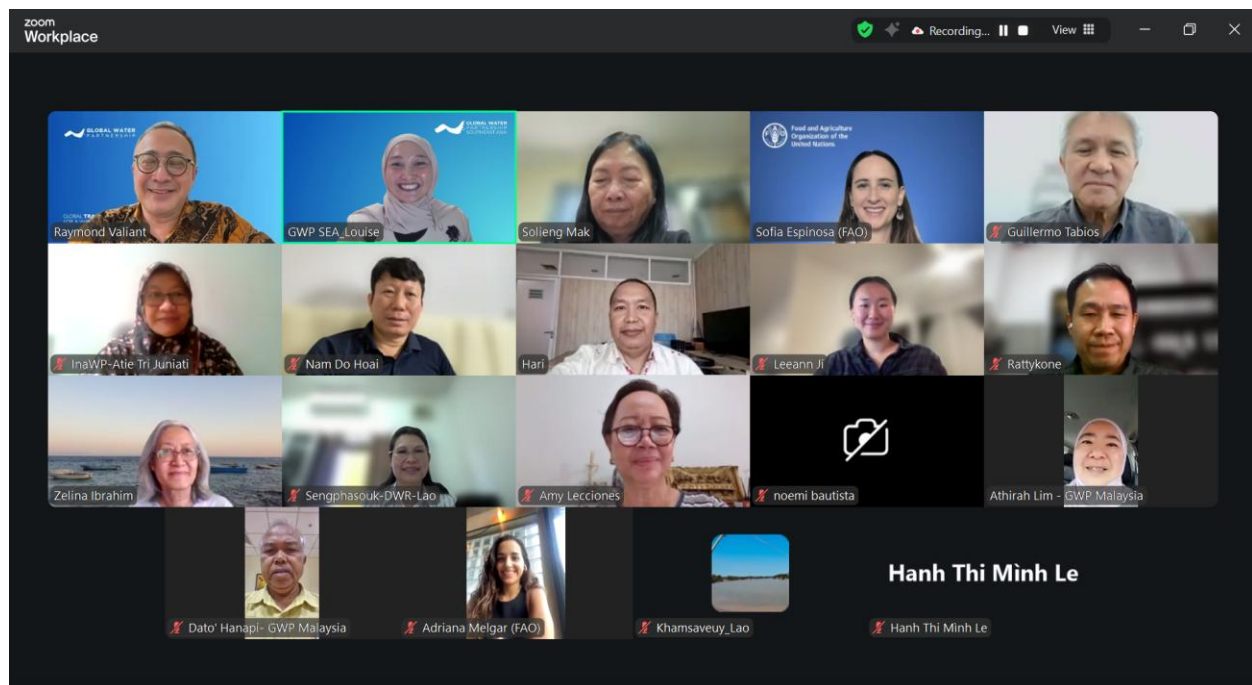


## Highlight Notes

### ONLINE KICK OFF MEETING GWP-SEA AND FAO COLLABORATION: SUPPORT MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS THE REGIONAL DIALOGUE OF WATER TENURE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC IN SUPPORT TO THE SCALEWAT PROJECT

Friday, February 6, 2026



## SUMMARY

The online kickoff highlighted collaboration between GWP Southeast Asia and FAO to strengthen multistakeholder involvement in water tenure issues across the Asia-Pacific, supporting the ScaleWat Project. Raymond Valiant introduced participants and the agenda, which covered water tenure concepts and a Cambodia case study. Sophia Espinosa (FAO) detailed the importance of water tenure in agriculture, challenges for vulnerable groups, and the need to integrate water tenure into water accounting to improve productivity.

Solieng Mak shared findings from Cambodia's water tenure study, highlighting issues with water supply, legal frameworks, and community involvement. Louise from GWP SEA led a discussion on water governance. Guillermo emphasized considering legal, social, and cultural aspects, prompting Sofia to explain "water tenure." The meeting stressed the need to align legal norms and boost community

participation, while preparing for regional dialogues on protecting the water rights of vulnerable groups.

## HIGHLIGHT NOTES

### 1. Introduction and Agenda Overview (Raymond Valiant, GWP-SEA)

Raymond Valiant opened the meeting by welcoming colleagues from the regional Water Partnership and FAO, specifically mentioning Sophia Espinosa and Leeann Ji. He presented the agenda, which included a 10-minute introduction, a presentation by Sophia on the global Water tenure concept, and a case study by Dr. Sol Yang from Cambodia. The meeting aimed to foster engagement and collaboration among participants.

### 2. Introduction to Water Tenure and the ScaleWat Project (Sofia Espinosa, FAO)

Sofia explained the importance of Water tenure, particularly for agriculture, which accounts for a significant portion of global water use. She discussed the historical context of Water tenure discussions, including the 2012 Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure, and the subsequent FAO initiatives aimed at promoting responsible governance of water resources.

Sofia outlined a three-level approach to water tenure assessment (national, regional, and local) highlighting overlapping laws and a gap between rights and practices. Espinosa noted ongoing discrimination against marginalized groups, especially women and small-scale farmers, in accessing water.

Sofia highlighted the significance of customary tenure and religious rights for local communities, particularly in Senegal, and presented a roadmap for engaging stakeholders in a regional dialogue on water tenure. She encouraged participation in various activities, including consultations and capacity development, leading to the regional dialogue scheduled for May. Additionally, she mentioned ongoing dialogues in other regions, such as Latin America and West Africa.

### 3. Overview of Water Tenure and Governance in Cambodia (Solieng Mak, GWP-Cambodia)

Solieng shared the categorization of water supply in Cambodia, including urban and rural infrastructures, and the challenges faced in water governance. She identified several types of water tenures derived from formal law, noting the limited implementation and security of these rights. The presentation underscored the need for improved legal frameworks and community engagement in water management.

## 4. Discussion on Water Tenure Concepts and Governance (Moderator: Louise Desrainy, GWP-SEA)

Louise from GWP SEA facilitated a Q&A session on water tenure, encouraging participation from country water partnerships. Guillermo from the Philippines highlighted the need to consider water governance in a broader context, addressing social, cultural, and economic factors. Sofia from FAO responded by explaining that while the term "water tenure" is used globally, it encompasses various legitimacy sources, including legal, spiritual, and cultural aspects.

## 5. Presentation of GWP-SEA Activity Plan (Louise Desrainy, GWP-SEA)

Louise stated that GWP's goal for the May 2026 regional dialogue in Bangkok is to enhance knowledge sharing, engagement, and capacity building on water tenure, setting the stage for a regional multi-stakeholder discussion with policymakers, civil society, academia, and development partners. She added that GWP-SEA aims to foster inclusive conversations and adapt FAO's principles of responsible water tenure governance to the Southeast Asian context.

Prior to the Asia Pacific Regional Water Tenure Dialogue, that will be held in Bangkok on May 2025, there will be 5 outputs in GWP-SEA supports:

1. Support to the water tenure Monday's webinar series, edition Asia and the Pacific (January–February 2026)
2. Preparation of a policy paper on water tenure governance in Southeast Asia (February–April 2026)
3. Online regional capacity building session organization and report (March 2026)
4. Pre-Regional Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on the Principles of Water Tenure organization and report (April 2026)
5. Support to the Regional Dialogue on water tenure for Asia and the Pacific (May 2026)

The following indicative areas of collaboration with Country Water Partnerships (CWPs) in the preparation of the Regional Dialogue were also presented, highlighting their role in advancing the water tenure agenda at both national and regional levels:

### 1. **National Multi-Stakeholder Engagement**

CWPs may help bring together key national stakeholders—such as government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and communities—through online consultations and capacity-building activities to improve understanding of water tenure concepts and practices.

### 2. **Contribution of Country Perspectives**

CWPs should share national insights and experiences to support the regional process, including validating the policy paper. These contributions help enhance regional learning and comparative analysis.

### 3. **Sharing and Promotion of Water Tenure Knowledge**

CWPs can support water tenure knowledge sharing within their national networks by distributing project materials like the Water Tenure Assessment methodology, governance principles, and related resources.

#### **4. Participation in the Regional Dialogue**

CWP representatives will receive support, subject to availability and confirmation, to join the Regional Dialogue on Water Tenure in Bangkok, May 2025. Their involvement will help inform future policies and collaboration on water tenure governance.

These areas of collaboration were acknowledged as indicative and flexible, allowing CWPs to engage based on their national context, capacities, and ongoing initiatives.

## **6. Discussion Session**

Mrs. Sengphasouk (Lao) shared that, for government agencies and line ministries in Lao PDR, it would be preferable to organize the capacity-building activities in a hybrid format, hosted at the Department of Water Resources (DWR) meeting premises.

GWP-SEA and FAO welcomed DWR's willingness to support the initiative by providing the meeting venue and hybrid facilities. It was also noted that the project budget may be adjusted, where feasible, to cover participant refreshments during the capacity-building session, as well as the possible provision of simultaneous interpretation.