Key messages of the Forum

FREAO 2026 - Forum outcomes

Ministerial session — IWRM & SDG 6

1. The session concluded that West Africa now has a solid and recognized regional water governance framework, the result of more than twenty-five years of collective efforts.
However, the coming years must be devoted to turning institutional achievements into concrete results for people, through better mobilization of financing, innovation, more effective governance and strengthened regional cooperation in the service of water security, climate resilience and sustainable development.

Financing water infrastructure

1. Move from identified projects to actual investments and highlight the cost of inaction

2. Make project preparation and bankability the first step of financing

3. Diversify financing and progressively build a regional financial sovereignty for water
Public and concessional financing remains essential, but must be complemented by climate funds, blended finance, PPPs, private capital, green and blue bonds and guarantee mechanisms.

4. Make governance, coordination and risk-sharing accelerators of investment
Solid governance and guarantee mechanisms are essential to attract financing.

5. Speed up the entire "project – financing – works – impact" chain and ensure the sustainability of investments
Mobilizing financing is not an end in itself: the goal is to achieve functional infrastructure and lasting impacts.

Regional cooperation and hydro-diplomacy

1. A structural water interdependence
Almost all major basins and several aquifers are transboundary. National decisions can therefore directly affect neighboring States, making regional cooperation a structural necessity.

2. The "data diplomacy", a guarantee of trust between States
Transparency and the regular sharing of reliable hydrological, hydrogeological and climate data are essential to strengthen trust between States, prevent tensions and inform decisions.

3. Better governance of transboundary aquifers
Groundwater constitutes a strategic reserve in the face of droughts and climate variability. Its knowledge, monitoring and concerted governance must become a regional priority.

4. Strengthen the capacities of basin organizations
The technical, institutional and financial capacities of basin organizations remain uneven and often insufficient in the face of growing challenges: climate change, pollution, demographic pressures, aquifers and water infrastructure. Targeted strengthening is essential to address the new challenges (pollution, demographic pressures, climate risks).

Water-Energy-Food-Environment Nexus

1. Effective operationalization of the WEFE nexus requires strong political leadership and structured cross-sectoral governance mechanisms.

2. Hybrid and innovative financing instruments are essential to reduce the risk of WEFE investments and attract private capital.

3. Alignment between technical partners, research institutions and implementing agencies is essential for scalable impact.

4. Private sector engagement thrives when projects are profitable, regulatory frameworks are clear including financial risk management, and capacities are strengthened.

Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion

1. There is a gap between policies and their implementation.

Moreover, the gender and social inclusion dimension is absent from water resources policies and guidelines in most countries. It is therefore necessary to close this gap between policies and their implementation by systematically mainstreaming gender and social inclusion into water resources management as well as into water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) policies, action plans, strategies and programmes, with institutional mechanisms and clear accountability arrangements.

2. Genuine and meaningful inclusion requires that a significant proportion of women, youth and vulnerable groups be able to make their voices heard on decision-making platforms, access information and have the skills and digital capacities needed to influence technical, strategic and budgetary decision

This enables them to help shape water governance, not only as beneficiaries but also as leaders, innovators and agents of change.

3. Gender and social inclusion must be integrated into regional water information systems in order to move from commitments to measurable results, foster evidence-based decision-making and strengthen accountability.