic ecosystems' contributions to mitigation and adaptation, including carbon sequestration in wetlands and the stabilization of hydro-ecological regimes. A second seminar strand focused on "water actions for health and climate resilience," making explicit the water-health-equity nexus and the importance of safeguarding WASH services under extremes. A third investigated "strategic water and climate actions within planetary boundaries," pushing participants to design measures that remain within ecological limits while meeting human needs. Together, these seminars translated the week's headline message into actionable insights on governance, finance, data and implementation.



PC: SIWI

If one narrative captured World Water Week 2025, it was the shift from advocacy to alignment and delivery. A SIWI reflection published on 28 August described the week as a "springboard to COP30 and the 2026 UN Water Conference," noting that the incoming Brazilian Presidency's COP30 Action Agenda comprises six interconnected axes; energy and transport transitions; forests and biodiversity; agriculture and food systems; resilience in cities and water systems; human and social development; and enablers such as finance, technology and governance with water running

through all of them. SIWI's Maggie White observed that "resilience thinking is no longer on the sidelines," signalling that what began years ago as an effort to connect water and resilience has now entered the climate policy mainstream. The task ahead, she argued, is to convert this alignment into scaled action and finance that reaches basins, utilities, communities and ecosystems.

The week's demographic profile nearly 40 percent under 35 with balanced gender participation also mattered substantively, not just symbolically. Youth-led dialogues, emerging-research showcases, and intergenerational mentoring threads infused discussions with the urgency, creativity and systems thinking required for the long arc of climate adaptation. Combined with strong Indigenous participation and a visible private-sector presence, the result was a conversation less about discrete projects and more about whole-of-society transformations grounded in water.

### **Conclusion:**

By close, a consistent message had taken hold: water is not a side chapter of climate action, it is the binding thread. From financing resilient services and restoring wetlands, to re-imagining river-city relationships and hardwiring water into EU, UN and COP processes, World Water Week 2025 showcased a maturing consensus that climate, biodiversity and development outcomes will stand or fall on how the world manages water. With COP30 in Belém later in 2025 and the UN 2026 Water Conference on the horizon, the priorities are clear: embed water into national climate plans and budgets, unlock finance for nature-positive and people-centered water solutions, strengthen basin governance and data systems, and scale partnerships that can deliver at speed. The week's hybrid, globally accessible format ensured that this momentum is shared across continents; an essential ingredient if the world is to move from vision to verifiable progress before the next global stocktake.

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