

# UN-Water Annual Report 2023



UN-Water, 2024

Cover: A view of a Water Action sign at UN Headquarters during the UN 2023 Water Conference. UN Photo/Mark Garten

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# About UN-Water

UN-Water coordinates the work of the United Nations (UN) on water and sanitation. It was formally established in 2003, building on a long history of collaboration within the UN. UN-Water comprises the UN bodies that have a focus on, or interest in, water-related issues as Members and other international organizations as Partners.

The main purpose of UN-Water is to complement and add value to existing programmes and projects by facilitating synergies and joint efforts in order to maximize 'UN family'-wide coordinated action and coherence and to reduce overlapping and duplication. In so doing, UN-Water seeks to increase the effectiveness of support provided to Member States in their efforts towards achieving international agreements on water. This is done along the following three main lines of work:

- > Informing policy processes and addressing emerging issues;
- > Supporting monitoring and reporting on water and sanitation; and
- > Building knowledge and inspiring people to take action.

At the end of 2023, UN-Water had 35 Members and 48 Partners.

[www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)

# Chair's message



In a tumultuous year, the pivotal moment for the UN-Water family was the UN 2023 Water Conference in March – the first of its kind in a generation.

Shortly after, and in response to the high expectations set by Member States, UN-Water released the milestone Blueprint for Acceleration: SDG 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation 2023 in July. This report contains key policy recommendations on how to move forward and work better together to protect humanity's most precious commodity.

The 'blueprint' identifies two crucial needs: for Member States to develop a UN political process for water and for the UN system to better unify its water-related efforts to support Member States.

On the first, in September 2023, Member States at the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that, among other things, established two UN water conferences – one in 2026 and one in 2028. The second conference will also mark the end of the Water Action Decade and represents our last chance to push for achievement of SDG 6.

On the second, the resolution also requested the UN Secretary-General present a United Nations System-wide Water and Sanitation Strategy in consultation with Member States before the end of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General looked to UN-Water, under my leadership, to deliver this and it will be presented in July 2024.

The Strategy is the first attempt to cohere all the UN system's work on water. It aims to provide Member States with more integrated support so they can achieve faster progress on water and sanitation. This is a prerequisite to solving major global challenges including climate change, food insecurity, health crises and gender inequality.

Our progress will also depend on good data. Last year, UN-Water's Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 entered its third phase, successfully completing the 2023 'Data Drive' to gather more and better data and set priorities for increased efforts and investments to ensure no one is left behind.

UN-Water also published the next three SDG 6 Country Acceleration Case Studies –this time from Brazil, Ghana and Singapore – sharing vital experiences and detailing best practice.

To inspire transformative change, we need to speak to people's hearts as well as their minds. This is why the campaigns for World Water Day and World Toilet Day used the ancient story of the hummingbird who carries drops of water in her beak to help put out a great fire.

This lighter side of our work contained an important lesson: be the change you want to see in the world. The campaign had over 10 billion in reach on social media and inspired tens of thousands of children throughout the year to take action in their daily lives.

Let us all be guided by their example in the year ahead.

**Alvaro Lario**

President of the International Fund for  
Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Chair of UN-Water



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# **Highlighted achievements and lessons learned in 2023**



“The Water Summit in March must result in a bold Water Action Agenda that gives our world’s lifeblood the commitment it deserves.”

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE

#WaterAction

Outreach for the UN 2023 Water Conference.

## Spotlight

The UN 2023 Water Conference provided Member States, the UN system and stakeholders with an opportunity to gather and discuss the issues facing global freshwater resources and the hydrological cycle under the auspices of the UN. It was the first such event since 1977, when the first-ever UN Water Conference took place in Mar del Plata, Argentina. The UN 2023 Water Conference took place from 22 to 24 March in New York, resulting in the Water Action Agenda, a platform collecting voluntary commitments from the international community to solve the global water crisis and achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6. The Conference also generated a Summary of Proceedings where game-changing solutions to water-related challenges were presented, produced by the President of the General Assembly of the 77<sup>th</sup> session.

In September, the UN General Assembly passed resolution A/RES/77/334 ‘Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028’. It mandated a UN Conference on water in 2026 as well as the United Nations Conference on the

Final Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, to be held in 2028.

## Highlighted achievements

### UN-WATER’S SUPPORT TO THE UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

The UN-Water family played a central role in the preparatory process of the UN 2023 Water Conference, underpinning substantive content for the five Interactive Dialogues of the Conference and providing support to 21 UN Country Teams. UN-Water Members and Partners contributed to the Water Action Agenda in the form of voluntary commitments and hosted a multitude of side events at the UN 2023 Water Conference, interlinking SDG 6 to the entire 2030 Agenda.

As a strategic response to the Conference, UN-Water launched the *Blueprint for Acceleration: Sustainable Development Goal 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation 2023* (2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report). The report presented key recommendations for the entire

water community on how to accelerate progress on SDG 6 – including for the UN system. For example, the hosting of regular intergovernmental conferences on water and a dedicated UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation were put forward as ways to meet the ambitions of the UN 2023 Water Conference. These two recommendations were discussed in the General Assembly and mandated through resolution A/RES/77/334.

## IMI-SDG6 ENTERING ITS THIRD PHASE

During 2023, the first year of its third phase, the primary focus of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 (IMI-SDG6) was the successful data collection of the 2023 Data Drive. The UN custodian agencies implemented the 2023 Data Drive, refined their monitoring methodologies, guidance materials, and capacity building support tools accordingly, while several agencies developed new tools to increase the feasibility and usefulness of their indicators.

The SDG 6 Data Portal was also translated to offer its content in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, French and Spanish to cover all official UN languages. Finally, every IMI indicator team provided data and analysis for the UN 2023 Water Conference, including the Concept Notes for the Interactive Dialogues and 16 SDG 6 Acceleration Snapshots, as well as the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report. In addition to this, the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) published regional snapshots for WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in households for all major regional groupings and produced a snapshot of progress on sanitation and hygiene in Africa for AfricaSan.

## THE YEAR OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

2023 was a pivotal year for water action, inspiring communities worldwide. Drawing inspiration from the Peruvian folktale which tells the story of a hummingbird putting out a raging fire, using its beak to carry a drop of water at a time, the 2023 World Water Day campaign was able to showcase an inspiring display of global solidarity led by thousands of pupils worldwide. Children from



Origami hummingbirds from the World Water Day campaign displayed at the UN 2023 Water Conference, at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

21 countries, including Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Japan, and Spain, contributed to the creation of 8,000 origami hummingbirds—a poignant display of the campaign’s official symbol—and inscribed them with heartfelt pledges to tackle the water and sanitation crisis. Promises included personal actions such as decreasing wasteful water use in their households and educating others on the value of water. Distributed to participants at the UN 2023 Water Conference, the creations aimed to bridge the gap between decision-makers and younger generations, highlighting the central role of children in shaping global agendas and reaffirming the transformative potential of public engagement in driving change.

## **Lessons learned**

In 2023, the international community showed unprecedented political will towards addressing global water challenges, demonstrating the importance of a continued political process targeting freshwater-related issues. Through a set of concrete recommendations that were put forward in the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report, UN-Water was able to move the needle on water action and start implementing some of the changes needed for the UN system to accelerate progress on SDG 6 following the UN 2023 Water Conference.



# **Informing policy processes and addressing emerging issues**



Closing of United Nations 2023 Water Conference. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

## UN 2023 Water Conference

2023 was a pivotal year for global water policy with the historic convening of the UN 2023 Water Conference. The Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands co-hosted the Conference and their joint vision statement reflected a shared commitment to an inclusive, action-oriented and cross-sectoral event. Spanning three days, the Conference yielded the Water Action Agenda, political commitment to and visibility of water within and beyond the UN system, as well as support for establishing a UN Special Envoy for Water. By the close of the meeting, the Water Action Agenda had gathered approximately 700 commitments from UN-Water Members, Partners, governments and other stakeholders in the form of financial pledges, collaborative projects, and actions to protect the world's most precious resource. The President of the General Assembly shared a Summary of Proceedings which laid out ways to change the game on water-related challenges.

Delivering closing remarks, UN-Water Chair (2017-2023) Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo stressed the need for unprecedented collaboration, the fundamental role of human rights and the important role that all stakeholders play in ensuring that the Conference will be considered a success. He pledged the continued engagement of the UN-Water family in the follow-up to the Conference and the implementation of the Water Action Agenda.

**“This week, we have demonstrated that the United Nations can bring water from ‘everywhere and from nowhere’ and bring it to one place where we can all debate, we can all reach consensus, and we can all decide on action, report on progress and learn from each other. As a result, water can flow into all other relevant intergovernmental processes. Because water is and shall remain everyone’s business. Now is our moment of concluding this Conference successfully. Tomorrow, we have to work harder to deliver on the voluntary commitments.”**

Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo, Director-General of ILO and the Chair of UN-Water (2017-2023)

## THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESS

The UN 2023 Water Conference was mandated by the 2018 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/226, where the decision to convene the 2023 Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (2018-2028) was agreed. Two years later, Member States negotiated the conference modalities in resolution A/RES/75/212 which conferred several mandates to UN-Water. After the conclusion of the Conference, Member States adopted resolution A/RES/77/334 'Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028'.

This resolution serves as a blueprint for furthering the implementation of water-related objectives outlined in the International Decade for Action and mandated two follow-up UN conferences on water in 2026 and 2028. It also mandated the Secretary-General to present a UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation in consultation with Member States. The Secretary-General asked UN-Water, under the leadership of the new Chair Mr. Alvaro Lario, to assist him in responding to this request. The Strategy will be presented during the 78<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly.

## FINANCE FOCUS IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE

The ninth meeting of the Roundtable on Financing Water laid the groundwork for an informed discussion on water financing, playing a key role in the lead-up to the UN 2023 Water Conference. Hosted by the OECD secretariat and UN-Water (7 – 9 February 2023), it brought together the finance and water communities to discuss how to anchor equity in water economics and define the hydrological cycle as a global common good. The Roundtable explored topics such as the economics of valuing and financing the hydrological cycle, moving the financial sector towards sustainable water practices and the role of public finance.

## UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE: FACTS AND FIGURES

The UN 2023 Water Conference took place 22 – 24 March at the UN Headquarters in New York with over 10,000 attendees participating in the three-day event. Among these, 6,700 registered as stakeholders, underlining the widespread engagement and commitment to addressing the global water crisis. Hundreds of side events were organized both within and outside the Conference venue, as well as during New York Water Week. Among the

**ROUNDTABLE**  
on Financing Water

United Nations | UN WATER

“Don’t bring concepts to the UN 2023 Water Conference. Please, develop action plans that will usher in a new era of sustainable development and climate resilience to maintain a safe space for humanity.”

**Csaba Körösi,**  
President of the 77<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly

OECD  
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

Ministry of Infrastructure  
and Water Management

WORLD  
WATER  
COUNCIL

THE WORLD BANK  
IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP

Outreach for the 9th meeting of the Roundtable on Financing Water.

registered participants to the UN 2023 Water Conference were 8 Heads of State, 3 Vice-Presidents, 3 Heads of Government, 6 Deputy Prime Ministers, some 120 ministers and 17 heads of international governmental organizations and specialized agencies. 13 heads of agencies had key roles in the discussions of the Interactive Dialogues, acting as moderators, panellists and lead discussants.

## INPUT AND SUPPORT FROM UN-WATER

The UN 2023 Water Conference mobilized the UN-Water Members and Partners around a historic opportunity to elevate the importance of water-related challenges not only among the global community, but also within the UN system. As a coordinating mechanism, and given that there is not a single UN entity dedicated to water, UN-Water played a catalytic role in accessing the expertise and knowledge needed to inform and support the substantive foundation of the Conference.

35 UN-Water Members and 40 Partners organized official side events at the UN 2023 Water Conference, bringing their expertise and innovative solutions to addressing the global water crisis. For example, UN-Water Members and Partners IAEA, IGRAC, IHE Delft, UNESCO, UNEP, WMO and World Bank Group launched, together with the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, the Global Water Analysis Laboratory (GloWAL) – a network aimed at empowering Member States to generate their own chemical, biological and isotopic water data. GCF, UNFCCC and WMO co-hosted an event which highlighted collaborative efforts for action in the water-climate nexus. UNDRR co-organized an official side event together with GCF, IISD, and UNIDO as well as the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Global Center on Adaptation. The event focused on concrete actions to improve water infrastructure resilience and the interlinkages between water and the energy and transport sectors. In addition, UN-Water hosted a public consultation on the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report, where preliminary findings were shared with stakeholders present at the UN 2023 Water Conference.

## FIVE INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

The Interactive Dialogues served as the substantive core of the Conference and provided a rare opportunity for Member States to discuss water issues in an

intergovernmental space together with the UN system and stakeholders.

The five mandated thematic Interactive Dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference were: Water for Health; Water for Sustainable Development; Water for Climate, Resilience, and Environment; Water for Cooperation; and the Water Action Decade. The UN Secretariat was mandated to prepare a Concept Paper for each dialogue, to set out the challenges, current status, interlinkages, opportunities for progress, transformative solutions and recommendations related to the theme. The Secretariat delegated the production of these to UN-Water, who collaborated on the production process through five Informal Preparatory Working Groups (IPWGs). The co-conveners and members of the IPWGs were selected based on the mandates of their entities and organizations. This approach ensured the UN system could deliver substantive input to the UN 2023 Water Conference with contributions from UN-Water Partners.

### Co-convenors of the Informal Preparatory Working Groups

**Water for Health** – UNICEF and WHO. Issues included WASH investment needs, rural and urban challenges, partnerships particularly with the private sector, and vulnerable people including migrants.

**Water for Sustainable Development** – UNDP, FAO and the World Bank Group. Issues included climate change and the increasing damage to water-relevant infrastructure, challenges to transforming to a low-carbon economy, more effective global cooperation and water's central role for food systems.

**Water for Climate, Resilience, and Environment** – UNDRR, UNEP and WMO. Issues included the synergies among biodiversity loss, climate change, water management and land degradation, technology transfer and ecosystem restoration.

**Water for Cooperation** – UNECE and UNESCO. Issues included legal frameworks for regional transboundary cooperation, national integrated water resource management policies, and

environmental benefits conferred by robust transboundary cooperation.

**The Water Action Decade** – UN DESA and UNU.

Issues included a call to share water data, the need for multi-stakeholder approaches to advance local solutions and a call to appoint a UN special envoy on water.

Action Agenda and the Summary of Proceedings by the President of the General Assembly. Building on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, the report identified obstacles blocking progress on SDG 6 and presented a ‘blueprint’ for accelerating based on the framework’s five accelerators (finance, data and information, capacity development, innovation and governance). Key recommendations for the UN system to meet the ambition of the UN 2023 Water Conference were also put forth, garnering significant political attention in the UN.

UN-Water hosted a briefing on the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report for Permanent Representatives, and an expert-level workshop together with the Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN in June 2023. The Report was launched at the SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event during the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF).

## Follow-up to the UN 2023 Water Conference

### 2023 SDG 6 SYNTHESIS REPORT

The 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report was produced by UN-Water as a strategic response to the outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference, including the Water

#### “Key recommendations – The United Nations system we need” presented in the Blueprint for Acceleration: Sustainable Development Goal 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation 2023

- **Water mainstreamed in all relevant intergovernmental processes.** UN leadership, UN entities and Member States can play a fundamental role in integrating water into the agendas of global and regional efforts on climate change, health, biodiversity, food, energy and disaster risk reduction, among others.
- **Regular intergovernmental meetings and conferences.** These can ensure progress is measured and momentum maintained at the top of the global political agenda.
- **UN leadership convened at the highest level.** UN executive heads can help accelerate progress on SDG 6 and drive the Water Action Agenda through regular dialogue and decision-making.
- **A more effective country-level coordination interface.** The interaction between UN entities working on water and the UN development system, through the resident coordinator system, can be enhanced to bolster and upscale country-level SDG 6 acceleration.
- **A dedicated UN system-wide water and sanitation strategy.** The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework can be elevated and transformed into a UN system-wide strategy to operationalize inter-agency coordination for SDG 6 acceleration.
- **Strengthened UN agency water and sanitation programmes.** The upscaling of current programmes and developing new ones to address gaps and respond to emerging needs can augment UN system capacity to deliver on SDG 6 implementation.
- **A UN coordination office to enhance the UN-Water inter-agency mandate.** The addition of a coordination office to UN-Water resources can strengthen the UN system’s capacity to deliver results. Such a coordination office would serve the UN-Water inter-agency mechanism.



## **SDG 6 UNDER REVIEW AT THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The overarching theme of the 2023 HLPF was 'Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels'. The 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report was one of the official documents for the dedicated SDG 6 review titled 'SDGs in focus: SDG 6 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Clean water and sanitation'. The SDG 6 review was organized by UN DESA and provided an opportunity for Member States, UN system and stakeholders to focus on next steps after the UN 2023 Water Conference.

The Lead Writer of the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report was invited to present recommendations stemming from the Report, joined by UN-Water Member UNESCWA who provided a regional perspective on implementation. The interactive panel discussion that followed was moderated by the UN-Water Vice-Chair and included UN-Water Member the World Bank Group and UN-Water Partner the Stockholm International Water Institute.

## **SDG 6 WATER ACTION AGENDA SPECIAL EVENT**

During the HLPF, UN-Water organized the SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event, a full-day in-person gathering on 17 July that was broadcast on UN WebTV. The event provided another opportunity to follow up on the UN 2023 Water Conference and focused on the Water Action Agenda and its commitment holders. Discussions were organized according to the five accelerators of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, with one segment allocated to each one. UN-Water Members moderated the sessions with FAO chairing the session on governance, IOM on innovation, UNICEF on data and information, UNESCO on capacity development and the World Bank Group on finance.

The SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event also featured a high-level segment which showcased the vision for the follow-up to the Conference. Mr. Gilbert F. Houngbo, the Chair of UN-Water (2017-2023), and H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, the President of the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, shared their ideas on next steps for achieving SDG 6. The co-hosts of the UN 2023 Water Conference discussed the implementation of commitments made at the Conference and were represented by H.E. Mr. Zavqizoda Zavqi Amin, Minister



View of the audience during the SDG 6 review of the 2024 HLPF.

of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan, and Mr. Steven Collet, Deputy Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Youth played a pivotal role in the programme, with the first segment dedicated to a discussion on the role of youth in the Water Action Agenda and multilateral discussions on water. UN-Water Partner the World Youth Parliament for Water co-coordinated the segment, with both UNESCO and UN Women providing input to the intergenerational discussion. Throughout the day, youth representatives were also invited to share feedback at the end of each segment, providing valuable input from the youth perspective.

## **UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION A/RES/77/334**

In September 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/77/334 'Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028'. Throughout the negotiation process, UN-Water played an active role by providing essential information requested by Member States.

The resolution outlined various mandates, including the directive for a UN Conference on water to be held in 2026, as well as the 2028 UN Conference on the Final Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade. It also called for the formulation of a comprehensive UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation, one of the key recommendations of the 2023 SDG 6 Synthesis Report.

## **UN SYSTEM-WIDE STRATEGY FOR WATER AND SANITATION**

The operative paragraph of UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/77/334 which mandates the production of the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation reads as follows:

*"Requests the Secretary-General to present a United Nations system-wide water and sanitation strategy in consultation with Member States before the end of*

*the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, in order to enhance the coordination and delivery of water priorities across the United Nations system, and in this context to place particular emphasis on the water-related needs of the developing countries, including those related to finance, technology transfer and capacity-building, and also requests the Secretary-General to provide adequate support, within existing resources, to the United Nations system-wide water and sanitation strategy."*

UN-Water was asked to assist the Secretary-General in responding to this request under the leadership of the new Chair Mr. Alvaro Lario. The Strategy development process commenced in September 2023, with a first technical consultation for UN-Water Members held virtually in November 2023. Entities representing 22 UN-Water Members attended the first consultation, providing essential input to the Strategy development. An informal Member States Technical Briefing was held at UN Headquarters in New York on 19 December 2023. Both consultations gathered feedback on the theory of change and timeline of the Strategy, which were presented by the Lead Writer. A zero draft was shared with Member States as well as UN-Water Members and Partners on 22 December 2023.

The UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation takes inspiration from existing UN system-wide strategies, such as those on youth and disability. Its aim is to fully operationalize inter-agency coordination, capitalize on reforms of the UN development system, and leverage upscaled water and sanitation action of UN entities to provide more strategic, effective, coherent, and efficient support to Member States. The launch is planned to take place during the 2024 HLPF.

## **SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework**

### **COLLECTIVE EFFORTS FOR ACCELERATING SDG 6**

The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework has become firmly rooted in policy discussions on water with numerous UN documents utilizing the Framework in 2023, including the supporting background documentation for the review of SDG 6 at the regional



Farai Tunhuma, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), speaking at the 38th UN-Water Meeting. IISD photo.

forums of ESCWA, ECA, ESCAP and ECLAC. Another example includes the 'Roadmap for the Integration of Human Rights to Water and Sanitation', which utilizes the Framework in identifying four action pillars.

## **TASK FORCE ON INNOVATION**

At the 38<sup>th</sup> UN-Water Meeting, the UN-Water Senior Programme Managers decided to set up the Task Force on Innovation, marking an important step in activating the innovation accelerator of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. The Task Force had its first meeting in October 2023 where the four co-coordinators were selected: GWP, Toilet Board Coalition, UNDP and the Water Environment Federation. Since then, the Task Force has been crafting a set of concrete recommendations to propel the accelerator forward.

## **COUNTRY LEVEL ENGAGEMENT**

UN-Water's country level work is carried out by the Task Force on Country Level Engagement, co-coordinated by FAO, UNDP and UNICEF. The Task Force works to reinforce Resident Coordinators' (RCs) and UN Country Teams' (UNCTs) inter-agency efforts on water-related issues and support coordination efforts among UN-Water-related country level initiatives.

Ahead of the UN 2023 Water Conference, the Task Force organized a clinic for UN Resident Coordinators together with DCO in January 2023. 21 RCs and UNCTs participated (Mauritania, Mauritius, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa, Vietnam, Colombia, Ecuador, Tanzania, Nigeria, Burundi, Comoros, Iraq, Djibouti, Bolivia, Zambia, Honduras, Serbia, Egypt, Pakistan, Senegal, and Costa Rica). At the UN 2023 Water Conference, the Task Force co-organized a side event with five Member States that focused on national leadership for inclusive water governance.

In August 2023, the Task Force was further mandated to develop a standard engagement model for countries at the 38<sup>th</sup> UN-Water Meeting. The model will build on the UN reform and the RC system and consider the differing roles of resident agencies, non-resident agencies, regional level work and UN-Water Partners that are active at the national level. Existing examples of inter-agency setups at the country level will be used as a basis for the model.

To enhance national level coordination setups and connect in-country efforts to water-related expertise and resources, the Task Force will provide seed funds to countries on a demand-driven basis. The engagement countries for the Task Force during 2023-2024 are Chad, Chile, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines and Sierra Leone.

## SDG 6 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

In 2021, the SDG 6 Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) was established to operationalize the capacity development accelerator of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. The Initiative consists of 35 members and is co-coordinated by UNESCO and UN DESA. The Initiative aims to strengthen the ability of the UN system to respond to requests from Members States related to capacity building and water. During 2023, Panama and Costa Rica were selected as pilot countries after having formally expressed interest to participate in the CDI. Planning and conversations with RCs and UNCTs in the countries took place during 2023. An initial workshop in Panama was postponed until 2024.

The CDI submitted three commitments to the Water Action Agenda<sup>1</sup> and organized a side event during the UN 2023 Water Conference 'Taking Next Steps for a Water and Climate Resilient World through Capacity Development of People and Organizations'. The next round of engagement countries will be selected and outreach will take place in 2024.

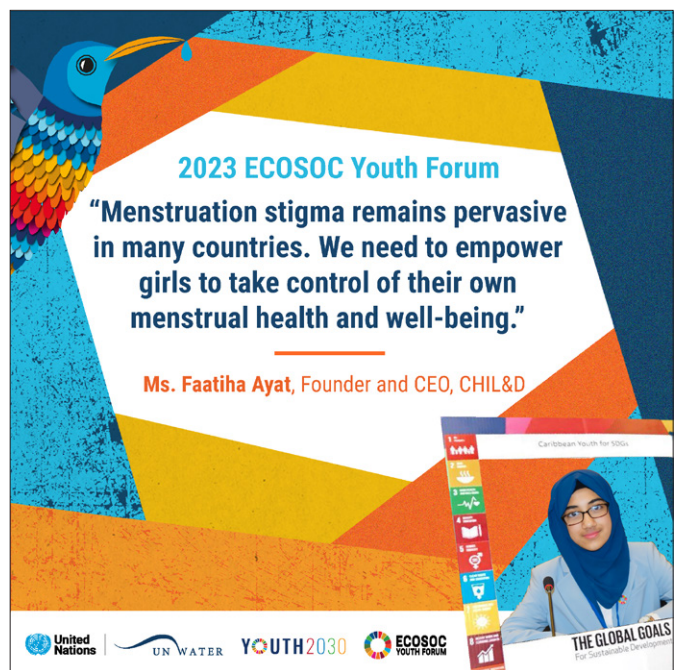
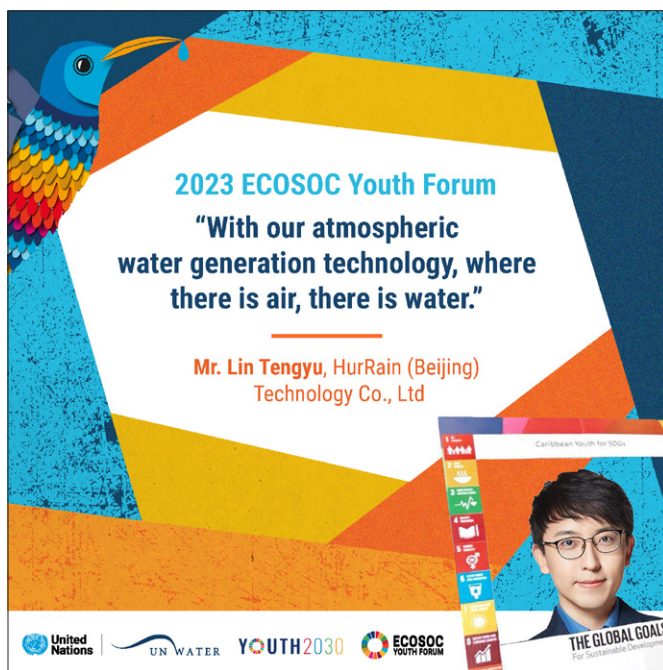
## Policy Briefs

### COUNTRY ACCELERATION CASE STUDIES

The second editions of the SDG 6 Country Acceleration Case Studies were published in 2023. The aim of the case studies is to highlight the accomplishments of countries in advancing towards the goals of SDG 6 and to facilitate information exchange on enabling conditions and key lessons learned. In consultation with the UN-Water family, Brazil, Ghana and Singapore were selected for the 2023 publications. Government officials representing the three countries spoke at the launch of the case studies, which took place during the SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event during the HLPF.

### UN WOMEN PUBLICATION

The joint publication between UN-Water and UN Women, *From Commodity to Common Good: A Feminist Agenda to Tackle the World's Water Crisis*, looked at the root causes of the global water crisis and how compounded risks have gendered effects. Grounded in a human rights framework, the report integrates an



Youth messages for the 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum.

<sup>1</sup> The commitments were entitled 'UN-Water SDG 6 Capacity Development Initiative', 'Taking Next Steps for a Water and Climate Resilient World Through Capacity Development of People and Organizations', 'Strengthen Regional Training Centers and Networks of Training Centers'.

indigenous perspective and calls for the full realization of women's rights in SDG 6 implementation. The policy recommendations presented in the publication highlight the mutually reinforcing investments needed in SDG 5 and 6. The publication was launched during the 2023 HLPF and will inform the theme for World Water Day 2026: 'Water and Gender'.

## **Participating in other global processes**

### **THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL YOUTH FORUM**

The 2023 Economic and Social Council Youth Forum, aligning with the HLPF cycle, included a review of SDG 6. UN-Water organized the official session together with the Children and Youth Major Group, Water Youth Network, IFMSA, UNESCO, UNEP, and the World Water Quality Alliances Youth Workstream. The session incorporated messaging from the 'Fill up the Glass' campaign which was launched ahead of the UN 2023 Water Conference.


The three key messages resulting from the session were incorporated into the Presidential Statement of the Economic and Social Council. These messages urged the prioritization of financial resources for effective menstrual hygiene management, advocated for support to young WASH innovators through strategic partnerships, and called for a commitment to ensuring that youth below 30 are meaningfully engaged with a targeted policy goal of achieving 30 per cent representation in water-related decision-making by 2030.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate Change convened the 'Technical Workshop on Water and Climate Change Mitigation Inter-Dependencies' on 13 June 2023 during the Bonn Climate Change Conference. Over 40 international water, energy and environment experts attended the workshop which found water to be central in achieving climate mitigation targets, with many existing and proposed solutions having a large water footprint. The results were presented to Bonn Conference delegates during a virtual briefing the following day.

At the 38<sup>th</sup> UN-Water Meeting, the Senior Programme Managers asked the Expert Group to produce a study on the potential water required to implement mitigation measures. The preliminary findings of the study were released at COP28 and discussed at the COP28 Presidency Event 'Watering the Clean Energy Transition' on 5 December 2023.

In addition, a third Water Pavilion was hosted 1 to 11 December 2023 at COP28 in partnership with the United Arab Emirates' UNFCCC COP Presidency. 21 UN-Water Members and Partners were official partners of the Water Pavilion.



# **Supporting monitoring and reporting on water and sanitation**

When Member States adopted the SDGs in 2015, they committed to regularly reporting data to the UN to track progress and ensure accountability. Credible and timely data are essential to the realization of the SDGs, as they help decision-makers to identify countries, people and sectors that are left behind, and to set priorities for increased efforts and investments. Through IMI-SDG6, UN-Water seeks to support countries in monitoring water- and sanitation-related issues within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in compiling country data to report on global progress towards SDG 6.

Eight years into the 2030 Agenda, and with seven years left to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, there have been three coordinated global data compilation exercises for SDG 6 (Data Drives), taking place in 2017, 2020, and most recently 2023. Thanks to the great efforts of country monitoring focal points, water and sanitation data are now available from almost all countries. Based on the country data, global baseline estimates are available for the 12 SDG 6 global indicators, and for 10 of the indicators there are sufficient data to analyze global trends.

## Implementing a coherent, integrated and efficient monitoring framework

During 2023, several IMI agencies developed new tools to increase the feasibility and usefulness of their indicators, for example for indicators 611 and 621 guidance materials for monitoring safe management of on-site sanitation systems were published. For the industrial wastewater portion of indicator 631 a concept for a ladder approach was presented at the 2023 GWOP Congress. For indicator 641, methodologies for disaggregation of country data by geographic area and sub-sector were tested and indicator 661 updated its metadata to better reflect mangrove loss.

Across indicators, the work on gender contextualization has continued. The main focus of the gender contextualization work in 2023 was on pilot testing the draft framework. The pilots in Brazil and Senegal were largely completed early in the year and learning/feedback webinars were held with country stakeholders and UN agencies. Based on the early feedback received from Brazil, the assessment framework was revised. Later in 2023, the pilots in Palestine and Philippines were launched. In November, country consultation webinars were held in four languages, with

participation from 80 countries and 200 individuals. The webinars were intended as the first global outreach of the tools, and the beginning of a process to assess countries’ capacity needs. Following the webinars, two desk review surveys were shared with country focal points, aiming to gather feedback on the tools and on their capacity needs.

The work on water basin disaggregation moved to its next phase during the year. The River Basin Working Group focused on a review of existing global maps and on the specification of needs for a standard basin map to be used by the IMI agencies. The work was started during 2023 by a consultant hired by UN-Water. During 2023, IMI also started developing pilot activities aimed at understanding country needs and how IMI can support them. Albania, Australia and Argentina are involved in ongoing discussions, with pilot activities starting in 2024.

## Engaging Member States and enhancing national capacity

As part of the 2023 Data Drive, the custodian agencies offered various types of capacity building support to country focal points. Similarly to the previous data drive in 2020, online activities such as regional, sub-regional and country workshops, instruction videos, helpdesks and bilateral calls were employed by all the UN custodian agencies. In addition, geospatial data services, gap assessments and national roadmaps were provided for some of the indicators.

To encourage countries to provide data on as many indicators as possible, the indicator-specific efforts were complemented with joint outreach activities. Support activities for the 2023 Data Drive started with a joint webinar in May 2023, attended by 235 participants across 84 countries. This was complemented by outreach to country monitoring focal points (highlighting information about cross-cutting resources, focal point database, etc.), letters to the UN missions, and support to agencies on filling focal point gaps.

In addition, the UN indicator teams also provided focused capacity support in specific countries, for example the 611/621 team undertook pilots for monitoring safe management of on-site sanitation systems in Malawi, Nepal, Oman and Moldova; indicator 632 on ambient water quality implemented citizen science projects in Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi; the 641/642 team



Selection of digital cards for the SDG 6 Acceleration snapshots: what progress looks like.

carried out institutional development training in Senegal, Mauritania, and Peru and national workshops in India, Senegal, and Madagascar. Indicator 642 also tested the Global Environmental Flows Information System (GEFIS) in 533 river sites in 27 countries. Indicator 651 hosted national stakeholder consultation workshops in 65 countries focusing on data quality, national cross coordination, stakeholder involvement, and use of reporting processes to advance IWRM.

The indicator 652 team employed a new approach of specifically targeting non-reporting countries, resulting in seven countries (Bahrain, Mauritania, Nepal, San Marino, Syria, Timor-Leste, and Yemen) reporting on it for the first time in 2023. Finally, 6a/6b supported the implementation of government-led country roadmaps in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The team also provided in-depth trainings and follow-up cohort sessions on WASH accounts in 20 countries.

All teams provided indicator data and analysis for UN 2023 Water Conference, including the Concept Notes for the Interactive Dialogues, SDG 6 acceleration snapshots and the SDG 6 Synthesis report. In addition to this, 611/621 published regional snapshots for WASH in households for all major regional groupings and produced a snapshot of progress on sanitation and hygiene in Africa for AfricaSan. The 632 team conducted a mission to Sierra Leone supporting development of a river basin management plan for the Rokel river basin; it also initiated an analysis of catchment-based water quality pressures in Jamaica, Uruguay and Sierra Leone. The indicator team for 661 provided support to South Africa,

Colombia, Botswana, and Kazakhstan on data usage, and 6a/6b shared their data with partners at various conferences, including the UNFCCC COP process, IWA Congress, the UN 2023 Water Conference, the IRC All Systems Connect Symposium and World Water Week.

## Reporting and outreach

Global reporting for most indicators will take place in 2024 based on the results of the 2023 Data Drive. However, in July 2023 WHO and UNICEF launched a progress update on WASH in households with a special focus on gender, and the industrial wastewater part of indicator 631 launched a global report on urban sanitation and wastewater management.

During 2023, the SDG 6 Data Portal expanded its language support to include Arabic, Chinese, Russian, French, and Spanish. Analytics revealed that the updated Data Portal witnessed substantial traffic, attracting 86,000 unique users from January to December 2023 and 306,000 views. Upgrading the technology underlying the Portal to its latest iteration also commenced. This enhancement aims to fortify the Portal's security, enhance accessibility, and improve overall usability in line with the most recent advancements.

To update the IMI outreach strategy to reflect the situation and priorities for Phase 3 (2023-2026: Integrating and mainstreaming), the existing strategy was reviewed considering in particular the prioritization of target audiences for outreach and feedback on the past outreach tools used by IMI.



The joint outreach activities in 2023 closely followed the outreach plan. The most important deliverables were the 16 country acceleration snapshots which were launched via a webinar in March 2023 in support of the UN 2023 Water Conference. This was accompanied by a social media kit that was aligned with World Water Day as well as an opinion piece

from the IMI Steering Committee. IMI provided data to the five Interactive Dialogues for the UN 2023 Water Conference and to the 2023 Synthesis Report which fed into the in-depth review of SDG 6 at the HLPF. IMI also played an important role in outreach around the 2023 Country Acceleration Case Studies.

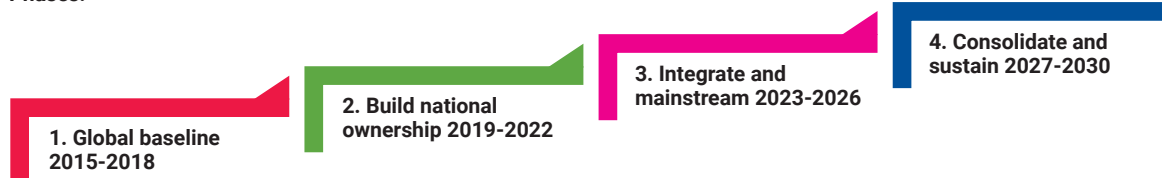
## Focus areas for IMI-SDG6 Phase 3

2023 represented the first year of Phase 3 of the IMI-SDG6, which will have a focus on 'Integrate and mainstream' (see IMI-SDG6 phase diagram below). Based on a comprehensive review and planning process, the below focus areas were identified.

**Goal:** Acceleration of the achievement of SDG 6 on water and sanitation through evidence based policies, regulations, planning and investments.

**Purpose:** By 2030, increased availability and holistic analysis of high quality data contributes to better informed water and sanitation policy, regulation, planning and investment at all levels.

**Phases:**



*Continued data collection and capacity building.* Although the first two phases have seen good progress in the availability of data and capacity in Member States, there remain gaps for some indicators and certain countries are not adequately engaged. Phase 3 will continue to place an emphasis on closing these gaps, making sure that countries have the skills and people in place to collect and use data for each indicator, and to regularly collect, analyse and report on data on the global indicators for various audiences.

*Making data more useful for countries.* Looking beyond global awareness raising, to maximise their value at the country level, the indicators need increased resolution and relevance to existing country processes, in particular considering demographic and geographic differences within the country. For this purpose, Phase 3 will develop approaches for disaggregation and contextualisation of the global indicators where possible.

*Uptake into policy at all levels.* Building on the above, different audiences will be targeted at country, regional and global levels for advancing the actual use of SDG 6 data. At the national level, the focus will be on national target setting, use in Common Country Assessments and Voluntary National Reviews, and to feed into country processes for planning, policy and investment decision-making. As such, IMI-SDG6 will increasingly focus on 'Data to Policy'.

*Stronger country processes.* Indicator-specific capacity needs will be accompanied by national and subnational institutional processes that mainstream monitoring within ministries and link monitoring to decision-making processes. This will require harmonising the monitoring of global indicators with the monitoring of national-level indicators, while finding opportunities to promote intersectoral processes that look across SDG 6 as a whole (and beyond to other goals). IMI-SDG6 will also look for ways to provide more intensive support to specific countries, which has proved effective in the first two phases.



# **Building knowledge and inspiring people to take action**

In 2023, UN-Water seized a significant opportunity to bolster awareness and spur action on water and sanitation issues, particularly during the first UN Conference on water in nearly five decades which coincided with World Water Day. This pivotal event served as a catalyst for galvanizing global efforts to address the crisis and empowering individuals to make a difference. Leading up to the Conference, UN-Water Members and Partners collaborated closely with the entire UN system and Member States to ensure widespread understanding, concern, and a sense of empowerment among the public.

## Managing a knowledge hub on water and sanitation

The UN-Water website was migrated in 2022 to a more advanced content management system, aligned with the latest UN standards. In 2023, with its revamped user-friendly interface, the website seamlessly guided visitors through a plethora of resources, ranging from reports to multimedia content, aimed at promoting sustainable water and sanitation management practices worldwide. Notably, its commitment to inclusivity is demonstrated by multilingual support and an accessible design, ensuring that crucial information reaches diverse audiences globally.

Renewed collaboration with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in 2023 further fortified the UN-Water website's role as a hub for collaboration and advocacy, fostering partnerships to address pressing challenges. Through innovative features, data-driven insights, and compelling storytelling, the platform educated, inspired, and mobilized stakeholders and individuals in relation to achieving SDG 6.

In 2023, the metrics for 'Pageviews' became unavailable as part of changes in Google Analytics measurement. Instead, the new measurement, 'Sessions', denotes a group of user interactions with a website within a given time frame. Throughout the year, the UN-Water website recorded 1,680,000 sessions, indicating a positive trend compared to similar websites in previous years. The most visited page, apart from the landing page, was the water facts page on water scarcity, followed by the news item on the UN 2023 Water Conference. While there was a slight decrease in publications downloads, this reflects fewer publications released in 2023 compared to 2022.

However, we saw substantial growth in 2023 on LinkedIn, where UN-Water's groups and page had an almost 50 per cent growth in followers compared with 2022. As a platform, this space allows professionals, experts and organizations to connect, network, engage in discussions, share insights and establish valuable connections within the global water community. Membership of the UN-Water LinkedIn group grants access to a wealth of resources, facilitating ongoing learning and knowledge exchange among members. Posts within the group testified to the utility of exploring collaboration opportunities and seeking potential partners for projects or initiatives, serving as a catalyst for collaboration and partnerships among individuals, organizations and stakeholders working towards common water- and sanitation-related goals. At the end of 2023, the group boasted over 17,400 members, posting an average of 60 times per month, showcasing its vibrant and dynamic nature.

## Informing, engaging and inspiring action

The UN World Water Day campaign in 2023 on the theme of 'Accelerating Change' achieved remarkable success due to several key factors. Firstly, its alignment with the UN 2023 Water Conference generated great synergy and mutually supportive exposure. Secondly, strategic coordination among UN-Water Members, Partners and the entire UN system, facilitated by the UN Department of Global Communications, ensured widespread engagement. Implemented by the World Water Day Task Force, co-ordinated by Aquafed, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and the World Youth Parliament for Water, the campaign utilized digital outreach, events and advocacy to reach diverse audiences, from policymakers to grassroots communities. Thirdly, the campaign's thematic focus resonated deeply with stakeholders worldwide. By highlighting ten actionable steps individuals and organizations could take to address water challenges, the campaign empowered people to make 'off-the-peg' commitments and take tangible, personal actions towards achieving SDG 6. Finally, innovative communication strategies, such as compelling storytelling and multimedia content, bolstered audience engagement, while the UN-Water Chair's interview on U.S. television network PBS provided audiences with invaluable insights into the widespread crisis and actionable solutions.

**“We as a global society have taken water for granted. It must become everyone’s business.”**

Gilbert F. Hougbo, Chair of UN-Water (2017-2023) in GZERO World with Ian Bremmer, also aired on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the United States.



World Water Day 2023 campaign poster.

Leveraging cutting-edge technologies and social media platforms, the campaign amplified its reach and impact, generating over 10 billion potential impressions on social media and garnering over 8,000 personal commitments on the dedicated website [www.unwater.org/bethechange](http://www.unwater.org/bethechange) - a complement to the Water Action Agenda that featured larger-scale commitments.

Drawing from an ancient tale originating from the Quechua people in Peru, the campaign utilized a story about a

hummingbird as a poignant analogy to inspire children worldwide. This sparked significant involvement of younger people, who followed online guidance to make origami hummingbirds and inscribed one of the ten actions (or their own) on each, symbolizing their personal commitments to water-related initiatives. Over 8,000 paper birds from 21 countries were sent to UN Headquarters and were prominently displayed during the Conference.

Under the theme of ‘Accelerating Change’ the UN World Water Development Report, published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water with its production coordinated by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme, also focused on partnerships and cooperation – two indispensable components in expediting progress towards SDG 6 and actualizing the human rights to water and sanitation. The flagship UN report on water and sanitation issues, launched on World Water Day, was downloaded almost 105,000 times – an increase of 28 per cent on 2022.

In contrast to World Water Day, the World Toilet Day campaign in 2023 faced significant challenges that contributed to its diminished success, notably due to the Israel-Gaza crisis which began on 7 October. The crisis in the region captured global attention and dominated news headlines, diverting focus away from initiatives such as World Toilet Day and overshadowing efforts to raise awareness about sanitation issues despite the concerted efforts of organizers and advocates.

However, in this challenging context, World Toilet Day activities expanded to 203 countries, marking a significant increase from 116 in 2022. India witnessed the highest engagement, propelled by religious, spiritual and political leaders advocating for human rights and the Swachh Bharat Mission. In the U.S., content took a light-hearted approach, resonating with the business and gaming communities, even featuring a song by Sesame Street characters. In the U.K., labour unions led discussions, highlighting the inadequate access to safe and hygienic toilets for train drivers. Nigeria’s conversations primarily focused on ending open defecation. Notably, 10 per cent of global discussions emphasized women’s and girls’ access to sanitation, with another 10% discussing gender equality, including mentions of menstruation in 6 per cent of discussions. Climate emerged as a prominent theme in 4 per cent of conversations, likely influenced by events in New York. Top hashtags included #WorldToiletDay and #PublicToilets, the latter making its debut and gaining traction among UN entities and Task

Force members. The micro campaign on gender equity, also featured around World Toilet Day, garnered significant engagement, with an average reach of 3,000 per post, surpassing the campaign's average reach. Additionally, the campaign encouraged schools to create origami hummingbirds and nests, building on the World Water Day initiative where the origami hummingbirds were introduced.

One of the major events for World Toilet Day was an online session on climate-resilient sanitation co-hosted with UNICEF and in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of India and Singapore. The session was particularly significant given the growing recognition of the insufficient representation of sanitation in climate discussions, limited financing for sanitation within major climate funds, and the increasing impact of climate change on sanitation, and vice versa. The event featured a briefing on the interconnectedness of sanitation and climate, followed by a panel discussion with senior representatives from organizations such as the World Bank Group, Gates Foundation, Japanese toilet producer Lixil, and the Permanent Missions of Tajikistan and the Netherlands. The primary objective was to lay the groundwork for enhancing engagement on sanitation issues at COP28, where efforts are underway to establish a financing annex for the Green Climate Fund specifically dedicated to climate-resilient sanitation. This session provided a platform to leverage World Toilet Day discussions to initiate ongoing conversations aimed at mobilizing governments, the private sector, and agencies to unite around a shared theme and drive collective action.

Throughout the year, UN-Water supported or participated in 35 relevant global celebrations and events such as the UN 2023 Water Conference, the UN Secretary-General's call to action on WASH in healthcare facilities, World Water Week in Stockholm, World Wetlands Day, International Women's Day, World Meteorological Day, International Day for Biological Diversity, World Environment Day, International Youth Day, Hand Hygiene Day, World Food Day, World Cities Day and Human Rights Day.

## Strengthening the UN-Water corporate brand

Throughout 2023, UN-Water's corporate communications remained aligned with the overarching UN global communications strategy, emphasizing the provision of solutions and examples to address challenges, rather than

solely aiming to capture attention. Through its support for the preparation and execution of the UN 2023 Water Conference, UN-Water significantly bolstered its brand by showcasing the impact of extensive collaboration and partnership among UN entities and international organizations within the UN-Water framework in elevating water-related issues to the top of the political agenda. This heightened UN-Water brand visibility was reflected in the sentiments expressed during the Conference's preparation and execution, as well as on social media platforms, underscoring the efficacy of UN-Water's collaborative approach. This collaborative approach was further demonstrated through the coordination within the UN-Water communications network – The Pipe – which consistently applied this strategy throughout the year. By fostering unified and collaborative responses, The Pipe effectively navigated the challenges of communication during a busy preparatory phase and a significant milestone event.

Social media posts with the most engagement and interactions in 2023 tended to encourage individuals to take action by providing simple ideas on what individuals can do to mitigate the water crisis. While posts with helpful advice for individuals had high popularity, posts about events like the SDG 6 Special Event at the High-Level Political Forum and the UN 2023 Water Conference also engaged the audience. Calls for action on SDG 6 showed especially high engagement.

UN-Water's publications remained highly sought-after in 2023, with their availability in the six official UN languages facilitating broader outreach. Additionally, the professional design of a significant percentage of these publications further enhanced their appeal and accessibility to diverse audiences.

In 2023, UN-Water also introduced a novel initiative, inspired by the widespread use of search engines by the general public to seek answers to common questions on water and sanitation. Recognizing the significant public interest in understanding these topics in simple terms, UN-Water launched a regular feature on its LinkedIn channel called 'Questions People Ask'. This initiative delivers informative content in a jargon-free manner through dedicated newsletter-style communications. The content was curated by the UN-Water Expert Groups or Task Forces, focusing on critical issues such as climate change, water scarcity, and wastewater management. Launched in October 2023, the initiative rapidly gained traction with 20,000 subscribers by the end of the year.



# **Governance and financial aspects**

## Documents

UN-Water's activities in 2023 were guided by the UN-Water 2030 Strategy and UN-Water Work Programme 2022–2023. All governance documents can be accessed at <http://www.unwater.org/about-unwater/governance/>.

### APPOINTMENT OF A NEW UN-WATER CHAIR

In December 2023, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, appointed Mr. Alvaro Lario, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, as Chair of UN-Water. The Secretary-General thanked Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo, who served as UN-Water Chair from 2017 – 2023, for his outstanding leadership of UN-Water and for his strong personal commitment to promoting impactful collaboration across the UN system on water and sanitation issues.

### Annual UN-Water Meetings

Throughout 2023, UN-Water was intensely engaged in the preparations leading up to the UN 2023 Water Conference, as well as follow-up activities. Therefore, only one UN-Water Meeting was held in 2023, which took place in Stockholm on 18 and 19 August.

At this Meeting, UN-Water discussed the follow-up to the UN 2023 Water Conference and the Water Action Agenda, which included the development of the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation and mainstreaming water into intergovernmental processes. UN-Water also discussed holding yearly Regional Discussion Group meetings to take stock of SDG 6 and plan regional level accelerated action for achieving water related goals and targets in the Water Action Decade's second half; the start of Phase 3 of IMI-SDG6, focusing on building capacity at the country level in how the IMI-SDG6 data can be applied and build on the needs of countries; the country snapshots and SDG 6 country acceleration case studies; and progress on the World Toilet Day 2023 and World Water Day 2024 campaigns. UN-Water decided to establish a Task Force on Innovation to develop recommendations for advancing the innovation accelerator of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework; to continue supporting Member States in the integration

of water in UNFCCC processes on mitigation and adaptation through the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate Change; and to establish an Expert Group on Groundwater.

UN-Water discussed the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation including the need for it to address the underlying causes of fragmentation in water within the UN system; achieve strong political buy-in from Executive Heads of UN entities; and the Strategy's potential to act as a tool to address the lack of resources in support of coordination. UN-Water also approved its work programme for the 2024-2025 biennium.

### UN-Water Joint Steering Group

The Joint Steering Group steers the operational management of UN-Water between UN-Water Meetings. In 2023, it exchanged via email and met once to pursue its assessment of the impact of the UNOPS crisis on UN-Water's operations, assess different options for the establishment of an alternative trust fund for UN-Water, and review three applications for Partner status received during the year.

### UN-Water Inter-Agency Trust Fund

The UN-Water Inter-Agency Trust Fund is administered by UNOPS. The indicative financial status<sup>2</sup> in 2023 is presented below as the total for targeted and core coordination activities:

<sup>2</sup> The figures presented in this report may be subject to minor changes in the final certified financial report.

<b>Balance forward (2022):</b>	<b>USD 1,929,040</b>
<b>Income (2023):</b>	
Netherlands:	USD 2,695,886
Sweden:	USD 540,405
Switzerland:	USD 3,244,254
Excess reserves settlement (partial refunds to donors)	USD 448
<b>Interest (2023):</b>	<b>USD 18,972</b>
<b>Total income without balance forward from 2022:</b>	<b>USD 6,499,964</b>
<b>Total income including balance forward from 2022:</b>	<b>USD 8,428,004</b>
<b>Total expenditure (2023):</b>	<b>USD 6,725,237</b>
<b>Balance (31 December 2023):</b>	<b>USD 1,702,767</b>

## Progress overview

During 2023, UN-Water's governance operations included one well-attended in-person UN-Water Meeting. UN-Water welcomed three new Partners: the Geneva Water Hub, the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) and the Water Integrity Network (WIN).

The impact of the UNOPS crisis on UN-Water's donor relations included a partner risk assessment requested by SDC, after which SDC confirmed the excellent results of UN-Water, and IMI-SDG6 in particular, thanks to its solid anchoring and strength built over the years as a coordination mechanism. The ongoing agreements with Sweden and Switzerland remained in force, but the agreement with Germany was prematurely terminated upon request of BMZ, with the 2023 disbursement channelled through WHO to IMI-SDG6. The agreement with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs originally intended to cover the period 2022-2030 was shortened to two years. The signing of new agreements with the Austrian Development Agency, the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, and the European Commission were severely delayed, with the agreements signed at the end of the year.



Gilbert Hougbo, UN-Water Chair (2017-2023) with Johannes Cullmann, Vice-Chair (2022-2023) expressing his appreciation for the participation and support of Partners at the UN-Water Meeting. IISD photo.







# **Annex 1. Members and Partners**

# Members

(35 as at December 2023)

## United Nations Secretariat

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA)

## Programmes and funds

United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

World Food Programme (WFP)

## Regional Commissions

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

## Specialized agencies

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

World Bank Group (WBG)  
World Health Organization (WHO)  
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)  
World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)

## **Other entities**

United Nations University (UNU)

## **United Nations-related organizations**

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)  
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

## **Conventions**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)  
Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)  
Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

## **Partners**

(48 as at December 2023)

AquaFed  
CDP  
Center for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST)  
Conservation International  
Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)  
Geneva Water Hub  
Global Water Partnership (GWP)  
Green Climate Fund (GCF)\*  
Human Right 2 Water (HR2W)  
International Association for Hydro-Environment Engineering and Research (IAHR)  
International Association for Water Law (AIDA)  
International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH)  
International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS)  
International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID)  
International Groundwater Centre (IGRAC)  
International Hydropower Association (IHA)

IHE Delft Institute for Water Education  
International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)  
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)  
International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)  
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)  
International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC)  
International Water Association (IWA)  
International Water Management Institute (IWMI)  
International Water Resources Association (IWRA)  
Mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation\*  
Public Services International (PSI)  
Ramsar Convention  
Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)  
Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF)\*  
Sanitation and Water for All (SWA)\*  
Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future  
Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)  
Toilet Board Coalition (TBC)  
United Nations Global Compact\*  
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)  
Water Environment Federation (WEF)  
Water Integrity Network (WIN)  
Water.org  
WaterAid  
Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)  
World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)  
World Council of Civil Engineers (WCCE)  
World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO)  
World Resources Institute (WRI)  
World Water Council (WWC)  
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)  
World Youth Parliament for Water (WYPW)

\* Partner with Special Status



## **Annex 2. Expert Groups and Task Forces**

# Expert Groups<sup>3</sup>

## *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [UNEP]*

With a focus on the 2030 Agenda, this Expert Group advises on the strategic scope of UN-Water's engagement in the 2030 Agenda and coordinates interventions among UN-Water's Members and Partners. During 2023, the Expert Group led on the development of the SDG 6 Synthesis Report which analysed the outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference and served as the official background documentation to the 2023 HLPF and the in-depth review of SDG 6. The Expert Group also supported implementation and activities around the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. For example, the Expert Group developed the 2023 iteration of the country acceleration case studies, which aim to support learning and sharing of good practices among countries.

## *Drinking-Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) [UNICEF, WHO]*

This Expert Group brings together the technical experience of the UN and other relevant experts to support ongoing global initiatives on WASH. In 2023, the Expert Group on WASH took the lead on developing the Concept Paper for the UN 2023 Water Conference Interactive Dialogue on Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation. In addition, the Expert Group on WASH has been supporting the implementation of the UN-Water Roadmap for the integration of Human Rights to Water and Sanitation and coordinated the World Toilet Day 2023 campaign.

## *Groundwater [IAEA, UNESCO, WMO, WBG]*

The Expert Group on Groundwater was established at the 38th UN-Water Meeting and builds on the work accomplished by the UN-Water Task Force which was established to prepare and contribute to the 2022 UN-Water Campaign on Groundwater 'Making the Invisible Visible', the UN-Water World Water Development Report 2022 and the UN-Water Summit on Groundwater. During 2023, the Expert Group has started drafting a workplan.

## *Regional Level Coordination [UNESCWA, UNESCAP]*

The Expert Group on Regional Level Coordination was formed in 2019 from the former Task Force on Regional Level Coordination. In 2023 the Expert Group organized Regional Water Dialogues which supported the UN 2023 Water Conference. The Expert Group designed a joint booklet that consolidates the key messages emanating from the UN Regional Commissions preparatory meetings to support the midterm comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade. The five UN Regional Commissions also organized Regional Forums on Sustainable Development in 2023, with special focus on accelerating efforts to meet SDG 6 related targets.

## *Transboundary Waters [UNECE, UNESCO]*

The UN-Water Expert Group on Transboundary Waters provides a platform to coordinate inputs to policy processes related to transboundary waters. The Expert Group coordinates awareness-raising and outreach efforts supporting transboundary water cooperation and promotes coherence in activities by UN-Water Members and Partners in the area of transboundary waters. In 2023, the Expert Group led on the development of the Concept Paper for the UN 2023 Water Conference Interactive Dialogue on Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda.

## *Water and Climate Change [UNECE, UNESCO, WMO]*

This Expert Group strengthens UN system coordination of activities related to water and climate change to support Member States in assessing the impacts of climate change on water and to adopt strategies for meeting the challenges of climate change in terms of both adaptation and mitigation in the related water sub-sectors. In 2023, the Expert Group together with UNDRR developed the Concept Paper for the UN 2023 Water Conference Interactive Dialogue on Water for Climate, Resilience, and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction. The Expert

<sup>3</sup> Expert Group coordinators in square brackets.

Group also hosted a Technical Workshop on Water and Climate Change Mitigation Inter-Dependencies at the Bonn Intersessions and started undertaking a study on the potential water required to implement different mitigation measures, at the scale required to achieve the Paris Agreement targets.

#### *Water Quality and Wastewater [UNEP, WHO, FAO]*

This Expert Group brings together the UN and other relevant expertise on water quality and wastewater. It also provides the platform to share information on, and convene interested parties to join, the World Water Quality Assessment (mandated by the UN Environment Assembly). In 2023, UNEP provided updated Terms of Reference to revitalize the Expert Group. WHO and FAO became co-coordinators together with UNEP.

#### *Water Scarcity [FAO]*

This Expert Group brings together expertise on water scarcity and droughts, working closely with and in support of the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG), launched by FAO in 2017.

## Task Forces<sup>4</sup>

#### *Country Level Engagement [UNDP, UNICEF, FAO]*

The Task Force developed a strategy to strengthen UN-Water's engagement at the country level in direct response to a recommendation made during an external review of UN-Water. In 2023, the Task Force organized a clinic for UN Resident Coordinators together with DCO where the UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams from Mauritania, Mauritius, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa, Vietnam, Colombia, Ecuador, Tanzania, Nigeria, Burundi, Comoros, Iraq, Djibouti, Bolivia, Zambia, Honduras, Serbia, Egypt, Pakistan, Senegal and Costa Rica participated. The Task Force was also mandated to develop a standard engagement model for countries and will provide seed funds to countries on a demand-driven basis. The Task Force started reaching out to engagement countries which included Chad, Chile, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, and Sierra Leone.

#### *Task Force on Innovation [GWP, Toilet Board Coalition, UNDP, Water Environment Federation]*

The Task Force on Innovation was set up at the 38<sup>th</sup> UN-Water Meeting to develop a set of concrete recommendations for advancing the innovation accelerator of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. During 2023, the Task Force had several meetings where the workplan was discussed.

#### *Water Action Decade Implementation [UN DESA, UNU]*

Given the alignment of the 2018 UN General Assembly resolution on the "Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018-2028", the Task Force led preparations for the UN 2023 Water Conference. In 2023, the Task Force supported the Water Action Decade processes in New York. The Task Force developed the Concept Paper for the Interactive Dialogue on Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan.

#### *Task Force on World Water Day and World Toilet Day 2023 [AquaFed, WYPW, UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF]*

The World Water Day and World Toilet Day 2023 Task Force coordinated both international observances in 2023 under the theme 'Accelerating Change'. Through an impactful year-long campaign, the Task Force raised awareness of the importance of turbocharging efforts to address the water and sanitation crisis worldwide and advocated for the opportunity for anyone, anywhere to be able to take action.

<sup>4</sup> Task Force coordinators in square brackets.







# **Annex 3. Human Resources**

# Members of the UN-Water Joint Steering Group

Gilbert F. Houngbo, Chair, UN-Water (2017-2023)

Johannes Cullmann, Vice-Chair, UN-Water

Madhushree Chatterjee, Secretary, UN-Water

Abou Amani, UNESCO

Sasha Koo-Oshima, FAO

Eva Mach, IOM (until August 2023)

Sonja Koepfel, UNECE (until August 2023)

Mary Matthews, UNDP (from August 2023)

Nicolas Franke, WMO (from August 2023)

## UN-Water Technical Advisory Unit and others

Federico Properzi, Chief Technical Adviser

Daniella Boström Couffe, Communications Manager

Leanne Burney, Programme Officer

William Reidhead, Global Monitoring Officer

Maria Schade, Global Monitoring Specialist

Klas Moldéus, Technical Officer

Cheng Li, Technical Officer

Sarah Breslin, Associate Expert

Georg Schücking, Associate Expert

Tamara Slowik, Administrative Assistant

Sarah Fragnière, Administrative Assistant

Tomoyuki Okada, Special Assistant to the Secretary (UN DESA)



**United  
Nations**

