Session 1: Transforming Water Systems with Science, Technology and Innovation

High-level respondent to Panel 2 on Water Infrastructure, Service Delivery and Urban Innovation

United Nations Headquarters, New York – 6 May 2026

Thank you, Chair,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Water stress in urban areas is one of the defining **challenges** of our time. Yet, it also offers an **opportunity to transform cities** into platforms for innovation—where solutions are tested, adapted, and scaled in response to local needs.

From the perspective of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations, and drawing on our work with member states—particularly through our Engineering Capacity Building for Africa Programme (ECBAP)—one message is clear: **capacity building is the foundation of this transformation.**

In many regions, including across Africa, solutions for water management already exist. However, their impact remains limited without sufficient local engineering capacity to implement, operate, and maintain them. Through ECBAP, we have seen that investing in engineering education, continuous professional development, and stronger linkages between universities, industry, and public institutions directly **improves service delivery** and **supports innovation uptake**.

If cities are to become effective platforms for testing and scaling solutions, they must be supported by **strong local ecosystems**—where knowledge, skills, and institutions are aligned. Pilot projects are important, but without sustained capacity, they rarely move beyond isolated success stories.

This is why capacity building must be placed at the center of urban water strategies. It is the key enabler that allows innovation to move from concept to impact.

Thank you.