

World Basin Summit 2026 Interactive Workshop 2 Report

Drought planning and water resources allocation in Central Asia, Austral Africa and Latin America



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Workshop Report

Increasing climate variability, growing water demand and competition between water uses are changing the way drought is addressed across river basins worldwide. Bringing together introductory perspectives from France and Brazil, followed by case studies from Southern Africa, Central Asia and North America, the workshop explored different approaches to drought planning and water allocation while identifying common challenges faced by basin organisations operating in very different environmental, political and socio-economic contexts.

Although the situations presented differed considerably, the discussions revealed a strong convergence around several issues. Drought is no longer seen as an exceptional event but as a structural component of water resources management. As a result, institutions are progressively shifting from emergency response towards long-term preparedness through drought plans, monitoring systems, allocation rules and stronger institutional coordination. The introductory presentations also highlighted that water allocation should no longer be viewed simply as an administrative process, but as a governance process requiring dialogue between public authorities, basin organisations, water users and local communities. Adaptive regulatory frameworks and negotiated allocation agreements were presented as important tools for improving both flexibility and stakeholder ownership.

Interactive pictures session:

The interactive picture exercise confirmed that, despite the diversity of countries represented, participants shared many of the same concerns: competition between water uses, upstream-downstream dynamics, climate change, allocation priorities and stakeholder participation emerged consistently across the discussions. Several groups pointed out that drought impacts are often aggravated by governance gaps rather than hydrological conditions alone. Others highlighted the importance of involving all stakeholders in decision-making and recognised the often overlooked role of women in water management, particularly in rural areas.

These themes were reflected in the three case studies.

- The INMACOM (Incomati and Maputo Watercourse Commission) experience illustrated how transboundary governance can support coordinated drought management through common operating rules, joint planning, early warning systems and agreed allocation mechanisms. It also demonstrated the evolution from water sharing towards benefit sharing, integrating food security, energy production, ecosystem protection and regional development within a common governance framework. Political commitment, trust and continuous dialogue between Member States (Mozambique, Eswatini, South Africa) were identified as key success factors.

- The Zarafshan River Basin (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) case highlighted Tajikistan's ongoing transition towards integrated water resources management through institutional reforms, the establishment of River Basin Organisations and River Basin Councils, and investments in irrigation efficiency, watershed restoration and climate adaptation. The presentation illustrated the importance of combining technical measures with institutional strengthening and capacity building.
- The Mexico–United States case study demonstrated how long-established bilateral cooperation mechanisms provide a stable framework for managing prolonged drought and increasing pressure on water resources. The presentation showed that durable institutional arrangements and continuous dialogue remain essential to support water allocation under increasingly challenging conditions.

Another recurring theme throughout the workshop was the growing role of data and digital technologies. Monitoring systems, forecasting, modelling tools and decision-support platforms are becoming central to drought planning and water allocation. However, participants consistently stressed that better information does not automatically resolve conflicts. Scientific evidence supports decision-making, but difficult allocation choices ultimately remain matters of governance, negotiation and political responsibility.

Agriculture also emerged as a common concern across all case studies. As the largest water user in many basins, irrigation increasingly sits at the centre of allocation debates. Participants agreed that future allocation decisions will require balancing food production, domestic supply, economic development and ecosystem protection through transparent rules established before drought situations occur.

Final interactive session:

The final interactive session invited participants to develop recommendations around three complementary dimensions: governance, science and economics. Discussions highlighted the need to strengthen basin organisations as coordination platforms, continue investing in monitoring and forecasting systems, improve access to reliable information and ensure sustainable financing for drought adaptation. Participants also underlined that investing in prevention is generally far less costly than managing repeated crises.

Conclusion:

Overall, five main conclusions emerged from the workshop:

- Drought is becoming a structural rather than an exceptional component of water resources management.
- Water allocation is fundamentally a governance issue requiring transparent institutions and stakeholder participation.

- Scientific information and digital tools are essential, but they cannot replace dialogue and political commitment.
- Transboundary river basins provide valuable laboratories for cooperation and shared learning.
- Agriculture remains at the centre of most allocation debates, reinforcing the need for integrated and participatory approaches.

Despite the diversity of contexts presented, participants reached the same conclusion: effective drought management depends less on finding a universal technical solution than on strengthening institutions capable of anticipating crises, coordinating stakeholders and adapting water allocation to increasingly uncertain conditions. River basin organisations therefore remain key actors for promoting cooperation, knowledge sharing and collective action at both national and transboundary levels.



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