



Water Film Prize

BACK TO OUR FUTURE

Short Film Competition on
Arid Lands and Ancient Hydro-Technologies

Announcement of the first edition (2025)
COP16/UNCCD - 8 December 2024

Press Release

On the occasion of **COP16 - UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification)** the Global Network of Water Museums (WAMU-NET - a flagship initiative of UNESCO-IHP) and Let's Talk About Water (LTAW) announced the *Water Film Prize: 'Back To Our Future'* short film competition. This competition aims to harness the power of cinema to showcase **Ancient Hydro-Technologies (AHTs)** as powerful tools for managing the ecological transition in arid regions. The announcement of the *Water Film Prize* was made on December 8 at the Green Zone of COP16 (Auditorium in Water and Agriculture Tent) during a session organized by WAMU-NET and hosted by the Deputy Ministry for Water (Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, KSA). Several prominent scientists and policy experts participated, including: Arif Alkalali (Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, KSA), Koen Verbist (Intergovernmental Hydrological Program, UNESCO-IHP), Eriberto Eulisse (Global Network of Water Museums), Linda Lilienfeld (Let's Talk about Water, USA), Jordi Morato (UNESCO Chair, Sustainability, Technical University of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain), Abdennabi El Mandour (Museum of Water Civilisations Mohamed VI, Morocco), and Donia Abdelwahed (UNESCO Office for the Gulf States and Yemen, Doha).

Why AHTs?

AHTs are techniques developed by communities across the planet over thousands of years for **managing freshwater resources, fostering social cohesion, and preserving biodiversity** while providing **sustainable livelihoods**, especially in **arid environments**.

Examples of AHTs include:

- **Water Transportation:** Qanats (Iran and North Africa), Karez System (China), Roman Aqueducts
- **Water Collection:** Stepwells (India), Phoenician Cisterns (Malta)
- **Water Harvesting:** Terraced irrigation systems (Peru), the Acequia Systems (New Mexico)
- **Water Retention:** Johad (India), Sand Dams (East Africa)
- **Water Extraction:** Sahduf (Sudan/Egypt) Persian Wheel (Pakistan India)

Despite global progress toward the water management and access goals of Agenda 2030, we believe scientists and policy experts need compelling narratives to engage the broader public with widening water inequality between developed nations and the rest of the world.

AHTs are a source of inspiration and a framework of **traditional water knowledge** that can be adapted to develop new technologies that help arid regions adapt to the growing impacts of **climate change, mass migration**, and the progressive abandonment of desert landscapes traditionally shaped by the activity of countless generations.

A Contribution to Find Innovative Solutions to Climate Change and Global Water Challenges

The *Film Prize* will bring together filmmakers, scientists, and community leaders to address **global water challenges** and understand the evolution of human relationships with nature in a period of **climate change**. It will celebrate humanity's historical heritage of ingenious water management and highlight solutions that foster biodiversity and freshwater ecosystems in arid lands.

Timeline and Awards

The *Water Film Prize* will provide an opportunity for collaboration between regional groups of the UNESCO-IHP Council and **award cash prizes** to short films highlighting these thematic areas:

- ❖ AHTs and Traditional Knowledge supporting Biodiversity for the Ecological Transition
- ❖ Climate Change impacts on Social Water Management
- ❖ New Technologies inspired by ancient knowledge to restore/promote Water Heritage

The first two editions will take place in **2025 and 2026**. The best short films will be:

- Screened in different film festivals and disseminated through the Global Network of Water Museums (120+ members in 40+ countries) via public screening and debates in 2025-26.
- Awarded in a special ceremony at the 11th World Water Forum in Riyadh in 2027.

A Contribution to the Forthcoming Virtual Science Museum of UNESCO

The *Water Film Prize* will contribute to enrich WAMU-NET's ongoing project *The Voices of Water*, a multi-channel immersive video installation focusing on AHTs, which premiered at the 10th World Water Forum in Bali (2024) as a contribution to the forthcoming Virtual Science Museum of UNESCO: <https://www.watermuseums.net/campaigns/the-voices-of-water/>

Cooperation and Partnerships to Promote IHP Phase 9 on Water Sustainability Education

We look forward to curating a collection of films that engage policymakers, scientists, and new audiences to inspire new solutions to water challenges in arid regions. The *Water Film Prize* will continue the collection of visual materials on AHTs and also stimulate the production of new short films in partnership with Let's Talk About Water (LTAW). LTAW draws from over 20 years of experience in organizing water science events and festivals; it also manages *Mayors Make Movies*, their ongoing flagship initiative engaging young people worldwide.

Toward the 11.WWF (KSA, 2027)

We are open to new partnerships with different institutions in pursuit of creating a 'Film Theater' at the 11th World Water Forum in Riyadh in 2027 to exhibit the winners of the editions 2025 and 2026 of the *Water Film Prize*. Our belief in the power of cinema as a medium for change underpins this initiative, which will increase awareness and encourage action on water issues globally.

Together, we will build new awareness and promote AHTs to find new solutions to combat climate change and support water sustainability education in Phase 9 of UNESCO-IHP