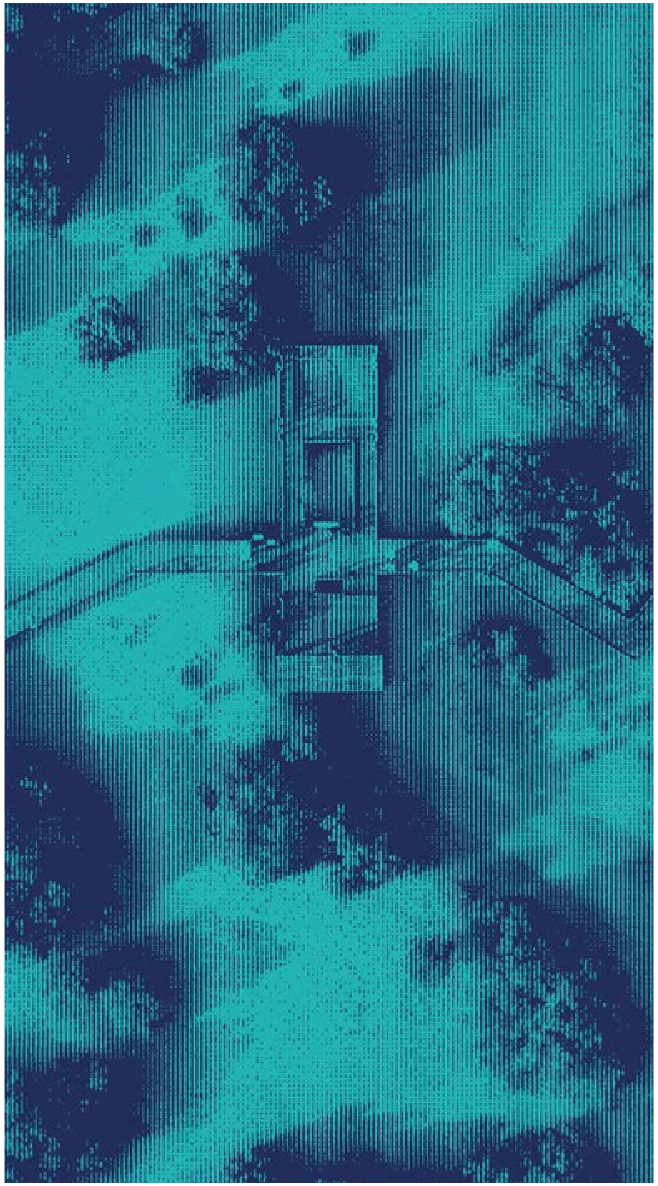
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
FROM INNOVATION TO IMPACT: CORPORATES SCALING WATER SOLUTIONS
World Water Week 2026 | Thursday 27 August 2026



This session brought corporates, investors, innovators and consumers together around a single question: how to mobilise the capital and partnerships needed to scale water solutions. Across a keynote and two panels, it showed the private sector already closing the finance gap and turning a rich pipeline of innovation into lasting impact.

OPENING & WELCOMING

Bryan Cortright
Moderator,
Partnerships Manager at Water Unite

- Bryan opened by naming the core problem: the water sector does not lack workable solutions, but it lacks the finance to scale them. Water Unite exists to close that gap.
- Water Unite's own journey shows the model. Founded in 2017, the non-profit has raised over $10 million through a micro-levy, initially supporting organisations through grant-giving and now through impact investing.
- With more than 500 innovators assessed and eight investments made, we now turn to the question driving the whole session: how do we help more of these solutions reach scale?
- The session aims to mobilise consumers, investors, innovators and corporates to move in the same direction, to raise capital and scale solutions that create lasting impact.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Marjorie Pittet
Vice President, Sustainable Operations at Accor

- Water anchors the first pillar of Accor's refreshed ESG strategy, Hosting Change.
- Marjorie explained that for Accor water is not a utility but a shared resource vital to its operations, guests and host communities.
- She warned that the sector faces a projected 40% gap between water supply and demand by 2030 and that Accor already runs close to 2,200 hotels in high-stress areas.
- As a franchisor, Accor needs to win hotel owners over with proven value, not mandates. Its Sustainability Innovation Programme with Water Unite put this into practice, narrowing 120 applications to five winning solutions now entering pilot projects.

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PANEL 1 - Corporate Leadership, Innovation and Partnerships

Jonathan Hall
Managing Partner of Sustainable Transformation at Kantar

- Jonathan explained that Kantar tracks how consumers relate to brands worldwide, drawing on work with 1,200 brands across 300 markets.
- Levels of concern for sustainability are high. 97% worry about an environmental or social issue, and 72% feel people like them should act.
- The true challenge is putting that concern into action, and bridging the gap between what people value and what they do.
- He described how consumers split into committed champions, a large pragmatic mainstream and the disengaged, each needing a different approach.
- When concerns become personal and relate to why consumers buy in the first place, such as taste, price, and quality, behaviour changes. And now that more than half of consumers have seen misleading green claims, honest communication is essential.

Marjorie Pittet
Vice President, Sustainable Operations at Accor

- Marjorie began by describing how Accor makes the case for water sustainability in each audience's own terms: owners hear how investing keeps their hotels viable over the next ten to fifteen years, while managers see the impact on water, energy and labour bills.
- Accor recognises that behaviour change works when it feels positive. Guests respond to pride rather than lectures, while staff adopt new habits when solutions make their work easier.
- Luxury hotels face the most challenges in ensuring water sustainability. Pools, spas, and landscaping increase water consumption, yet premium guests demand indulgence, thus behaviour must be encouraged without greenwashing.
- Progress at this stage requires top-level alignment and consistency, such as water targets in bonuses, and a lighter touch. Marjorie provided examples of how competitions, awards, and cartoons can win over teams.

Louis Goring-Morris
Partnerships Director at Water Unite

- Louis reflected that since 2017 Water Unite's micro-levy of one penny per litre has raised over $10 million, a steady, lasting income stream.
- Innovative ideas are plentiful, with over 500 innovators identified, but many stall in the missing middle, short of growth capital and customers.
- Water Unite Impact answers this with blended finance: a catalytic first-loss layer absorbs early risk to draw in cautious investors, while debt and equity recycle capital so each pound works several times over.
- He argued that innovation lies as much in business models as in technology. For instance, Jibu uses no new tech, but its model of decentralised kiosks run by local franchisees, selling water at an affordable price, has scaled to reach around half a million people a day.

WATER UNITE

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PANEL 2 - Scaling Water Solutions: Innovation unlocking Impact

Tim Evers
Lead Impact & Knowledge at Aqua for All

Birgitte Lind-Hjertum
Chief Financial Officer at Flocean

- Tim highlighted that private capital only meets 2% of the sector's demands, despite a global gap of about one trillion dollars per year, which is why mobilising private finance is critical.
- Aqua for All pursues a structured approach to making firms bankable, reducing bank risk through guarantees, structuring funds with concessional capital, and then attracting corporate customers.
- Guarantees, he noted, unlock far more lending than their value: in a Kenyan pilot, a €150,000 guarantee backed a portfolio ten times larger, yet only a few thousand euros were ever drawn.
- The most difficult stage is project development, when you must turn a demonstration into an investable business. This requires extensive engineering and firm long-term contracts, which is slow and demanding work.
- Momentum is building, with a third of impact investors now keen to invest in water.

- Birgitte stated that water scarcity is the infrastructure challenge of our generation, where the financial structure matters as much as the technology.
- Her central point was the missing middle: infrastructure investors wait for long-term contracts, but the engineering to get there is costly and therefore goes unfunded.
- Impact investors, she noted, add value beyond capital: feasibility funding unlocked a Maldives project, and a strategic Water Unite stake brought expert advisers.
- Efficiency and reuse are not enough, she said, so desalination must be part of the answer. Flocean reinvents it with modular plants on the seabed at around 500 metres, cutting energy use by up to 50%, using up to 95% less land and releasing no concentrated brine, all at competitive cost.

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Closing Remarks

Louis Goring-Morris
Partnerships Director at Water Unite

- Accor illustrated how corporates are treating water as a strategic priority, not a CSR exercise, with a real focus on scaling water innovations that work.
- The first panel showed that no one can solve water alone, and that engaging consumers matters as much as corporates.
- The second panel reiterated that the solutions and capital already exist, from Flocean's technology to Aqua for All's blended finance.
- The missing middle persists, but the tools to bridge it now exist.
- The closing message: water is not a charitable afterthought but an investable asset, with a role for everyone.

VIEW SESSION

For registrants, a recording is now available on demand via the platform. The session will be made publicly available on World Water Week's Youtube channel by mid-September.

ON DEMAND

NEXT STEPS

Following the session, Accor's five selected innovations move into pilots across its hotels, with first findings due later this year. Water Unite continues to connect innovators with corporate partners and to grow its impact fund ahead of its $20 million first close. Corporates, investors and innovators are welcome to get in touch and take part.

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NEXT STEPS