

A serene landscape photograph of a forest at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow and long, dramatic rays of light that filter through the tall, dark trees. The scene is reflected in a calm body of water in the foreground, creating a symmetrical effect. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

ACTION **SPARKS** **HOPE**

Implementing the
Water Action Agenda
together

GLOBAL ACTION AND COMMITMENTS

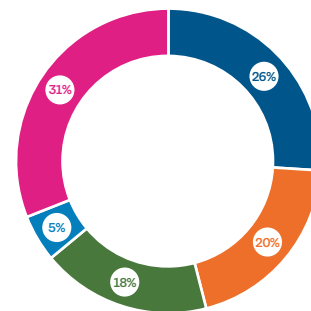
IN MARCH 2023, for the first time in nearly 50 years, Water Action came into focus as the global community assembled in New York for the UN 2023 Water Conference. The Conference made one thing clear: commitments and action are the priority. The conference delivered on this key demand through the **Water Action Agenda**.

THROUGH THE WATER Action Agenda, thousands of stakeholders confirmed 843 commitments (as of the date of publishing). These commitments, spanning many regions and stakeholder groups, represent an accumulated financial investment of approximately 77.2 billion US dollars. The agenda underscores enhanced implementation speed and impact, aiming to surpass conventional approaches.

THIS SHORT PUBLICATION provides a sampling of Water Action Agenda commitments across different regions, sectors, and actors. The sampling includes actions at local, basin, national, and global levels.

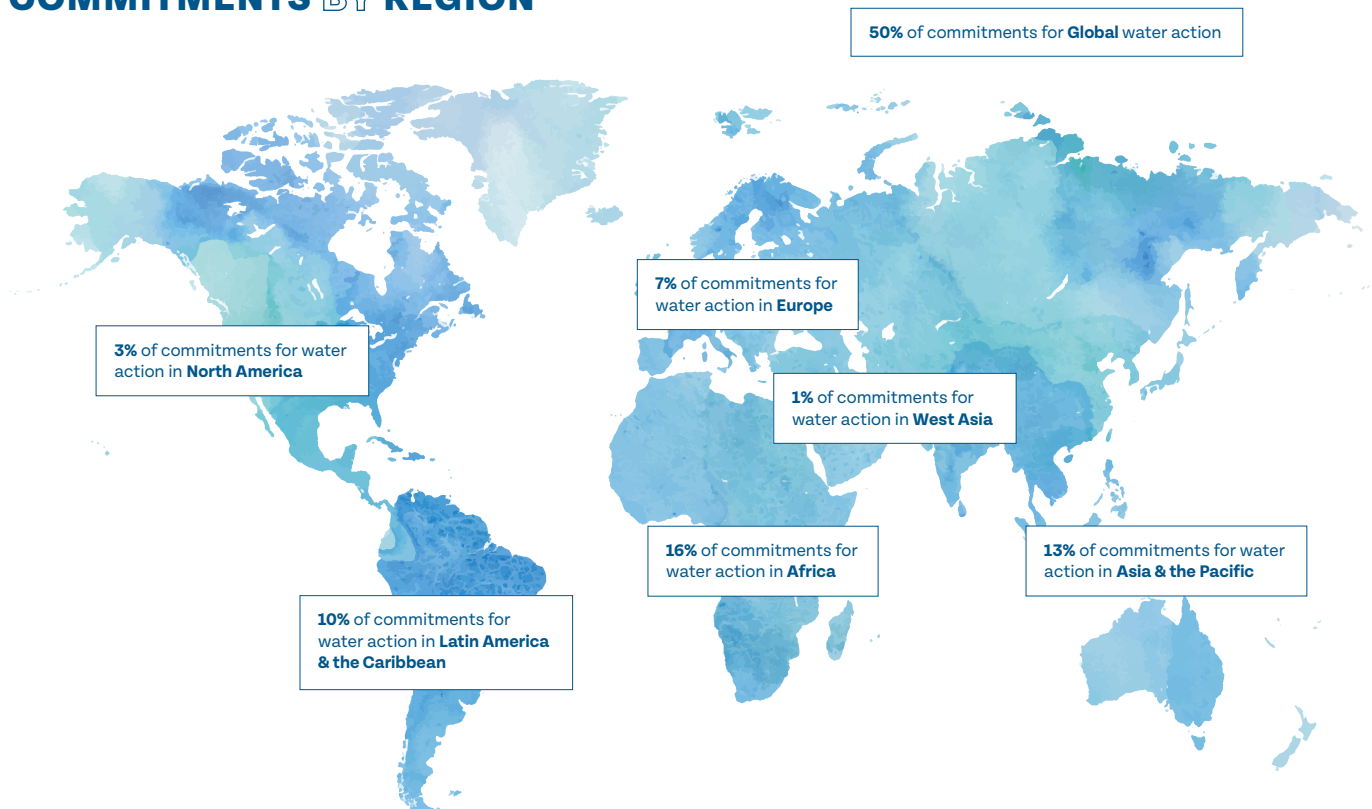


COMMITMENTS BY INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE



- Water for Health
- Water for Sustainable Development
- Water for Climate, Resilience, and Environment
- Water for Cooperation
- Water Action Decade

COMMITMENTS BY REGION



*Data sourced from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' report: **Mapping and Progress of the UN 2023 Water Conference Water Action Agenda**.

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An aerial photograph of a city, showing a dense residential area on the right and a large, lush green forested area on the left. A winding river or stream flows through the forest. The text 'BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH ACTION' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH ACTION



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
22-24
MARCH
2023

The Water Action Agenda is in full swing a year and a half after the United Nations 2023 Water Conference and with the 2026 Water Conference clearly in our sights.

WE HAVE PUSHED the global water cycle out of balance. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals seems to be lagging and even regressing in some cases, making the 2030 targets seem further and further out of reach. Rather than succumb to fatalism, however, the trend can be reversed through collective action, which is exactly where the Water Action Agenda can help. This magazine is dedicated to visualizing, channelling, and accelerating momentum for ongoing collective action at every level.

CO-CHAIRLED BY the Republic of Tajikistan and The Kingdom of the Netherlands, the UN 2023 Water Conference mobilized global efforts on water, addressed pressing water challenges, and created a platform for inclusive, action-oriented, and cross-sectoral initiatives. One key outcome was the Water Action Agenda, enriched by over 800 commitments aimed at making a substantial contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. It is not only a place to gather commitments that will advance the cause of water. It also provides insight into what communities and institutions around the world are already doing to catalyse positive change. Additionally, it identifies potential synergies that can multiply impact and highlights what further actions are needed where change is not happening fast enough.

THE GOOD NEWS is that commitment holders around the world are now following up with action and bringing their commitments to life, closing the gap towards the future we want. Because the achievement of the SDGs is off-track, we need to course correct with less talk and more impactful action.

REACHING SDG6 WILL require quadrupling the impact—not necessarily the quantity or speed—of action. More

and better impact can be achieved when challenges are tackled together. This means reaching out to other sectors, such as health, food, energy, oceans, climate, and finance. These sectors need water to succeed, and they need the water community to help them become better stewards of this vital resource. If an expanded community becomes passionate about the cause of water, we can reach a tipping point for creating exponential impact. Bridging silos to promote cross-sectoral cooperation will lead to stronger decisions, policies, and investments.

TOGETHER, WE ARE taking the Water Action Agenda forward and are using our leadership to influence and encourage others. The Water Action Agenda has built broad alliances and is creating more partnerships, including private sector and philanthropic involvement. The many collaborations set in motion by the Water Action Agenda are creating momentum for our shared ambitions as we learn from each other. It creates a better world as we progress toward the UN 2026 Water Conference.

THE WATER ACTION Agenda is not just about making promises; it is a dynamic tool meant to unite people around shared goals. As we move forward, let's seize this chance to revolutionize how we tackle water-related challenges, ensuring resilience for those most vulnerable. We have proven that we honour our commitments by the action we are taking. We now need to maintain implementation and build on our early successes. Taking action inspires hope, and together, we are committed to building a sustainable future where everyone has access to secure water resources. Anything less is not an option.



EXCITED ABOUT WATER ACTION

AS I REFLECT on the 15 months since the UN Water Conference, a profound sense of hope fills me. The conference spurred a significant global effort to mobilize people towards concrete water commitments. However, making commitments is only the first step. The true challenge lies in implementation.

ENCOURAGINGLY, WE HAVE seen Governments, organizations, and individuals worldwide rise to this challenge. Actions are being taken around the world. These visible efforts inspire others to follow suit, demonstrating that change occurs not only in meeting rooms, but also on farms, in cities, and across countries.

IN THE PAST year, I have seen water action at the farm, city, basin, and national levels. My focus will be on maintaining momentum and connecting various initiatives so we can learn together. As the Water Envoy of The Netherlands, a country deeply intertwined with water, I believe water should be higher on the global agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals have garnered much attention, yet many overlook the fact that water is integral to all these goals. Without clean water, how can we achieve health, equality, or sustainable growth?

IT IS NOT only governments, businesses, or large organizations that can make a difference, but also people and communities. The Water Action Agenda is creating tangible results and hope for communities. This is inspiring more people to take action. Water, after all, is more than just a resource – it is a fundamental element of equality and life itself. Every small action contributes to a larger ripple of change, reminding us that every drop counts. And that action brings hope.

MEIKE VAN GINNEKEN

Water Envoy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Water Action Decade

In the face of a global water crisis, the United Nations (UN) seeks to mobilize action over a ten-year period from 2018 to 2028, known as the **Water Action Decade**. Within the framework of this Decade, the Government of Tajikistan, with support from the UN, is dedicated to driving policy dialogue, partnership, and action through the **Dushanbe Water Process** – a series of high-level international conferences designed to drive global water initiatives.

As a proactive advocate for water issues, Tajikistan has initiated numerous water-related UN General Assembly Resolutions, ensuring water remains a prominent item on the global agenda. Indeed, the first UN conference on water in nearly 50 years was conceived as a mid-term review of the Water Action Decade. It marked a milestone for the global water agenda, welcoming nearly ten thousand participants, and provided the platform for the Water Action Agenda to come into being.

It bridged divides, establishing interactive dialogues, not on water alone, but on health; sustainable development; climate, resilience, and environment; cooperation; and culminating with a discussion on the pathway forward. It is through these same lenses that we will provide inspiring examples of commitments and action.



ANTÓNIO GUTERRES
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL



From water as a key driver across economies and policymaking to the recognition of water and sanitation as a human right. From the integration of water and climate policies to an innovative approach in the use of water in food production. Now is the moment for game-changing commitments to bring the Water Action Agenda to life.

* From his address at the opening of the UN 2023 Water Conference



H.E. MR. QOHIR RASULZODA

PRIME MINISTER OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

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The objective of the [3rd High-level International Conference on the International Decade for Action] is to advance our collective efforts and support the implementation of voluntary commitments registered in the Water Action Agenda of the UN Water Conference, as well as stimulate new partnerships and accelerate action to achieve the water goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

* From the Co-Chair Welcome Message, Third Dushanbe Water Action Decade Conference



H.E. MR. LI JUNHUA

UN UNDER-SECRETARY-
GENERAL FOR
ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL AFFAIRS



A key outcome of the [UN2023 Water] Conference, convened after nearly fifty years, was the Water Action Agenda: a compendium of voluntary pledges that were announced or registered in the lead up to, as well as during the Conference itself. As of today, over 830 commitments have been published. These commitments recognize the cross-cutting nature of water and leverage the interlinkages between SDG 6 and other goals in the 2030 Agenda. Many of these commitments seek to work across the interlinkages of water action, climate action, environmental protection, human health and partnerships, with commitments made by stakeholders at all levels and sectors. But now we need to deliver on the commitments made. We need a holistic and integrated approach to water management, innovative and evidence-based solutions, increased sector-wide investment and capacity-building, and strengthened cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders.

* From the Co-Chair Welcome Message, Third Dushanbe Water Action Decade Conference



WATER FOR HEALTH

The UN 2023 Water Conference aimed a spotlight on the critical link between water, sanitation, and health. The conference stressed that universal access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation services are fundamental human rights. These services are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and reducing inequalities.

THE 220 HEALTH-RELATED commitments registered in the Water Action Agenda include a significant commitment from the UK Government to invest 18.5M GBP in funding for water, sanitation and hygiene systems for health. The Water Institute at the University of North Carolina offered its annual Water and Health Conference as a moment to gather researchers, practitioners and policy makers, especially from low- and middle-income countries, to review progress, align and plan forward on health-related Water Action Agenda commitments.

IN 2020, 3.6 BILLION people – nearly half the world's population – did not have access to safely managed sanitation facilities. This is not just a matter of dignity; poorly managed waste contaminates water, soil, and food, and spreads disease, hindering socio-economic development. Commitments and action demonstrate the essential role of women, girls and disadvantaged populations in overcoming health-related challenges. Their empowerment can drive forward better water management and promote healthier communities.



ENSURING SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS

DESPITE ONGOING EFFORTS, many First Nations communities, one type of Indigenous community in Canada, still lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation, impacting health, education, and economic development, sometimes even leading to the displacement of populations. To many Indigenous Peoples, water holds spiritual and cultural significance: it is regarded as a sacred living spirit. Women are particularly affected when their traditional roles as water carriers and protectors of lands and waterways are threatened.

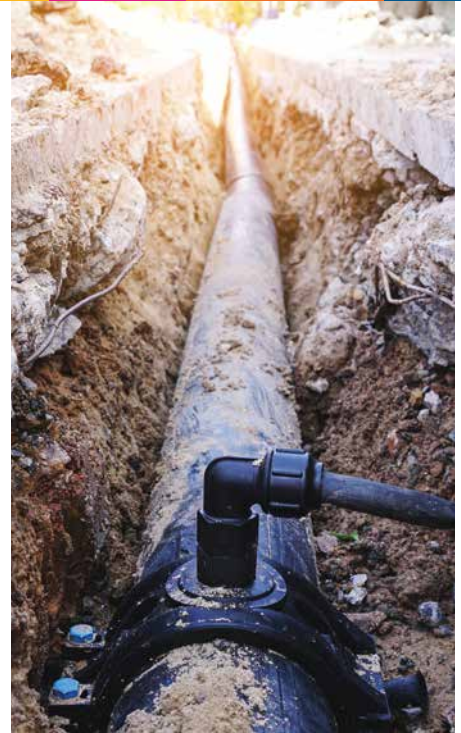
THE ASSEMBLY OF First Nations (AFN), representing 634 member nations, is leading the fight for these basic rights. Its Infrastructure and Safe Drinking Water Sector initiative currently notes 28 communities whose water is unsafe to drink. Through the organization of a national water symposium and the edition of a comprehensive report, it is assessing progress on Sustainable Development Goal 6 among First Nations. In collaboration with the Canadian Government, they are driving action towards Sustainable Development Goal 6, ensuring the human right to safe drinking

water and sanitation for all First Nations. In the meantime, the AFN continues its advocacy efforts for the recognition of First Nations' rights to jurisdiction, management and self-determination over their lands and waters and for allocation of funding for the implementation of policies and solutions.

UNITING ALL FIRST Nations across Canada to the cause, progress and challenges are discussed during engagement sessions and annual assemblies of First Nations leadership. Feedback from these sessions informs the AFN's advocacy objectives, such as encouraging Canada to place people's rights at the very center of their sustainable development policies and practices, which aligns with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT of the AFN's initiative is profound. Not only is it a fight for the right to clean water, but a struggle for a resilient and equitable future for all First Nations in Canada.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/advancing-progress-achieve-un-sdg-6-first-nations-through-advocacy-canadian-government

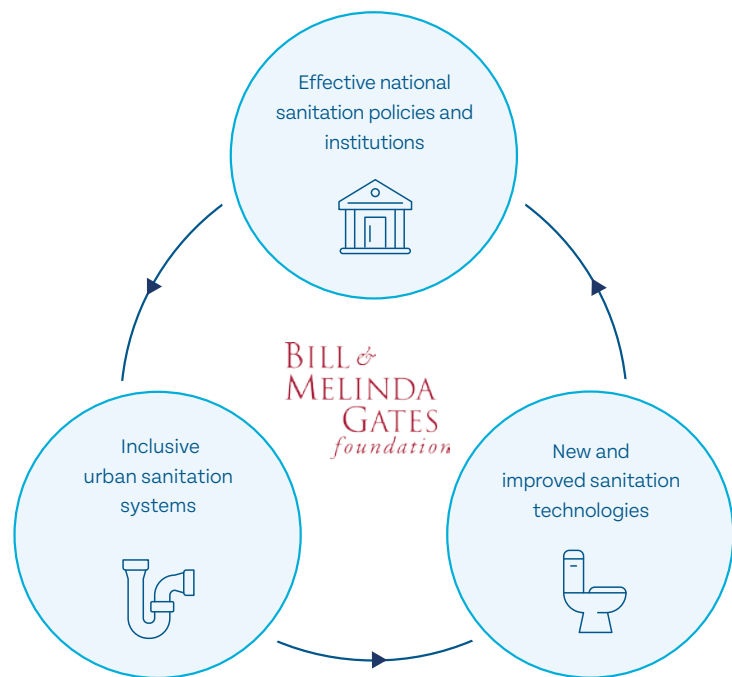


TOWARDS INCLUSIVE AND SECURE SANITATION FOR ALL

OVER THE PAST 12 years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation focused on water for health by driving the development of new sanitation technologies for billions of urban residents without sewer access. As explained by Doulaye Kone, Interim Director for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, “The Foundation has supported the sector in shifting from a dominant focus on water and infrastructure to a focus on safe sanitation services that reach all people.”

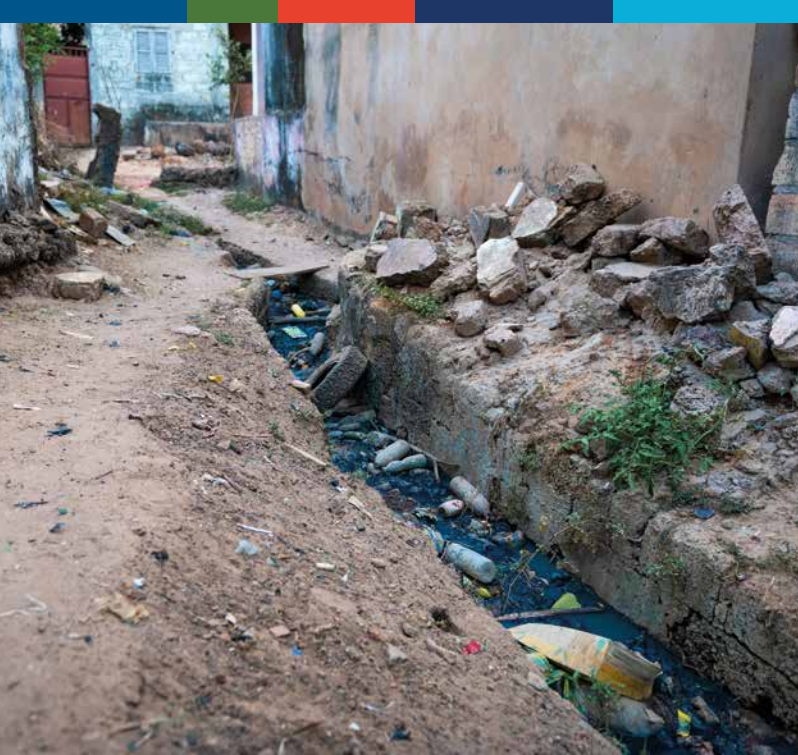
IN ITS WATER Action Agenda commitment, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged \$370 million from 2023 to 2026 to support Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation, focusing on three key pathways:

1 THE FOUNDATION COLLABORATES with government leaders, the private sector, and technologists to promote policies and practical steps that governments can take to establish safer sanitation through fecal sludge management—a sanitation strategy that does not require sewers. For example, it worked with its partners to create African Sanitation Policy Guidelines. These guidelines are already being used in more than 15 countries to help create better policies and more inclusive sanitation systems.



2 WORKING TO ENSURE urban sanitation systems serve all, especially low-income communities. To do this, they invest in both sewered and non-sewered infrastructure, particularly in slums and informal settlements that are typically underserved.

3 FOCUSING ON TECHNOLOGIES like the reinvented toilet and omni-processor, supporting new business models and public-



Making strides for WASH in healthcare

One in five of all health care facilities in the world are lacking the basic water services they need to ensure the health of their patients. Globally, 10% of patients contract infections while receiving care. To combat this, the World Health Assembly set a resolution in 2019 to ensure fully functioning water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in healthcare facilities. This initiative is crucial for preventing infections, combating antimicrobial resistance, reducing preventable maternal and newborn deaths, and effectively responding to public health crises.

Since then, countries worldwide have made remarkable strides in improving standards for safety, climate resilience, sustainability, gender equity, and inclusivity. For example, in Bangladesh, an accessibility audit that tracked access to water and sanitation services in community clinics provoked an increase in the number of women giving birth in those facilities from zero to 300 over a three-year period. This reduced the risk of infection associated with unclean births, which account for 26% of neonatal deaths and 11% of maternal mortality.

Training materials and support are now offered in over 75 countries, with additional guidance developed on safe plumbing, climate resilience, and digitization. A notable example is the “Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) in WASH in Health-Care Facilities (2023)” developed by the World Health Organization. This toolkit supports the commitment to Leaving No One Behind, providing step-by-step guidance to broaden inclusivity. It demonstrates how to identify barriers encountered by different groups of stakeholders related to availability, accessibility and acceptability of WASH services in healthcare facilities and how to establish targets and roadmaps to overcome them.

private partnerships. In the words of Doulaye, “These innovations are being developed into cost-effective, low-energy, off-grid systems that can treat waste and eliminate harmful pathogens without needing a connection to water or treatment plants. And they provide options for governments seeking sanitation technologies that best address the needs of their communities.” These actions are moving the needle on investing in technologies that can radically change how municipalities and households manage faecal waste affordably, on a large scale, and with little or no need for water and electricity, especially for those still lacking access to safely managed sanitation in rural or hard to reach geographies.

THE FOUNDATION IS focusing on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services is the lowest and the potential for progress is the highest. According to Doulaye, “This progress has shown us that when innovators, governments, philanthropy, and industry come together with urgency and focus, we can develop life-saving solutions to global health crises. We must continue to promote the adoption of innovations to accelerate access to inclusive, safely managed sanitation services.”

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/accelerate-progress-towards-inclusive-safely-managed-sanitation-services

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/accelerating-professionalized-water-supply-and-sanitation-services-through-capacity

Women lead on Water Action

Achieving gender equality in the water sector is crucial for fulfilling global commitments, yet severe gender inequalities persist at all levels. Despite making up a majority of the planet's population, women are largely marginalized, especially in higher-level water-related decision-making and planning processes. Women comprise less than 17% of the water, sanitation, and hygiene labour force in developing economies, and only a fraction of policymakers, regulators, management, and technical experts are female. The commitments in the Water Action Agenda must be gender transformative to address this disparity. That is to say, the leaders for each action should consider how to redress gender inequalities and promote more equitable outcomes for their commitments. To do this, they must examine and address any underlying causes of potential inequalities

and identify actions that can help transform the systems towards more positive norms.

According to **UN Water's recent report**, involving women can increase the effectiveness of water projects six to seven times, and gender-inclusive peace processes are found to last longer and be more resilient. Incorporating gender transformative approaches enhances the impact and sustainability of water initiatives worldwide. Among the commitments in the agenda, 139 recognize the crucial role of gender, addressing root causes of inequality, amplifying impacts on marginalized groups, or directly tackling issues affecting women. Within this group, 48 commitments stand out as explicitly including an empowerment angle or seeking to overcome barriers such as finance, capacity or leadership for women and girls.

UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme's Call for Action bridges data gaps and promotes gender-inclusive strategies by urging leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to:

- » Protect women's water rights and ensure gender-equal financing
- » Promote women's leadership in water management
- » Narrow the gender gap between policy and practice
- » Challenge norms and stereotypes disadvantaging women and girls
- » Ensure that water data can be differentiated between respondents of different genders

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/call-action-accelerate-gender-equality-water-domain

One key UN report from 2015 states that women in peace processes push for the commencement, resumption, or finalization of negotiations when talks have faltered. The Women in Water Diplomacy Network promotes gender equality in high-level decision-making in transboundary basins, a means to cultivate regional peace and security.

The Network connects decision-makers with influencers, including academics and women-led civil society leaders. Inspired by the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, it focuses on empowerment, experience exchange, capacity building, and research cooperation.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/rising-tide-support-women-water-diplomacy

In a similar vein, the Women for Water and Peace Project (W4WP) mitigates water-based community conflicts in five wards in Freetown, Sierra Leone: Mayinkineh, Rokupa, Dworzark, Lumley, and Crab Town. W4WP seeks to prevent conflicts from escalating into violence by addressing the lack of equitable access to water. To this end, the initiative supports the installation and management of 25 water kiosks with solar-powered purification systems. The project empowers women and girls to take leadership roles in managing water scarcity-related conflicts to promote peace and social cohesion.

Expected impacts include:

- » Strengthening women's participation in conflict resolution
- » Increasing economic self-reliance
- » Improving livelihood opportunities
- » Enhancing social cohesion

Through these efforts, W4WP envisions a future where equitable water access promotes harmony and empowers communities.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/women-water-and-peace-project-w4wp-sierra-leone

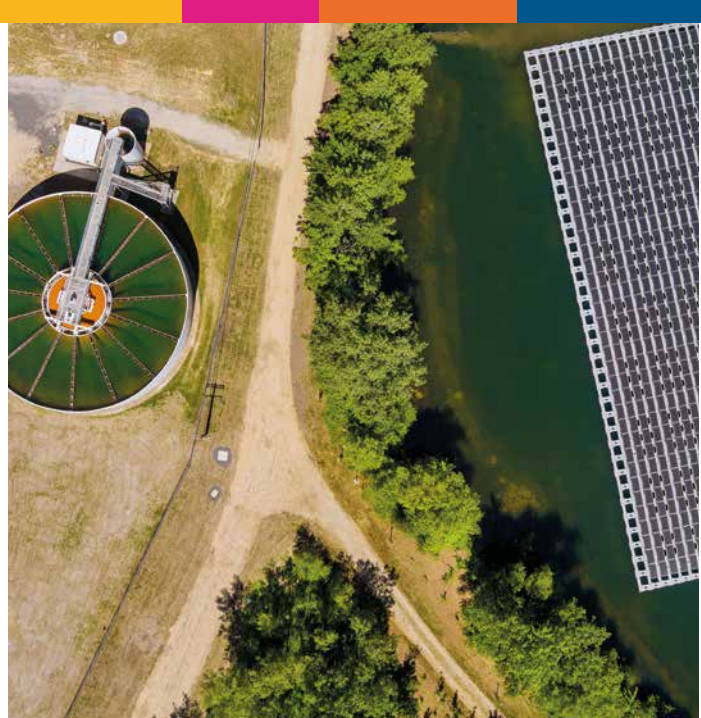


WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

At the UN 2023 Water Conference, Interactive Dialogue 2 emphasized water's critical role underpinning the entire 2030 Agenda. It zeroed in on the Water-Energy-Food nexus, advocating for integrated and sustainable economic and urban development.

PROMOTING EFFICIENT WATER use and sound management supports global efforts to achieve multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to clean water, energy, food security, and sustainable cities. Our ability to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, respond to climate change, or enhance biodiversity is intimately

linked to the value we ascribe to water, which ultimately determines how it is managed and shared equitably across competing needs. As the **Global Commission on the Economics of Water** is demonstrating through its commitment, valuing water is not merely a financing issue but central to managing it as a common good.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

AS CLIMATE CHANGE intensifies and natural resources become scarcer, the European Union (EU) is stepping up its efforts to create a more resource-efficient future. With a clear focus on water conservation and the circular economy, the EU is committing to a series of initiatives to strengthen its policy and regulatory frameworks in these crucial areas.

“PROMOTING A MORE circular approach to water and the management of wastewater is very important, because it strengthens sustainability,” says Dr. Florika Fink Hooijer, Director-General of the Environment Department of the European Commission (DG ENV). “We are committed to reducing water use by setting water-saving requirements for various products, promoting water efficiency, circularity, reuse, sustainable land use, and encouraging the wider use of drought management plans, where relevant.”

BY 2027, THE EU aspires to achieve good status for all water bodies, as outlined in the Water Framework Directive. This goal should be supported by mobilisation of private and public funding in areas such as: fighting leakages and unwanted losses in water distribution networks, water treatment, supply and sanitation, modernisation of irrigation systems, precision farming and green & blue infrastructure, including green water storage and nature-based solutions.

WE MUST ENSURE that all sectors prepare for challenges posed by climate change. For example, as of June 2023, standards are applied to guarantee and promote safe water reuse in agricultural irrigation wherever relevant across the European Union. This move aims not only to conserve water but also to ensure that reuse practices do not pose risks to

human health or the environment. By sharing its knowledge and experience globally, the EU hopes to lead by example in the sound management of water resources.

“OUR ENGAGEMENT IN the Water Action Agenda is driven by a number of reasons, all linked to the need for sustainable and circular water management practices globally,” Florika notes. “We brought forward 33 commitments because we very much want to be part of these global efforts to address the growing challenges related to water scarcity, pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts on water resources, both in terms of quantity and quality.”

THE EU IS also making significant strides in the regulation and promotion of water reuse and wastewater management. The new Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation and the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive are examples of how these commitments are being implemented. These regulations aim to improve durability, reusability, upgradability, reparability, and energy and resource efficiency, while reducing environmental impacts.

FLORIKA CONCLUDES, “We are still implementing the commitments, but these policies are helping us improve efficiency and circularity in resource use. By investing in water infrastructure, sustainable management practices, and the circular economy, we support economic growth, improve public health, and enhance the quality of life for communities worldwide.”

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/european-union-commitments-strengthen-policy-and-regulatory-framework-water-and



HARVESTING THE POWER OF THE SUN

AGRICULTURE IS BY far the biggest consumer of water, and without water, there can be no food. Generally speaking, the current agricultural system relies heavily on unsustainable production methods and extensive irrigation that places tremendous stress on limited freshwater resources. To cultivate a healthy and sustainable food system, it is vital to manage interactions, trade-offs, and unintended consequences between water, food, energy, and environmental systems. To this end, some small-scale farmers are benefitting from technological innovations and financial support.

WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION of high-quality solar irrigation systems, farmers can transcend the limitations of relying solely on biannual rain seasons and enjoy year-round farming yields. Nexus Green is one such company providing innovative solutions to revolutionize agricultural outcomes across Africa. Its project in Uganda enhances water supply and agricultural productivity through the use of solar-powered irrigation systems. Jointly funded by the Government of Uganda and UK Export Finance, the project involves the construction of 687 solar-powered water irrigation sites across the country. This initiative benefits around 2.6 million people in particularly water-stressed districts, improving the productivity of smallholder farmers and extending their agricultural seasons. Additionally, it offers clean drinking water to rural and urban communities, potentially reducing water tariffs and improving public health.

NEXUS GREEN EXEMPLIFIES how ambitious actions reaching beyond sectors can be achieved. The vision is a future where renewable energy becomes the cornerstone of economic development and environmental stewardship, driving the region's transition toward a sustainable and prosperous future.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/solar-powered-water-supply-and-irrigation-services

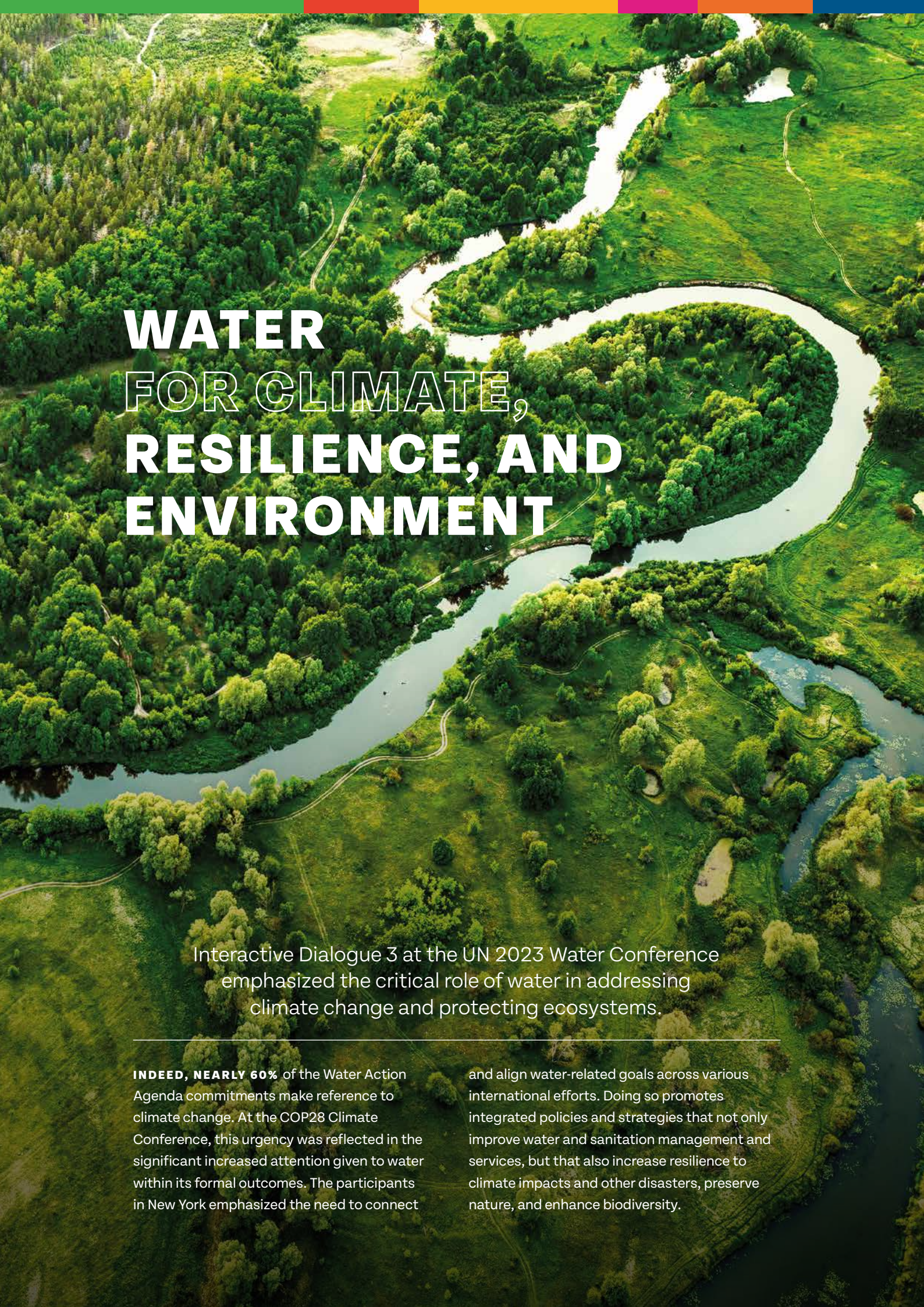


Stepping towards Fair Water Footprints

Many products purchased and consumed in developed countries are actually produced in developing countries using unsustainable practices. The choices we make about the food, clothes and goods we acquire have implications on water and climate security for millions of people all around the world. Embedded water that is exported from developing countries in the form of consumer goods means less water of poorer quality is available for local populations and that their vulnerability to climate change and disease increases.

To address this inequity, the UK and Malawi launched the Glasgow Declaration for Fair Water Footprints at COP26. It combines commitments to eliminate pollution, use water sustainably, ensure access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for all, protect nature, and build resilience to climate impacts throughout product life cycles and across borders. This initiative, endorsed by 26 founding signatories representing 185 million people and \$5 trillion in GDP, sets ambitious targets for 2030. In line with the Water Action Agenda, signatories re-commit to their leadership pledges, expanding their coalitions, and sharing insights to transform global water usage in supply chains. Collaborating with the UN, they will use standards, trade policies, and business practices to harness the power of enterprise, investment, and communities, aiming to drive change across trade, finance, markets, media, and governance.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/fair-water-footprints-ambition-accountability-and-action-sdg6



WATER FOR CLIMATE, RESILIENCE, AND ENVIRONMENT

Interactive Dialogue 3 at the UN 2023 Water Conference emphasized the critical role of water in addressing climate change and protecting ecosystems.

INDEED, NEARLY 60% of the Water Action Agenda commitments make reference to climate change. At the COP28 Climate Conference, this urgency was reflected in the significant increased attention given to water within its formal outcomes. The participants in New York emphasized the need to connect

and align water-related goals across various international efforts. Doing so promotes integrated policies and strategies that not only improve water and sanitation management and services, but that also increase resilience to climate impacts and other disasters, preserve nature, and enhance biodiversity.



JOINT ACTION FOR HEALTHY FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS

SOME 300,000 KILOMETERS of rivers flowing freely and 350 million hectares of thriving wetlands, teeming with life: this vision is the driving force behind the Freshwater Challenge, an initiative launched at the UN 2023 Water Conference. This country-driven effort aims to restore 30% of the world's degraded freshwater ecosystems by 2030.

“THE RATIONALE BEHIND the Freshwater Challenge is clear: healthy freshwater ecosystems are crucial for sustainable development,” says Christine Colvin, the Water Policy Lead at WWF. They are essential for clean water and food production, and absorb, store and distribute heat to keep temperatures stable. However, efforts to coordinate actions among different organizations, programs, and funds remain fragmented. At the national level, isolated approaches to water management and the challenge of mainstreaming these efforts into broader sustainable development strategies further complicate the issue.

“THE FRESHWATER CHALLENGE is about bringing together diverse partners to restore our vital freshwater ecosystems,” says Richard Lee, Communications Manager at WWF. “It’s a call to action, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.” The Freshwater Challenge offers a platform for discussion and coordination. By promoting collaboration and integrating freshwater restoration into national and international agendas, the initiative overcomes the barriers that have hindered progress in the past. Stakeholders work hand in hand, mobilizing resources and expertise to define and implement restoration targets. This inclusive approach ensures that all voices are heard

and that solutions are co-created to address the unique challenges faced by different regions.

THE EFFORT HAS already gained significant traction. Initially involving a consortium of countries including Colombia, Ecuador, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zambia, the initiative has since expanded. It now includes 45 countries and the European Union, with efforts to involve more nations like Sweden and India.

A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT of the Freshwater Challenge is the involvement of the private sector. Companies like IKEA, Boston Consulting Group, and Reckitt are partnering with WWF to contribute to water stewardship and advocate for national-level restoration efforts. These partnerships integrate corporate water stewardship initiatives into broader, nationally significant restoration projects, enhancing their impact.

DESPITE THE PROGRESS, the initiative faces several challenges. “Maintaining momentum and securing substantial funding to support countries in planning and implementing are critical,” Christine emphasizes.

THE FRESHWATER CHALLENGE is an ambitious but necessary endeavour. By working together to restore rivers and wetlands, ecosystems are revived, biodiversity enhanced, and the sustainability of vital resources secured for future generations.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/freshwater-challenge-0



WATER AT THE HEART OF CLIMATE ACTION

IN A MOVE to tackle the intertwined challenges of climate change and water-related risks, the "Water at the Heart of Climate Action" initiative emerges as a beacon of hope for vulnerable communities in Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. This pioneering effort mitigates water-related disasters through local collaboration, connecting global policies with local needs. The initiative reduces disaster risks while enhancing climate adaptation.

"**WATER AT THE** Heart of Climate Action is about empowering communities to take charge of their own resilience," says Pieter Copper from the Climate Team in the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who spearheads the climate team and leads the adaptation efforts. Central to this initiative is the emphasis on local perspectives and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the design and implementation of interventions. "We need to ensure that the people most affected by climate change have a seat at the table. Their voices must shape the strategies that will protect their communities," Pieter emphasizes.

A KEY FOCUS of the initiative is enhancing the forecasting and early warning system capacity of regional and national actors. Current systems suffer from fragmentation and a disconnect between national and local levels, often leading to ineffective responses.

"**EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS** are crucial, but they need to be relevant and accessible to the communities they serve. We are working to bridge the gap between national systems and local needs," Pieter says. By improving these systems and ensuring community ownership, the initiative aims to create a seamless flow of information and action from the ground up, ultimately saving lives and livelihoods. The initiative focuses on five main areas:

- » Increasing **investment** in risk-based decision-making to improve governance
- » Enhancing regional, national, and local **hydro-meteorological capacity** for better weather and hazard forecasting
- » Improving **communication** of early warnings to bridge gaps between communities and national systems
- » Integrating proactive measures with long-term resilience efforts using a **community-focused approach**
- » Ensuring **effective knowledge sharing and learning** across different sectors

PIETER CONCLUDES, "As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, initiatives like this provide a blueprint for effective, inclusive, and sustainable action. And action sparks hope."

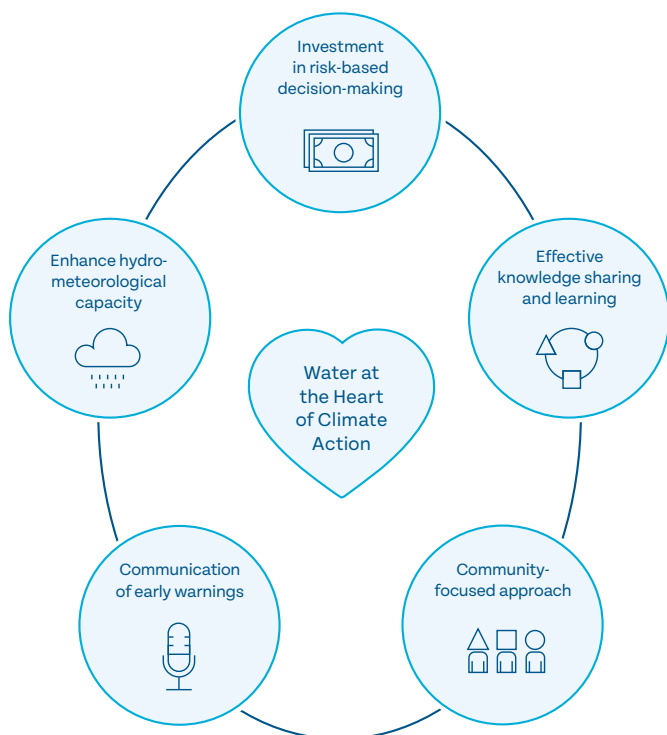


Making islands resilient

Islands face specific conditions that hinder water resilience. For example, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are among the world's most disaster-prone countries, suffering twice as many casualties from disasters as the global average and seven times more financial loss.

The Greening the Islands (GTI) Observatory is a think tank that analyzes the specific needs of islands and matches them with sustainable solutions. It supports strategies for sustainable transitions by identifying innovations, developing business models, monitoring funding opportunities, and disseminating best practices.

By promoting collaboration between governments and businesses worldwide, it has helped create innovative projects. For instance, in Malta, a project introduced affordable, nature-based methods to improve irrigation efficiency and water supply for smallholder farmers. Using circular economy principles, it reduced evaporation by 90%, increased yields by 10-30%, and cut energy use by 20%.



» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/water-heart-climate-action

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/greening-islands-observatory

An aerial photograph of a river system, likely a delta or estuary, showing a complex network of channels and islands. The water is a vibrant green, contrasting with the brownish-tan land. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

WATER FOR COOPERATION

At the UN 2023 Water Conference, Interactive Dialogue 4 highlighted the crucial connection between SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 17 (partnerships), emphasizing inclusive water management and cooperation as a catalyst for global peace and prosperity.

THIS COOPERATION EXTENDS to scientific collaboration as well. Indeed, water connects stakeholders of the 2030 Agenda. By encouraging the establishment of institutions and rules to manage cooperation fairly, water management can be improved, and conflicts can be diffused, in particular in the 153 Member States that share transboundary

waters. The discussion emphasized that cooperation is not possible without a foundation of stability, trust, mutual benefit sharing and political will. With a majority of the registered actions spanning borders and sectors, cooperation of all types is clearly the trend of the future.

UNCOVERING DEEP OFFSHORE GROUNDWATER

IN THE FACE of escalating climate change and growing water scarcity, the search for new and unusual water sources has become increasingly important. Deep, onshore and offshore freshwater reservoirs can bolster resilience in water-stressed communities, as emphasized by the [UN's 2020 analytical brief](#). Addressing this challenge head-on, a global coalition of 111 experts from 33 countries is investigating the untapped potential of deep offshore groundwater.

ZAKIE HIBA WAZAZ, a research support officer at the University of Malta, leads the OFOUR Cost Action project. Now in its second year, this initiative focuses on offshore freshwater and offshore groundwater, bridging gaps between disparate scientific disciplines and sectors. Combining methods and understanding across disciplines not only serves to create a common language, but also improves findings. The project's innovative approach brings together partners from diverse backgrounds related to offshore groundwater, including scientific researchers, water agencies, governmental bodies, and private sector entities like oil and gas companies. By fostering collaboration across these sectors, the project builds a comprehensive understanding of offshore groundwater.

"BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN scientists and sectors is critical," Hiba emphasizes. "We begin by assembling partners who may seem worlds apart and encourage them to collaborate from the outset."

"THE SUCCESS STORIES, such as Somalia's discovery of vast freshwater reserves stored in deep aquifers, underscore the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation," Hiba points out. "Through inter-ministerial collaboration and innovative input from the private sector, we've unlocked new water sources that hold potential to sustainably address water scarcity in regions like Somalia."

"AS WE MOVE forward, our global commitment is clear: to navigate the complexities of deep offshore groundwater, evaluate its environmental implications, and develop strong policies that support its responsible management," says Hiba. "Through collaborative efforts, we are paving the way for a more resilient future, ensuring equitable access to water resources for generations to come."

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/breaking-down-silos-111-experts-33-countries-across-sectors-collaborate-investigate



WATER AS LEVERAGE IN CARTAGENA

THE CITY OF Cartagena faces a significant threat from frequent flooding, which is exacerbated by climate change and inadequate waste management. “Every time it rains, it’s a disaster,” says Maria Landano, Head of International Cooperation in Cartagena. “Trash worsens the problem, and getting people committed to change is hard. We’ve made significant efforts to clean the canals, but they quickly revert to their previous state. It’s a process, but Water as Leverage offers hope.”

DEVELOPED BY THE Government of the Netherlands with international partners, Water as Leverage (WaL) addresses urban climate adaptation challenges through a holistic and inclusive project preparation approach. This strategy considers the entire urban fabric—physical, social, economic, and cultural—to create scalable and sustainable solutions.

BUILDING ON THE successful Water as Leverage for Resilient Cities Asia program, which targeted cities like Chennai, Khulna, and Semarang, the current WaL approach in Cartagena acts on three key levers from the outset: driving process and

project innovation, building coalitions and facilitating resource mobilization, and developing bankable projects from the start.

IT IS A shining example of multi-stakeholder collaboration. The project brings together government agencies, private sector companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and international partners. In collaboration with local actors and the community, the projects leverage the strengths and expertise of each participant.

THE CARTAGENA INITIATIVE focuses on two main projects: La Bocana and Cañon Juan Angola. The projects increase the natural flow of water and safeguard animal wildlife while preserving the social and ecological functions of the Ciénaga de la Virgen lagoon ecosystem. “Cartagena is surrounded by water, yet we don’t fully integrate it into our urban planning,” says Landano.

THE PROJECT HAS involved the community significantly in its work. “We’ve overcome early challenges and are now working closely together,” says Landano. “The community’s



Sharing know-how, sharing water resources

The Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition is a group that works together across borders to manage and protect shared water resources. This task is crucial given financial limits, structural challenges, past agreement shortcomings, and growing risks linked to climate change. This coalition, launched during the UN 2023 Water Conference, unites 17 countries plus the European Union, 9 intergovernmental bodies, 3 international financing bodies and 10 civil society organizations.

It has set collective goals, which include increasing the proportion of transboundary basins with operational arrangements, boosting signatories to international water conventions, enhancing river basin organizations' effectiveness, and securing projects and funding for cooperative water management. These efforts amplify the transboundary water community's voice, showcasing the benefits of sustainable water cooperation and overcoming barriers to collaboration. By rallying financial and technical support, the coalition drives dialogue and cooperation.

This unified approach optimizes resources, address critical gaps, and inspire new solutions to make water a source of cooperation rather than conflict.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/transboundary-water-cooperation-coalition



Image courtesy of Conservation International

support has been crucial, and we ensure that our efforts benefit everyone, especially the most vulnerable." Private sector involvement is also key, particularly for the building sector and industries around the Ciénaga de la Virgen. "The private sector must see tangible benefits," says Landano. "We're working to integrate their contributions into the project."

WATER AS LEVERAGE forges a promising path forward for Cartagena, guided by collaboration. "This project is the solution for Cartagena," affirms Landano. "We must learn to live with water, not against it."

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/water-leverage-cartagena-contruyendo-con-el-agua



ACCELERATING ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

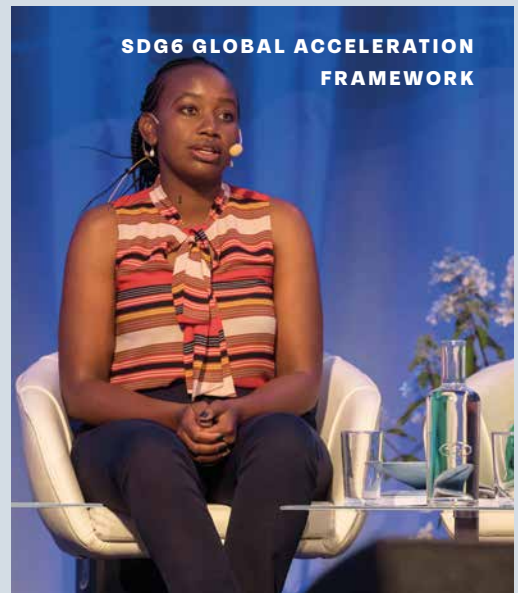
Contributing to the UN's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the SDG6 Global Acceleration Framework, created by UN-Water in 2020, aims to speed up progress on Goal 6, focusing on water and sanitation.

THE FRAMEWORK TARGETS collaboration to achieve quick, effective progress towards universal access to water and sanitation on a larger scale.

IT FOCUSES ON unifying five key accelerators, which, if implemented within the Water Action Agenda, could be instrumental to its success.

- » **FINANCE:** Increasing investment and ensuring the efficient use of funds
- » **DATA:** Improving data collection and sharing for informed decision-making
- » **CAPACITY:** Strengthening human and institutional capabilities
- » **INNOVATION:** Encouraging innovative solutions and technologies
- » **GOVERNANCE:** Enhancing policies, regulations, and institutional frameworks





CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: INVESTING IN FUTURE WATER MANAGERS



TODAY'S YOUTH ARE the stewards of tomorrow's water systems. Equipping them with the necessary skills is vital for the success of future water management. It is also crucial that future water managers reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. The North American Youth Parliament for Water is drawing attention to these issues and is training young professionals as part of their Water Action Agenda commitment. Virtual workshops and training sessions led by seasoned water experts target individuals aged 18-35. Additionally, on-the-ground networking sessions and field tours offer hands-on experience, showcasing how local industries address water issues and develop infrastructure.

THE PROGRAMME ALSO empowers women to assume active roles and leadership positions in water management through outreach, training sessions led by women, and recognition for women experts. They also encourage local communities to get involved in managing water and sanitation, promoting fair decision-making.

Additionally, the initiative helps young people by making it easier for them to find jobs, obtain education, and access training in the water industry. This not only gives them valuable experience, but also improves their chances of finding work and reduces unemployment rates.

A SHINING EXAMPLE of youth empowerment is the position created for a youth representative on the Board of Directors for the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, an American initiative to engage Benton County residents into conservation and stewardship of natural resources. Such positions allow young professionals to be directly involved in water management and decision-making processes, while broadening their networks and gaining valuable experience. Through training, networking, and active community engagement, young professionals are empowered to lead the way in overcoming the pressing water challenges of the 21st century.

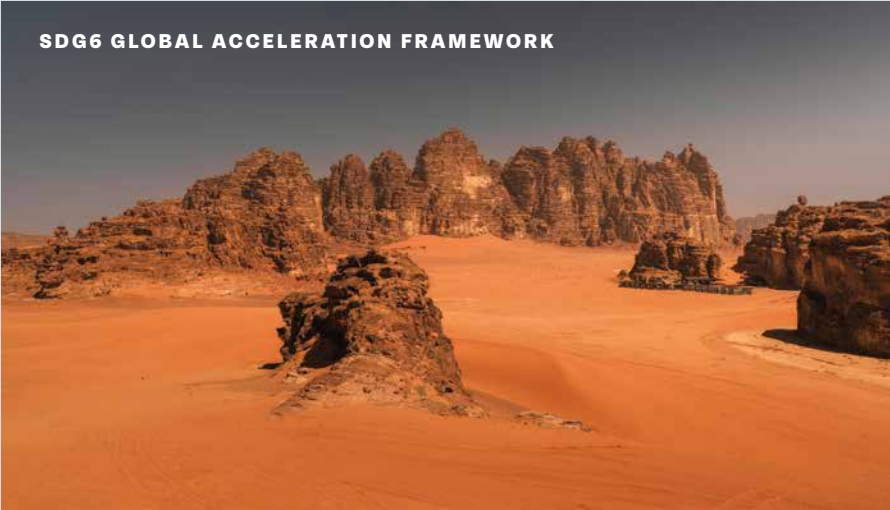
» naypw.wordpress.com/our-actions

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL TRAINING CENTERS

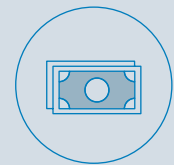
The commitment to connect networks for water education and capacity development was successfully delivered in August of 2023 through the launch of the Global Water Education Alliance (GWEN), supported by IHE-Delft, SIWI, Cap-Net UNDP, and UNESCO, in alignment with the UN-Water SDG6 Capacity Development Initiative. The alliance aims to develop and deliver on a common global agenda to accelerate capacity development for the water sector in at least 10 low- and middle-income countries by 2028.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/strengthen-regional-training-centers-and-networks-training-centers

» cap-net.org/global-water-education-network



FINANCING RESILIENCE IN THE ARAB REGION



IN A WORLD grappling with water scarcity and climate change, the Arab region stands at a critical junction. The **Arab Initiative for Mobilizing Climate Finance for Water** is a beacon of hope and action. Stemming from urgent discussions in Beirut in May 2022, this initiative addresses the dire need for climate adaptation in the water sector.

WATER SCARCITY IS a harsh reality for many Arab nations, made worse by climate change. With only approximately one-third of international climate finance directed towards adaptation, the region's vulnerability to water-related climate impacts demands increased and targeted funding. AIM Climate Finance for Water enhances regional capacities to mobilize and effectively use financial resources for water adaptation projects.

CENTRAL TO THE initiative is its foundation in scientific research and data-driven strategies. Using the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability, AIM Climate Finance for Water employs a strong scientific framework for targeted water actions at various levels.

BUILDING ON EXISTING efforts, such as the FAO's Water Scarcity Initiative, AIM Climate Finance for Water complements regional strategies and guidelines for designing water-climate resilient projects. By mobilizing public and private sector finance, it upholds the right to water and sanitation for all, even amidst financial constraints.

WITH THE REGION facing a staggering \$1.4 trillion in debt, the initiative emphasizes concessional finance and grants, especially for the six Least Developed Countries receiving only 5% of global climate finance flows. AIM Climate Finance for Water promotes integrated water resources management and transboundary water cooperation, advocating for climate-smart irrigation, investments in non-conventional water resources, and efficient water conservation practices.

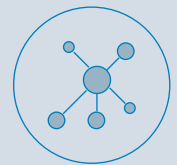
CAPACITY-BUILDING IS a critical component. By enhancing the ability of member states to develop bankable, climate-resilient water projects, the initiative unlocks access to global funds. This involves demonstrating the long-term benefits and cost savings of water projects under various climate scenarios.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IS key. It involves a range of actors in identifying and targeting water projects for climate finance through a collaborative approach. Special focus is placed on multi-country and transboundary basin projects that promote water cooperation under changing climate conditions. With high-level support from the Arab Ministerial Water Council, this initiative stands as a testament to the power of collective action in addressing global challenges.

» unesqwa.org/acccp



IMPROVING DATA FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



APPROXIMATELY 90% OF natural disasters are water-related, with serious consequences on health and mortality. Floods, droughts, and storms cause significant infrastructure loss and damage, adding a substantial financial burden not only at the time of the crisis, but for years thereafter. As climate change intensifies, water-related disasters are expected to increase in frequency and severity, highlighting the urgent need for better information and preparedness.

ACCURATE DATA IS essential for understanding water-related losses and damages, informing risk-reducing measures, and preventing future hazards. In response, the **United Nations Office on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)** is carrying out several key actions:

1 A TRACKING SYSTEM for Water-Related Disasters: UNDRR is establishing a system to track hazardous events, losses, and damages from water-related disasters. This system helps countries benchmark their progress in adaptation and disaster risk reduction, providing crucial insights for early action. The goal is for 100 countries to collect data on water-related losses and damages by 2028.

2 ENHANCING NATIONAL CAPACITIES: UNDRR is strengthening national capacities to collect and report official statistics on water-related disasters using the Sendai Framework Monitor. This should lighten the burden for countries who will use similar metrics across

multiple tracking systems when it comes to disaster-related and resilience-building reporting. All UN Member States are expected to report annually through this monitoring system, generating thematic reports on water-related disasters until 2028.

3 PUBLIC ACCESS TO The Risk Information Exchange (RiX) serves as a publicly accessible portal, providing open-source global, regional, and national risk data. The data provides complementary information about how disaster risks, like extreme heat, are felt at different levels, in addition to understanding national trends. In a first stage, this platform supports 50 countries in their efforts to enhance risk knowledge, literacy, and analytics, offering technical support for risk information and analysis to better understand disaster and climate risks at national levels.

THESE INITIATIVES FROM UNDRR are building a more resilient future in the face of increasing water-related disasters. This concerted effort not only aids in immediate disaster response, but also supports long-term adaptation strategies, ensuring communities are better prepared for the challenges posed by our changing climate. Moving forward, collaboration and data-driven decision-making will safeguard lives, infrastructure, and the environment from the escalating threats of water-related hazards.

» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/better-data-water-related-disasters



GOVERNANCE: UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WASH IN TAJIKISTAN



IN THE HEART of Central Asia, Tajikistan stands at a critical moment to ensure universal access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services. The country's population has surged from 6.2 million to 10 million in just two decades, creating an urgent need to improve water and sanitation infrastructure. While Tajikistan has made significant strides towards achieving the ambitious targets set by Sustainable Development Goals, initial estimates suggest that achieving universal access to safely managed water supply services by 2030 will require an investment of approximately \$800 million, and an additional \$340 million for sanitation. A thorough, strategic framework and prioritized investment plan is essential, targeting densely populated areas that currently lack adequate water supply and wastewater services.

THE ROADMAP TO achieving these goals involves several key steps.

1 A NATIONWIDE SURVEY of water supply and sanitation conditions assesses the most critical needs.

2 USING THE IDENTIFIED needs the country targets robust policies, sector planning, monitoring, and reinforces the role of regulatory bodies, ensuring these functions are separate from service delivery.

3 AN EXTENSIVE INVESTMENT plan acts as a gateway for settlements with safe water sources, dense populations, and viable technical solutions.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF this program will be bolstered by support from the World Bank and other development partners, ensuring that Tajikistan can meet its ambitious goals.

AS TAJIKISTAN CONTINUES this critical journey, the stakes are high. Successfully implementing this strategic framework will not only improve public health outcomes, but also enhance the quality of life for millions of citizens. With coordinated efforts and substantial investments, Tajikistan can achieve universal access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services, setting an example for other nations facing similar challenges.

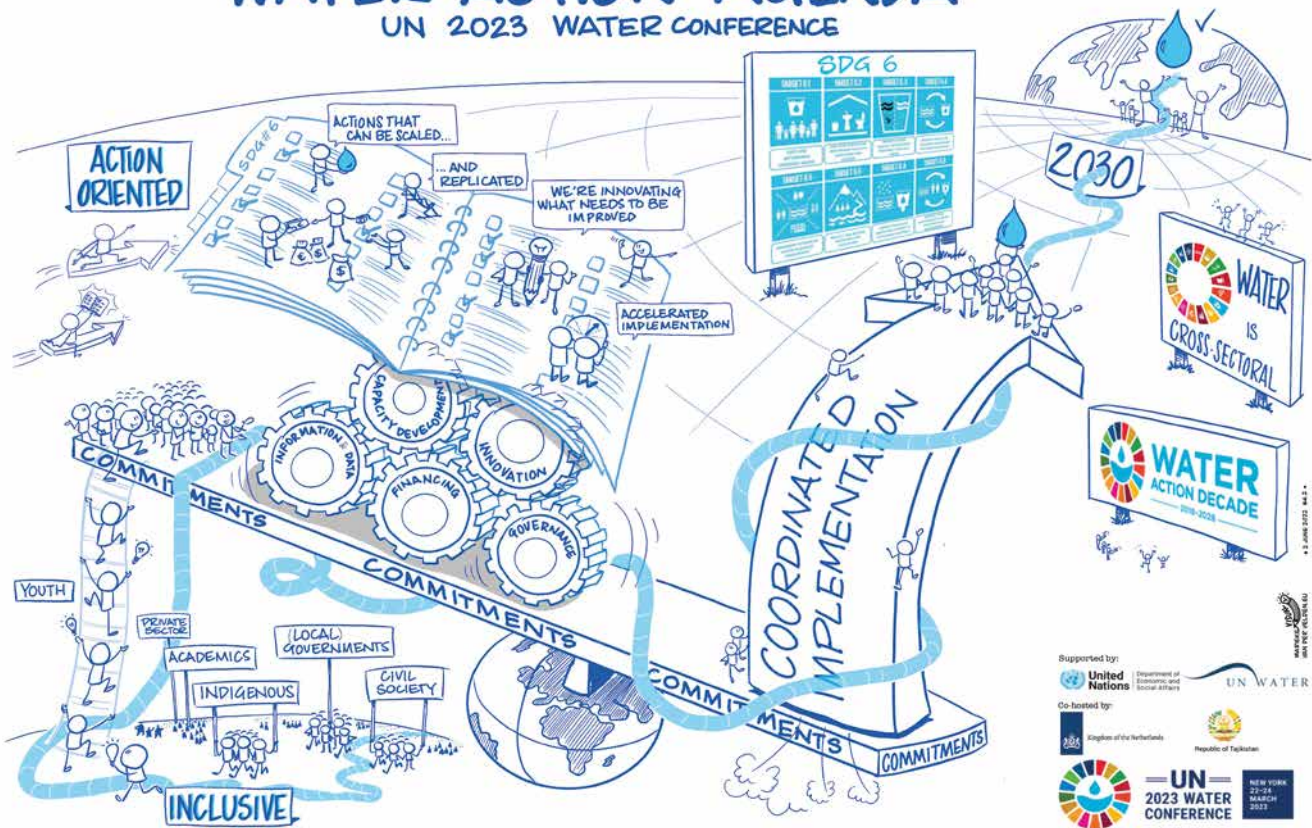
» sdgs.un.org/partnerships/establishing-strategic-framework-achieving-universal-access-safely-managed-drinking



COMMITTING
TO CONTINUED
ACTION

WATER ACTION AGENDA

UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE



Visual by Marieke van der Velden, Eyeopeners.eu

As this publication has shown, the Water Action Agenda is in full swing. New commitments can be continually added, like, for example, the actions collected through the 10th World Water Forum and the 3rd Decade for Action Conference in Dushanbe. Yet, the real challenge lies in turning these commitments into concrete impact. As the next milestone in 2026 approaches, the question remains: How can implementation be increased?

WHAT IS IMPORTANT to remember, however, is that behind these commitments are people. The key to the success of the Water Action Agenda lies in building relationships among commitment holders and forming coalitions that work together and complement each other. Assembling communities around shared actions, sectors, countries, or basins can amplify impact and serve to leverage resources more effectively. Local authorities and philanthropies must be engaged. National-level multi-stakeholder processes must flourish in complementarity with the new UN-system wide strategy on water. The Water Action Agenda is not about either/or. It is about and, and, and...

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL António Guterres emphasized during the UN 2023 Water

Conference, “Now is the moment for game-changing commitments to bring the Water Action Agenda to life.”

TO THAT END, a new sort of water leadership is emerging. During the Water Action Agenda High-Level Panel at the 10th World Water Forum, H.E. Abdulla Balalaa, Assistant Minister for Energy and Sustainability of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented, “There is a need for an urgent, comprehensive and coordinated response from the international community to achieve a water-secure future...We are keen to bring a new perspective and lens...[to] truly move the needle on the water agenda and accelerate the implementation of all global agendas, such as the Water Action Agenda.”



FOR SENEGAL, a recognized leader in water-related political processes for some time already, progress on the international agenda is not only a question of multiplying conferences but of producing outcomes that can be rapidly acted upon. According to the Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal, H.E. Cheikh Tidiane Dieye, “If we don’t implement our commitments, we will not reach the 2030 goals. And populations especially in the Global South will be left behind, while we know that the potential for reaching the SDGs exists.”

HOWEVER, ACTION IS a collective effort. Solid leadership is required from high-level decision-makers, but also from individuals. By assuming shared responsibility and driving momentum forward, everyone can become leaders for change within their own spheres of influence and inspire others to act. Together, we can make a difference.

ACTION SPARKS HOPE.

Scan for
a digital
version.



Produced and edited by the Stockholm International Water Institute on behalf of the Government of the Netherlands.

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Special recognition has to be paid to UN DESA and UN-Water for their invaluable contributions and support in providing a home and oversight for the Water Action Agenda and its commitments. Their leadership and coordination are instrumental in achieving the collective goals for a sustainable and water-secure future. In particular, UN DESA's recent report on "Mapping and Progress of the UN 2023 Water Conference Water Action Agenda" provides valuable insight into the current landscape of the Water Action Agenda commitments, in addition to the challenges, progress achieved, and suggested pathways forward.

