



3rd Coastal Water Convention 2026

Concept Note

Working Theme: *Conserve Water Ecosystems Towards Sustainable Development*

Date: 24–26 January 2026

Venue: CSS Ava Center, Khulna, Bangladesh

Chair: WaterAid Bangladesh

Secretariat: An Organization for Socio-Economic Development (AOSED)

1. Background & Rationale

Across the world, an estimated 780 million people still lack access to safe drinking water; in South Asia alone, this affects roughly 134 million people. Climate change, unsustainable extraction, pollution and destructive infrastructure are degrading water sources and reducing freshwater availability. In such a context, the south-western coastal region of Bangladesh stands out as one of the most vulnerable yet overlooked frontiers.

This region, covering about 15,118 square kilometres across six districts and home to nearly 13 million people, is shaped by a brackish water regime, tidal wetlands, rivers and canals, and the Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem. Civilisation, culture and livelihoods—fishing, farming, shrimp and crab value chains, small trade and services—are deeply tied to these natural water systems. Yet salinity intrusion, cyclones, storm surges, sea-level rise, chronic waterlogging, river and canal siltation, pollution and unplanned embankments are progressively degrading water-dependent ecosystems.

As these ecosystems deteriorate, poverty deepens, food and water insecurity grows, health risks increase and more people are pushed towards climate-induced displacement. These dynamics directly threaten Bangladesh's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land), and intersect strongly with SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships).

In response to these challenges, a coalition of around 60 regional, national and international development agencies, civil society networks, local government bodies and research institutions convened the 1st Coastal Water Convention in 2011 and the 2nd in 2019, with AOSED serving as secretariat. Those platforms helped place coastal water justice and ecosystem health on the agenda of government and international partners, strengthened recognition of water as a right rather than merely a commodity, and stimulated dialogue between communities, policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

However, relative to the scale and urgency of the crisis, transformational and scalable solutions remain limited. Many promising local innovations and lessons have yet to translate into systemic policy reform, long-term investment and institutionalised mechanisms for coastal water governance and ecosystem protection. Bangladesh's leadership at global forums such as the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), alongside its national commitment to SDG 6 and climate-resilient development, offers a pivotal opportunity to move from awareness to implementation in coastal regions.

2. Key Problems the 3rd Convention Seeks to Address

The 3rd Coastal Water Convention is designed to build on earlier achievements but is explicitly problem-driven.

First, coastal water ecosystems are degrading rapidly. Rivers, canals and ponds are becoming saline or heavily silted; wetlands and sweet-water ponds are disappearing; and the Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem is under multiple stresses. This erosion of ecosystem health undermines targets such as SDG 6.6 on protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems, SDG 14.2 on sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems and SDG 15.1 on conserving terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems.

Second, water governance remains fragmented and inequitable. Overlapping institutional mandates, weak enforcement and limited community participation frequently result in unfair access to water services and benefits, particularly for women, the poorest households, smallholder farmers and artisanal fishers. This weak governance architecture slows progress on SDG 6.1 and 6.2 (universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation) and clashes with the spirit of SDG 16 on inclusive and accountable institutions.

Third, climate risks are outpacing current adaptation capacity. Cyclones, storm surges, tidal flooding and slow-onset changes such as sea-level rise and salinity intrusion are becoming more intense, while climate finance, risk-transfer instruments and loss-and-damage mechanisms remain difficult to access for coastal communities. Without targeted support, commitments under SDG 13, SDG 1.5 and SDG 11.5 will be hard to realise in the coastal belt.

Fourth, water-dependent livelihoods and local economies are under threat. Salinity and waterlogging contribute to crop failure; fish stocks and aquatic biodiversity are changing; and fishers and farmers often work in unsafe, poorly protected conditions. These stresses undermine progress on SDG 1 and SDG 2, as well as SDG 8 on decent work and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities.

Fifth, the people who bear the greatest burdens are often the least heard. Women, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous and marginalized groups are under-represented in spaces where water and climate decisions are made, even as they shoulder much of the work of securing water, food and care in households and communities. Indigenous and local knowledge is still insufficiently recognised and used. This gap limits progress on SDG 5, SDG 10 and SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making.

Finally, evidence, technology and learning are not yet systematically integrated into practice. Data, research, local innovation and digital tools are often fragmented across projects and organisations, with few sustained platforms for joint analysis, learning and scaling. As a result, opportunities to advance SDG 6.b and SDG 17 through stronger knowledge systems and partnerships are being missed.

The 3rd Coastal Water Convention aims to gather these challenges into a single, coherent agenda, and to identify practical pathways that directly support SDG implementation in the coastal context.

3. Legacy of Previous Conventions

The 1st Coastal Water Convention, under the theme “*Water is not a commercial product, it is a right*”, explored the ecological characteristics of the southwest coast, introduced integrated water resources management (IWRM), and highlighted the cultural, livelihood and disaster-related dimensions of water. It helped to frame water in coastal Bangladesh as a rights and justice issue, not only a technical one.

The 2nd Convention, under the theme “*Water Justice in Development Progress*”, moved this agenda forward by focusing on governance for equitable access to safe water, the roles and accountability of the private sector, the importance of appropriate and affordable technologies for vulnerable groups, and the need to conserve water ecology while adapting to climate change in line with the SDGs.

The 3rd Convention will build on this legacy by shifting from recognition and advocacy towards practical implementation: identifying scalable solutions, potential financing options, institutional reforms and multi-stakeholder mechanisms that can bridge the gap between policy commitments and lived realities in coastal communities.

4. Purpose of the 3rd Convention

The overall purpose of the 3rd Coastal Water Convention is to catalyze evidence-based policy dialogue, co-created solutions and investment pathways that protect coastal water ecosystems while advancing inclusive, climate-resilient development in Bangladesh's southwest and comparable delta regions. In doing so, the Convention seeks to accelerate tangible progress towards the 2030 Agenda, with particular emphasis on SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15 and their links to equity, livelihoods and governance.

5. Objectives

The Convention has four interlinked objectives.

First, it will convene and align stakeholders. By bringing together government institutions, local communities, academia, the private sector and development partners, the Convention will create a shared space to discuss priorities for coastal water governance, ecosystem integrity and resilient livelihoods. This directly supports SDG 6.5 on IWRM, SDG 16 on effective, inclusive institutions and SDG 17 on partnerships.

Second, it will surface and help to scale locally led, climate-smart water solutions. These will include nature-based solutions such as mangrove and wetland restoration, resilient WASH systems, climate-smart agriculture and fisheries practices, and innovative financial and governance mechanisms, including insurance and risk-sharing tools for climate-exposed communities. Such solutions contribute to SDG 6.1, 6.2 and 6.6, as well as SDG 13.

Third, it will advance policy, regulatory and investment commitments aligned with SDG 6 and related goals. The Convention will work towards clear policy messages and recommendations that promote coherence across SDG 6, 13, 14 and 15, while also connecting to SDGs 1, 2, 5, 10, 11 and 16 in the coastal context. A central concern will be ensuring that the principle of "leave no one behind" is operationalised in water and climate planning and investment.

Fourth, it will strengthen knowledge systems and transformative learning. The Convention will highlight and connect knowledge platforms that link community experience, scientific research and policy practice. It will emphasise inclusive participation—especially of women, youth, people with disabilities and indigenous and marginalized groups—and support adaptive and transformative learning communities that extend beyond the event itself, contributing to SDG 6.b and SDG 17.

6. Contribution to the SDGs

The 3rd Coastal Water Convention is explicitly framed as a contribution to the SDGs.

It will directly advance SDG 6 by promoting integrated, rights-based and ecosystem-sensitive water governance, addressing coastal WASH challenges, and emphasising the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems. Through its focus on climate-resilient water management, locally led adaptation, loss and damage and climate finance, it will contribute strongly to SDG 13.

By highlighting coastal and marine ecosystem health, Sundarbans conservation, river and canal restoration and nature-based solutions, the Convention will support SDG 14 and SDG 15. At the same time, by linking water ecosystem conservation to poverty reduction, food security, gender equality, reduced inequalities, resilient human settlements, accountable institutions and strong partnerships, it will contribute to cross-cutting goals such as SDG 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 16 and 17.

7. Thematic Tracks (2026)

Track 1: Water & Climate Change

This track will examine how salinity intrusion, cyclones, storm surges, compound flooding and chronic waterlogging are reshaping coastal lives and landscapes. It will explore nature-based solutions such as mangrove restoration, wetland rehabilitation and climate-resilient polder management, along with climate-risk governance, early warning, and mechanisms for loss-and-damage responsive measures and climate finance. The discussions will link directly to SDG targets under 6, 13, 14 and 15.

Track 2: Water Governance

This track will focus on integrated water resources management and basin/delta planning, institutional accountability, transparency and community water rights. It will address tariff and subsidy design that protects poorer households while promoting conservation, and explore public-private-community partnerships for water and WASH services in the coastal belt. The work of this track will connect to SDG 6.5 and 6.b, as well as SDG 10, 16 and 17.

Track 3: Water Ecosystems & the SDGs

Here, the emphasis will be on ecosystem health metrics, biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods. The track will consider how infrastructure development, blue economy initiatives and industrialization can be designed and regulated so that they do not undermine water ecosystems. It will promote policy coherence across SDG targets related to water, climate, oceans and terrestrial ecosystems, and discuss tools and safeguards for environmental and social protection in coastal investments.

Track 4: Adaptive & Transformative Learning – Lives & Livelihoods

This track will highlight locally led adaptation and community-driven planning, linkages between social protection and climate risks, and the role of women- and youth-led enterprises in water, WASH, agriculture and fisheries. It will address the safety and productivity of fishers and farmers, and examine how skills, data and digital tools can improve early warning, planning and accountability. Particular attention will be given to knowledge platforms, learning labs and youth leadership that can drive long-term transformation.

Across all tracks, gender equality and social inclusion, disability inclusion, indigenous and local knowledge, climate finance access, human rights and conflict sensitivity will be treated as cross-cutting lenses. In this way, the Convention will ensure that conserving water ecosystems is inseparable from advancing justice, dignity and sustainable development for the people of coastal Bangladesh.