

## UN 2023 Water Conference

Highlights from the conference in year for UN Water Action and Focus

### In This Issue

The UN 2023 Water Conference, 22-24 March, offered a platform to discuss water issues that affect humanity, with the aim to mobilize Member States, the UN system, and stakeholders to take action and bring solutions at a global scale.

The conference included interactive dialogues, plenary meetings and side events and focused on a range of global issues on the future of water, some of which are featured in this Round Up.

### Resources/Links

#### Interactive Dialogue Concept Papers:

1. [Water for Health](#)
2. [Water for Sustainable Development](#)
3. [Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment](#)
4. [Water for Cooperation](#)
5. [Water Action Decade](#)

#### Water Conference Key Documents:

- [UN 2023 Water Conference](#)
- [UN Secretary-General: Water Action Decade \(2018-2028\)](#)
- [UN World Water Development Report](#)
- [SDG 6 Acceleration Snapshots](#)
- [Cooperation Opportunities \(SDG6\)](#)

#### UN Daily Journal: Water Conference Statements & Documents

- [Journal Day 1](#)
- [Journal Day 2](#)
- [Journal Day 3](#)

UN Water SDG 6 [Data Portal](#)

### SDG 6:

#### Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- In 2015, 91% of the global population used an improved drinking water source, up from 76% in 1990. However, 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services, such as toilets or latrines.
- Each day, an average of 5,000 children die due to preventable water and sanitation-related diseases.
- Hydropower is the most important and widely used renewable source of energy and as of 2011, represented 16% of total electricity production worldwide.
- Approximately 70% of all available water is used for irrigation.
- Floods account for 15% of all deaths related to natural disasters.

[SDG Fact Sheet](#) | [SDG 6](#)

#### Namibia highlights progress on [SDG 6](#) and calls for a Special Envoy

- Namibia strives "to ensure equity in access to water and safely managed sanitation, especially for rural agrarian communities".
- The Prime Minister emphasized the need for global coordination and investment in the water sector, including the appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Water: "There is a strong need for the global water community to engage and share technological expertise to accelerate efforts towards meeting water-related SDGs, beyond the UN 2023 Water Conference."
- Namibia commits to **addressing climate change** and improving access to sanitation and hygiene: "The link between access to sanitation

for all and human dignity remains a priority for the Namibian government."

- On **funding**: "At national level, the Namibian government's funding to water for the next five years has been strengthened to address water infrastructure development and rehabilitation of pipelines at the coastal areas."

### **Botswana showcases progress on SDG 6**

- To ensure that every citizen has access to safe and affordable drinking water, "the government of Botswana has prioritized the development of water resources and infrastructure through increasing the development budget for water and sanitation projects".
- 98% of the population has access to potable water; 80% has access to basic sanitation services; 10% has access to shared or improved sanitation facilities
- [Private Public Partnerships model](#): Engage private partner for the operation, management, and maintenance of wastewater infrastructure

### **SafePani: Bangladesh highlights model to secure water for rural regions**

- SafePani is a model of water service that "proposes reforms in institutional design, sustainable finance, and information systems, to advance the Sustainable Development Goal Target 6.1 of universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for households, schools and healthcare facilities in rural Bangladesh".
- This is a "results based contracting model, where the government will blend internal funds with an external donor pool".
- SafePani works not only to secure safe water and ensure access, but also to alleviate the burden on school teachers and officials. The goal is to free them from the responsibilities of fixing infrastructure and getting water to their students, and instead attend to the goal of educating them.

- It also ensures that data on water quality and functionality is reported to the government and steering committee.
- Eight unions in the Khulna District are currently being serviced through this model, 135 primary schools, 35 secondary schools, 33 healthcare centres.
- **Benefitting**: 29,000 students, 900 daily outpatients, 1,500 teaching and healthcare staff, & 10,000 community members.
- **Impacts** (as of January 2023): 96% of repairs and maintenance within 48 hours of reported breakdown, 98% facilities have low risk during sanitary inspection, and 100% of the water systems used are free from E.coli.

### **Uganda notes successes and challenges for the future**

- Notes "progress on access to safe water which stands at 72% in urban areas and 67% in rural areas, compared to the average for the rest of Sub-Saharan African which is at 57%".
- Despite this, "safely managed sanitation services are still very low and stand at 82% (rural areas) and 40.7% (urban areas)".
- **Challenges for the future** are "emerging environmental contaminants such as plastics, trace organic and inorganic contaminants, which are increasingly being detected in the water with potential implication on the health of the population".
- **Financing requirements**: "USD 1.7 billion annually to implement water and environment related programmes to help improve people's social and economic welfare, livelihoods, and incomes."
- Only **25%** of required funds have been mobilized from a varying number of sources.

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**"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new course to sustainably manage and conserve water ... it needs to be at the centre of the political agenda."**

@UN\_Water (via Twitter)

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Plenary Segment- MS Statements

22 March, 2023

[Plurinational State of Bolivia](#)[Republic of Iraq](#)[Madagascar](#)[Republic of Botswana](#)[Republic of Slovenia](#)[State of Libya](#)[Republic of Gambia](#)[Tuvalu \(on behalf of Pacific Small-Island Developing States \(SIDS\)\)](#)[Republic of Namibia](#)[Cuba \(on behalf of Group of 77 and China\)](#)[Viet Nam](#)[Barbados](#)[European Union](#)[Fiji \(on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum\)](#)[Germany](#)[United States](#)[Dominican Republic](#)[China](#)[Bangladesh](#)[Maldives](#)[Honduras](#)[Argentina](#)[United Republic of Tanzania](#)

### **Republic of Zambia, in an effort to diversify its economy, details its Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP)**

- The plan is anchored on “four **strategic development areas**”, namely “economic transformation and job creation”, “human and social development”, “environmental sustainability”, and “good governance environment”
- With regard to “Economic Transformation and Job Creation”, it emphasizes that “**water has been prioritized as an economic enabler** of sectors such as agriculture, energy, tourism, mining and manufacturing among others”.

- Investments in this sector will allow for diversification of economic activities.
- Wholesale and Retail Trade, Mining, & Quarrying and Construction account for roughly 50% of the country’s GDP.
- Zambia launched a USD 5.75 billion water investment programme that is expected to directly impact 200,000 Zambians through formal job creation and economic empowerment through water investment.
- Overall, 8NDP is a “medium-term blueprint designed to unlock the country’s potential in all sectors of the economy for sustainable, holistic and inclusive national development”.

**People with disabilities face barriers that prevent them from realizing basic human rights such as access to clean and safe drinking water. These barriers and the many rights they interfere with make disability inclusion a human right. According to 2023 estimates, of the 15% of the global population of people with disabilities in DRC, 4.8 million are in humanitarian need in the DRC and 1.8 million are targeted for an inclusive humanitarian response for this year 2023.**

[Congo Handicap \(Interactive Dialogue 1: Water for Health\)](#)

### **FAO, UNICEF and OHCHR emphasize the importance of national leadership and inclusive water governance**

- FAO member states are **committed** to a new concept of water tenure, which has never existed, in order to improve water governance and household access.
- UNICEF explains that national water roadmaps would assist in **multilateralism** and **national governance** of water. Over 20 member states have committed to these roadmaps, led by Africa.
- OHCHR calls for “the development of human rights indicators allowing for a better evaluation of progress in an integrated matter.”

## At “Economics of Water” Briefing (7 February 2023), panelists recommend using water as a means of peacebuilding

- “Water can exacerbate tensions, but can also create a pathway for dialogue and **peacebuilding**.”
- In most international water agreements, there is not a reference to science. Changes in international law could help to transform communication between countries.

## Panama understands the effectiveness of international cooperation in managing transboundary waters

- Panama affirms that **scientific evidence** is key in carrying out public policies.
- Trusts that the **voluntary commitments** offered by member states who chose to be a part of the United Nations Water Convention are “complied with in a timely manner”.
- **International Cooperation** is “an effective tool to concretize these projects and to decentralize water management so that the authorities, local and community leaders, have the financial resources and skills to properly manage the resource”.
- “We must be a part of the custody of our **environmental and cultural heritage** to preserve the lives and progress of our groups most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.”

## Nigeria and Iraq become the newest countries to join the Water Convention

- Iraq is the first country in the Middle East to join the convention.
- The Water Convention underlines **transboundary water cooperation**.
- By joining this convention, countries can become more attractive for investment.

## Water as a Living Being International Indian Treaty Council

“Much of the dialogue around this Conference refers to water as a target, a ‘dealmaker for the health and prosperity of people and the planet’. A resource to manage, own or, best case, cherish and protect, but still something outside of ourselves. I remind all of us in this room, and all those listening around the world, that we are all mainly made of water. Water was our first home in our mother’s wombs. In our Yaqui creation story, we came out of the water. Some of us stayed to live on land, and some of us, our close relatives the dolphins and the whales, returned to the water. They are also watching to see what we decide here so that they can survive.

As we gather this week in New York City to make commitments for the protection of water, we are also committing to defend the lives of our children, grandchildren and each and every living thing on this planet that we depend on and love. For Indigenous Peoples, water is not only the sacred source of life. It is itself a living being with its own spirit and power.

[Article 25 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 as a minimum standard and living commitment by States, affirms that “Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

For Indigenous Peoples to fulfill these sacred responsibilities, our rights must be respected and implemented, including to our lands and territories, cultural heritage, self-determination, participation in decision-making and free prior and informed consent. We are both willing and obligated to participate in actions on all levels to protect and maintain the integrity and health of water in all its forms based on our millennial knowledge and practices. Real solutions require full and effective participation of diverse stakeholders and rights holders including Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples commit to actively engage, coordinate and plan with national, regional and local governments as well as UN bodies, based on their full recognition of our rights and respect for the value of our contributions, in order to produce positive results for the protection of water, and promote solutions that benefit our future generations, the natural world and all humanity.

Vaa'am itom jiapsi, Mní wičhóni, Water is Life.”

[Interactive Dialogue 1 \(Water for Health\)](#)

## Germany emphasizes the importance of water in protecting human rights and the cross-border nature of its impacts

- “Access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation are human rights. Just like the right to food and to a clean and healthy environment. It is our joint obligation to enforce these rights for everyone.”
- Germany also highlighted how water supply improvement can also reduce gender inequality, reiterating its commitment to gender equality in international cooperation.
- Water does not stop at national borders: “Water is at the heart of the three major environmental crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.... To date, global implementation of SDG 6 has been too slow, too fragmented and poorly coordinated.... This is why it is crucial to foster intergovernmental agreements on transboundary water management.”
- Germany supports the following initiatives for achieving SDG 6:
  - **Innovative financing approaches** in addition to public funding; leverage public and private funding, such as the Urban Water Catalyst Fund
  - **Bonn Water Dialogues**: concrete recommendations in a cross-regional, inclusive process
  - **Regular UN conferences on water**, at the highest level to drive joint solutions forward
  - Better **donor and UN coordination**: to ensure best possible support for Member States, the United Nations must take a more efficient and coherent system-wide approach on water
  - **UN Special Envoy for Water** has the support of 150 delegations; Germany is willing to contribute financially to this as well

## France speaks on the need for Multilateral Cooperation and Efficient Water Management

- Water scarcity is a significant challenge with severe consequences for humanity: "Already more than half of the world's population is facing

severe water scarcity for at least one month each year."

- "We must act to optimize our management, both nationally and in the territories, in every watershed, to be more efficient in all our uses, to facilitate the reuse of wastewater, and to avoid waste."
- France feels that a **stronger multilateral approach** is needed to address the systemic and global challenges of water management and access: "At the global level, we want to put the issue of water back at the heart of multilateralism, benefiting from a shared vision and effective coordination."
- France notes that “we’ve fallen too far behind in our 2030 Agenda in achieving SDG 6, and this could affect our ability to achieve all the other SDGs sustainably”.
- **Integrated water resources management** and cooperation at the watershed level are essential for sustainable water management. France is “committed to supporting the development of transboundary basin organizations, particularly in Africa, and to continuing our support for the **United Nations Convention on Water**, which provides a legal and institutional framework, as well as valuable tools for establishing cooperation”.

**“A society can only achieve high rates of public health, gender equity, educational attainment, and economic productivity when all of its members enjoy their rights to water and sanitation.”**

@UN\_Water (via Twitter)

## UNDDR: natural disasters and their impacts

- Water is central to “achieving the goal of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction of reducing global disaster losses”.
- “**The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030** outlines seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent

new and reduce existing disaster risks: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to 'Build Back Better' in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction."

- The framework was formed with a goal to substantially reduce disaster risks and loss of lives, as well as improve the "economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of persons, business, communities and countries".
- **Water connects 90% of disasters around the world**, "and with climate change, it is becoming increasingly difficult for communities to manage the disaster risks associated with water".
- "The UN Economic Commission for Africa reports that African countries are spending between 2% and 9% of their budgets to respond to extreme weather events."
- UNDDR commits to address three distinct areas:
  1. Help countries understand their risks: Strengthen the availability and access to data on water-related disasters
  2. Enhance infrastructure resilience: Damage during disasters is a major contributor to disaster economic losses
  3. Act on the trust placed in them by the UN Secretary-General to "co-lead with WMO the implementation of his **Early Warnings for All Initiative**"

### **The United Republic of Tanzania calls on world leaders to action**

- "Increase investment in water resources management, **governance and development** as a paramount element to achieve security";
- "Consider water as a driver and enabler of human development";
- "Assess the value and contribution of water in global, regional and national economies";
- "Invest in human capital and build institutional capacity to **improve water governance**";

- "Ensure joint efforts are in place to manage shared challenges such as impacts of climate change which lead to increasing frequencies of drought and floods"; and
- "Consider water as a substantive agenda in meetings and conferences on economic forums as well as the United Nations."
- "Recognize that all investment in water in achieving SDG 6 has a direct positive impact on gender equality and economic empowerment of women and girls."

### **Interactive Dialogue 3**

**Theme: Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and DRR**

**Event Description:** The world is not on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 – water and sanitation for all and related goals and targets by 2030. Water provides social, cultural, environmental, economic and political values. It connects and supports terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems through the hydrological cycle. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the inextricable linkages between water and the three pillars of sustainable development, as well as the need to build resilience, in particular in communities most at risk. These links are crosscutting and underpin the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals.

[Interactive Dialogue 3: Meeting Video](#)

### **Kazakhstan warns of history repeating, citing history of the Aral Sea**

- "We experienced the tragedy of the Aral Sea. Once the fourth biggest Sea, is now no more there. People were forced to leave their houses.

"With the efforts that we are consistently taking, the Sea returned, and so did people who see their future at the shore of the Aral Sea.

“We should ensure that water is used and managed in an integrated and sustainable way to achieve environmental, social and economic objectives. And this task becomes even more pressing with climate change.”

- Kazakhstan is confident that “the **Water Decade Action Plan** is one of the tools to accelerate the achievement of our common goals in water resources.”
- Delegates should “unite in our common aspiration to protect and preserve water resources and water-related ecosystems for the good of people and the planet”.

### **Water technology and data are important for countries to secure water allocation for sustainable food production**

- Sudan is partnering on the use of **satellite** applications that inform how much a farmer should irrigate via text messages. Studies showed importance of knowing when to irrigate rather than how much. Wheat yield increased 67%, and water saved in irrigation was 33% to 55% per season.
- In Somalia, remote sensing was reliant in accessing difficult areas to access and increasing more reliable processing methods and tools.
- Remote sensing can help with communication in understanding irrigation techniques between Ethiopia and Somalia.
- In the Sahel region, acquiring real-time data is difficult because of the lack of internet connection.
- 90% of irrigation is in small farms of Kenya calculated through remote sensing; remote irrigation potential goes from 1.9 million acres to 6.6 million acres with remote sensing.

**“We can come together to unlock #water in #HornOfAfrica & this will end the suffering of millions & open a world of new opportunities toward #ARegeneration.**

**This is why we are calling for the creation of a Groundwater Access Facility in the region.**

**#UNWaterConference #WaterAction”**

[@ahunnaeziakonwa](#) (via Twitter)

### **Water Action Agenda**

“We need clear commitments, pledges and actions, across all our sectors, industries and interests, uniting nations, stakeholders and professionals on actions that help deliver on the water actions in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, actions that can be scaled and replicated in the years to come. Such commitments will be compiled in the Water Action Agenda, another key outcome of the Conference. The emphasis should be on accelerated implementation and improved impact towards achieving SDG 6 and other water-related goals and targets, looking at content, process and structure. The existing and future challenges in the field of water require innovative and transformative ideas and a ‘beyond business as usual’ approach.”

[Water Action Agenda Homepage](#)

**“Closing of the UN 2023 Water Conference kicks off with summaries of the five interactive dialogues.**

**The dialogues got to the heart not only of what water is, but what it can be: a driver of equality, a solution to the climate crisis, a facilitator of peace, and much, much more.”**

- @SustDev (via Twitter)

## Snapshot of Commitments

### Closing Press Release, UN 2023 Water Conference

#### 1. Member State Action

- a. USA commits up to USD 49 billion in investments to support climate resilient water and sanitation infrastructure and services.
- b. Japan will proactively contribute to the solution of water-related social issues faced by the Asia-Pacific region by developing “quality Infrastructure”, providing financial assistance worth approximately 500 billion yen (USD 3.65 billion) over the next five years.
- c. Vietnam pledges to develop policies for major river basins management by 2025 and to ensure all households would have access to clean running water by 2030.
- d. Switzerland, as co-chair of the Interactive Dialogue on Water for Cooperation, submits 5 commitments to contribute to the UN's work, including in the areas of the Water Convention and transboundary cooperation.
- e. The Niger Basin Authority (NBA) and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) jointly commit to USD 21.2 million in funding for a project that strengthens the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) and its member countries.
- f. Mozambique commits to taking all necessary steps to accelerate achievement of SDG 6 by 2030 with investments of USD 9.5 billion.
- g. The African Union Commission commits to close Africa's water investments gap by mobilizing at least USD 30 billion/year by 2030 through a range of initiatives, including the International High-Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa.
- h. The EU commits to support the access of 70 million individuals to an improved drinking water source and/or sanitation facility by 2030. Promises €20 million funding to accelerate the deployment of wastewater surveillance for COVID-19.
- i. More than 50 leading global companies unite to make a collective commitment to SDG 6.

#### 2. Multilateral Banks

- a. The Asian Development Bank commits to investing USD 11 billion in the water sector in the Asia-Pacific Region and USD 100 billion to the water sector globally by 2030.

#### 3. Private Sector

- a. Starbucks, Ecolab, Gap Inc., Reckitt and DuPont joined forces with the USA to invest nearly USD 140 million in Water Access Fund in order to give 5 million people access to water, sanitation and hygiene.
- b. DANONE launches a water acceleration blending fund to give daily safe water access to 30 million people in need.
- c. Xylem and 16 other companies commit USD 11 billion in Research and Development.
- d. World Benchmarking Alliance pledges to assess 1,000 global companies across 22 industries on their impact towards achieving water-related goals every two years to help close the corporate accountability gap.

#### 4. NGOs

- a. World Vision commits to raising and investing USD 2 billion by 2030 to extend the impact of transformative water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services work across 50 countries in six regions.