

Invite only event!

Role of water in strengthening climate resilience of communities

13:45-16:00 | Oct 19

Siemens Stiftung, Kaiserstrasse 16, 80801 Munich



Outcomes of the Round Table: The Role of Water in Strengthening Climate Resilience of Communities

Water is at the heart of climate resilience. As climate change intensifies water-related challenges, strengthening water security becomes essential for protecting people, livelihoods, ecosystems, and social stability.

This round table brought together stakeholders from policy, business, academia, civil society, and development organizations to explore the role of water in building climate-resilient communities. The discussion was structured around six perspectives: policy and governance; technology and innovation; systems transformation; community resilience; partnerships; and social cohesion, highlighting the need for integrated solutions and collective action.

1. Policy and Governance Perspective

Participants emphasized that water lies at the heart of climate adaptation and should be elevated from a sectoral issue to a strategic policy priority. Climate change is intensifying existing WASH challenges while increasing risks of resource scarcity, instability, and conflict. There was broad agreement that future climate and development discussions, including preparations for the UN Water Conference, should place water at the center of adaptation strategies and strengthen the links between water, food systems, and soil management.

It was also highlighted that the importance of international cooperation and transboundary water governance, noting that climate-related water stress increasingly transcends national borders. Water was recognized not only as an environmental issue but also as a matter of peace, security, and social stability.

A key concern was the persistent gap between political recognition of water and actual climate financing. Despite the growing importance of water for adaptation, WASH remains insufficiently reflected in major climate finance mechanisms. Stronger advocacy is needed to ensure water and sanitation receive adequate attention within global climate funding frameworks.

2. Water Utilities, Technology and Innovation Perspective

Utilities around the world are facing increasing pressure from climate impacts, aging infrastructure, resource constraints, and rising demand. Participants stressed that technology can play a critical role in strengthening resilience through real-time monitoring, digitalization, smart distribution systems, and improved management of water resources.

A recurring theme was the transition from linear to circular water management. Wastewater should no longer be viewed as a waste product but as a valuable resource that can support agriculture, energy

production, industry, and ecosystem restoration. Water reuse, recycling, and resource recovery were identified as key strategies for building long-term resilience while reducing pressure on scarce freshwater resources.

It was emphasized that technological solutions already exist. The challenge now is to accelerate implementation through stronger cooperation among utilities, policymakers, regulators, communities, and private-sector actors.

3. Academic and Systems Transformation Perspective

The discussion highlighted the need to move from a supply-focused approach toward integrated water management that actively addresses consumption patterns, efficiency, and resource recovery. Current systems often lack sufficient data and real-time information to manage water effectively and respond to peak demand or climate shocks.

Academic perspectives pointed to the potential of diversified water portfolios, fit-for-purpose water use, and innovative models that transform wastewater into a source of nutrients, energy, and economic value. Recovering and reusing water and its embedded resources offers significant opportunities to strengthen resilience, reduce pressure on freshwater supplies, and support more circular and sustainable water systems. Such approaches can contribute to self-sustaining systems that reduce dependence on subsidies while creating environmental and social benefits.

It became clear that, when it comes to resilience, the issue is not only one of general water scarcity but also of how societies manage, value, recover and govern the available water resources.

4. Community Resilience and Local Action Perspective

Experiences from East Africa demonstrated that climate impacts are already affecting daily life through prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, flooding, and emerging hazards such as landslides. These impacts extend far beyond the water sector, influencing health, food security, education, livelihoods, and local economic development.

Participants agreed that reliable and affordable water services form a critical foundation for community resilience. However, resilient water systems require more than infrastructure. Local utilities, community organizations, entrepreneurs, and service providers must be equipped with the skills, resources, and partnerships necessary to adapt to changing conditions.

Special recognition was given to the role of local social enterprises as drivers of innovation. Their close understanding of local realities enables them to develop practical and sustainable solutions that can strengthen resilience over time.

5. Partnership and Ecosystem Building Perspective

A strong consensus emerged that climate resilience cannot be achieved by individual actors working in isolation. A strong consensus emerged that the importance of partnerships that connect governments, utilities, social enterprises, academia, investors, development organizations, and local communities.

Rather than focusing solely on infrastructure delivery, successful resilience-building requires strengthening entire water ecosystems. Capacity development, knowledge sharing, co-creation, and peer learning were identified as essential elements of sustainable solutions. Initiatives such as the Water Resilience Solutions Hub were cited as examples of how diverse stakeholders can jointly develop practical responses to climate-related water risks.

Participants also emphasized that resilience strategies must be context-specific. One-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to succeed. Locally adapted and community-driven solutions are essential for achieving lasting impact.

6. Social Cohesion and Civil Society Perspective

Beyond its physical and economic dimensions, water was recognized as a critical factor for social cohesion. Climate-induced water insecurity can amplify societal tensions, inequalities, and conflicts, while equitable access to water can strengthen trust, cooperation, and collective resilience.

It was stressed that building resilience is ultimately about strengthening communities' capacity to cope, adapt, and recover together. Civil society organizations contribute to this through community engagement, awareness raising, behavior change, and inclusive participation. Water was described as both a connector and a potential source of division, underscoring the need for proactive cooperation and dialogue.

The importance of gender equality, cultural understanding, education, and intercultural learning was also highlighted. Effective resilience-building requires listening to local knowledge and ensuring that those most affected by climate impacts shape the solutions.

Conclusion

The round table demonstrated a shared understanding that water is not merely one sector among many, but a foundational enabler of climate resilience, sustainable development, social stability, and human well-being. Across all perspectives, participants agreed that water connects climate adaptation, food security, health, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and peace.

Building climate-resilient communities will require a shift from fragmented approaches toward integrated, systems-based solutions that combine technology, finance, governance, local capacity, and social participation. Resilient water systems depend as much on people, institutions, and partnerships as on infrastructure.

The dialogue further underscored that future progress depends on stronger cross-sector collaboration, greater recognition of water within climate finance and policy frameworks, and more support for locally driven innovation. Water should therefore be positioned as a strategic priority in climate action and global decision-making, recognizing its unique role as both a foundation for resilience and a stabilizing force for communities and societies facing increasing climate uncertainty. And even more as our main essential need and basis for a healthy planet.

Special thanks to our speakers and guests for their contributions to the Stakeholder Dialogue.