

VOICE

UN DESA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, VOL. 27, NO. 03 – MARCH 2023



Uniting the world for water action

In 1977, world leaders, water experts and policymakers from around the world gathered in Mar del Plata, Argentina, for the UN Water Conference. Almost 50 years later, the global community will come together from 22 to 24 March in New York for the second ever [UN 2023 Water Conference](#).

By nature, water connects different environments, peoples and sectors. But growing demands for water, coupled with poor water management, have increased water stress around the world. Meanwhile, the effects of worsening climate change are often felt through water, in the form of floods or droughts. Something has to change.

Halfway into the [Water Action Decade](#), our progress on water-related goals and targets remains alarmingly off-track, jeopardizing the entire sustainable development agenda.

The UN 2023 Water Conference will put water into the spotlight and onto global agendas. It seeks to mobilize States, the UN system and stakeholders alike to share and exchange knowledge, challenges and best practices, and forge new partnerships across sectors. Governance, innovation, data and financing all have a role to play in accelerating water action.

The Conference aims to help everyone better understand, value and manage water and take concerted action to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets. Water can be the dealmaker for the Sustainable Development Goals, and in turn for the health and prosperity of people and planet. Water action can increase food security and equality between genders, water action keeps children in school, communities at peace and nature healthy.

While [briefing the General Assembly](#) on his priorities for the year, Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the need for water action and that we must “act decisively before it is too late”.

The time is now. The UN 2023 Water Conference is the once-in-a-generation opportunity to act for water.

Learn more about the UN 2023 Water Conference [here](#), access the latest [media advisory](#) and sign up to get regular event updates [here](#).

Ahead of the Conference, join UN DESA’s Global Policy Dialogue event on “Indigenous and youth solutions for clean water” on 9 March at 9 am EST and be inspired by some of the water action already taking place. Get more details [here](#) and register to join: <https://bit.ly/dialogue9march>



EXPERT VOICES



LDC5: From potential to prosperity

Forty-six countries in the world are classified as least developed. Ahead of the [5th UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries \(LDC5\)](#) UN DESA Economists Marcia Tavares and Matthias Bruckner share challenges and opportunities facing Least Developed Countries (LDCs) today.

1. What are the most challenging issues facing the 46 least developed countries today and how can the global community best address them?

“The issues facing the LDCs are systemic and interconnected. These countries lag significantly behind other developing countries in terms of income, poverty, health, education, and many other aspects of sustainable development. Most have very limited fiscal resources to address these problems and are constrained in their capacity to mobilize domestic and external finances. Many are facing high levels of debt.

These financial constraints also restrict their ability to enhance their productive capacities – infrastructure, human capital, manufacturing capacity, capacity in science and technology, etc. – which in turn holds them back from embarking on inclusive and sustainable development and structural transformation.

Adding to all these interconnected challenges, and because of them, LDCs are highly vulnerable to external shocks which put hard-won development gains at risk. COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and the ever-increasing climate-related disasters are just the latest examples.

Despite these challenges, many LDCs have made considerable advances and are approaching what we call “graduation” from the LDC category. LDCs need to be supported holistically, to a much greater scale than they have been so far, so that they can effectively implement their development strategies and policies and advance towards the SDGs. Graduating countries need to be supported in the transition, to ensure their gains are not reversed. They have come a long way, but many will still face significant development gaps and multidimensional vulnerabilities.”

2. Why is the 5th UN Conference on LDCs in Doha important for these countries?

“The Conference is important to ensure that LDCs remain front and center in global development efforts, at a time when the world is facing many competing and compounding challenges. It is an opportunity for governments and other stakeholders from LDCs to engage with each other and with other partners, including different parts of the UN System, to explore or consolidate partnerships and opportunities for experience-sharing and peer learning. The conference is not just important for the LDCs. There cannot be a peaceful and prosperous world if we don’t overcome the immense inequalities between, as well as within, countries, as the 2030 Agenda recognizes. Hence, LDC5 is also an opportunity for partners to announce support to LDCs, which is needed to move them towards achieving the SDGs.”

3. The Doha Programme of Action (DPoA) is the new blueprint for LDC development in the next decade.* What are its key components and how will it impact peoples’ lives?

“The Doha Programme of Action is organized around six focus areas: investing in people (eradicating poverty, building capacity to leave no one behind); science, technology and innovation; supporting structural transformation; trade and regional integration; addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovering from the pandemic and building resilience against future shocks; and mobilizing international solidarity and partnerships towards a sustainable graduation. For each area, there are targets and commitments to specific actions, both for LDC governments and for partner countries and organizations. Some actions directly impact the lives of people in LDCs, such as commitments for financing to strengthen education systems. Others have an indirect but equally important role, by strengthening the institutions, policies and fiscal space that will help overcome the systemic challenges described above, which in turn can enable governments to provide the services their populations need in order to meet the SDGs and their own development goals. For example, there are commitments on building the capacity of domestic financial institutions and of national statistical offices.

Closer to UN DESA’s work as secretariat of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), the Doha Programme of Action emphasizes the importance of support for a smooth transition out of the LDC category, for those countries that have or are in the process of reaching that milestone. There is a call for support for the [Sustainable Graduation Support Facility](#) (also known as iGrad), a mechanism recently established by UN DESA and the Office of the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (OHRLLS), designed to deliver integrated advisory services and capacity-building for graduating and recently graduated countries. The DPoA has also called for an enhanced system to monitor graduating and recently graduated countries by the CDP that, among other enhancements, is responsive to crises and emergencies. Both initiatives are being put in motion but need additional support to live up to their full potential.

*The final text of the DPoA was adopted during the first part of the LDC5 conference on 17 March 2022 and endorsed by the General Assembly through resolution A/RES/76/258 on April 1 of the same year.

For more information on the LDC 5 Conference taking place on 5-9 March in Doha:

[LDC information \(CDP webpage\)](#)

[LDC Portal on International Support Measures \(includes an LDC library and information about countries in the graduation process\)](#)



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



5 things you should know about water and the UN 2023 Water Conference

Water is life. It connects us and is vital to our existence on this planet. To protect this critical resource, and accelerate actions to solve the water crisis, the world will come together for the UN 2023 Water

Conference on 22-24 March. Here are 5 things you should know about water and the upcoming conference.

1. Water for health

Drinking water and sanitation are human rights. However, in 2020, 2 billion people did not use safely managed drinking water, and 3.6 billion people used sanitation services that leave human waste untreated, threatening human and environmental health. Globally, at least a quadruple rate of progress on water, sanitation and hygiene is needed to meet the SDG targets.

2. Water for sustainable development

Approximately 35% of treated water is currently lost in urban water systems. Water utilities bear the huge financial costs of treating and pumping water but lose revenues from leaked water that could have been sold. Policy, institutional, and regulatory reforms are needed for sustainable and equitable water use, valuing water properly, and improved service delivery.

3. Water for climate, resilience and environment

Nearly 95% of infrastructure loss and damage reported between 2010 to 2019 were due to water-related disasters. At least 1.4 billion people have been affected by droughts and 1.6 billion by floods for the same period. Sustainable use of water resources is fundamental to deal with the climate and environmental emergency and build resilience.

4. Water for cooperation

Transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are shared by 153 countries. But only a small proportion of (32) countries reported high (90% or more) coverage of their transboundary

waters by operational arrangements in 2020. Joining the UN Water Conventions is a practical step to bolster political support for transboundary water cooperation.

5. Water Action Decade

As an outcome of the UN 2023 Water Conference, the Water Action Agenda will serve as a catalyst for actions and commitments by all countries and stakeholders. The Water Action Decade can facilitate efforts towards the achievement of the commitments, through its various workstreams on knowledge exchange, advocacy and communications.

For more information: [UN 2023 Water Conference](#)

Photo credit: Sophia Paris/A young girl washes her face in Croix des Bouquets, Haiti.





We need actions and solutions that drive the change we need

– Improving the governance of water is an urgent priority for all of humankind

By Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs, Kingdom of the Netherlands and Sulton Rahimzoda, Special Envoy of the President of Tajikistan for Water and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

This month the United Nations will hold its first **water** conference in almost 50 years. This is not only a unique opportunity for the world to come together and accelerate and scale our collective action achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 and all other water-related goals and targets. It is perhaps our last chance to get the world on track for a water-secure world for all, everywhere.

Why water, why now? For the past five decades we have been noisily going about the business of rapid growth and development. Water was always available, and its quality and its supply were understood as predictable. This allowed us to raise families, build cities and factories, prevent the spread of disease, boost farm yields and bring more land under cultivation.

Since the 1970s, the world's population has doubled to 8 billion. Coupled with economic development and changing consumption patterns, this has meant the demand for water is skyrocketing. But as we continue to over-deplete, mismanage and abuse this vital resource, it is becoming more scarce, more polluted and contested at an unprecedented rate and scale.

Water insecurity, its rising temperature, impoverished quality and declining availability is making climate change worse: freshwater security is our best bet to curb climate change and keep it within the agreed upon limits. But as global warming takes effect, ordinary weather is becoming a thing of the past, exacerbating the water crisis. Wind and rainfall conditions have become more extreme and harder to predict. This is affecting water's availability and supply. For example, climate change is distorting India's monsoon season, causing ice in Tibet to melt and affecting freshwater supplies to more than a billion people.^[1] Increasingly, in many parts of the world, demand for water is more and more nudging above the limits of water availability.

Fuel for life

The World Meteorological Organization estimates that 3.6 billion people struggle to get enough water for their needs at least one month a year, and it has forecast that 5 billion – more than half of humanity – will be facing the same plight by 2050.^[2]

And it's not just about getting enough to drink, wash or water crops. Extreme weather events sometimes bring too much water all at once. Floods, hurricanes and other water-related events take lives and destroy homes, livelihoods and infrastructure. UN-Water, which coordinates efforts by UN agencies on this issue, reckons that between 2001 and 2018, almost three-quarters of all natural disasters were water-related.^[3]

If the problem is increasingly too little water, at other times we have too much of it, partly because we haven't adjusted our thinking in response to the growing unpredictability of rainfall and growing competition for a commodity in short supply.

To prevent disasters, we need to build more resilient – green and blue – infrastructure, backed by laws that keep people from building in newly-vulnerable areas, for example.

And to prevent thirst, we need to rethink our economic approach. Water is, after all, a common good, and the water cycle a global common good. When it falls from the sky it is free. But getting it to where it is needed, at the right quality and in sufficient volumes, costs money. Governance – decisions about who gets what – is ultimately in the hands of governments, but tends to be hugely fragmented, sometimes conflictual and enmeshed in historic rights.

An increasingly urgent priority

Competition for water can readily become a source of tension, and even conflict, whether between countries or cities on a common river system, between herders and farmers, or between farmers and city-dwellers. Climate change doesn't just create floods and droughts or increase demand on artesian water reserves. It can increase levels of pollution, putting health at risk and creating clean-up costs.

This is an issue that concerns rich and poor alike. Achieving access to water and sanitation for all is the ambition of SDG 6. Make no mistake: achieving many of the SDGs, such as ending hunger and poverty, depends upon access to water. Climate change is making better governance of water an urgent priority.

How can we best allocate and value common goods? Equally, how should we share the cost of preventing or mitigating droughts and floods exacerbated by global warming?

These questions are about equity and fairness as much as they are about economics and adapting to climate change. We need some clear thinking about how to improve the governance of water supplies to ensure everyone has access to water to drink and wash. How can we ensure our regulation of distribution is effective, fair, just and has democratic oversight? How can we share the cost of preventing disasters?

This month's UN Water Conference, therefore, comes not a day too early. We need actions and solutions that drive the change we need, that we can scale and replicate across the world. Therefore, we do not need a Conference with bold statements. We need a Conference with bold commitments. And the boldness to put these commitments into action. To that end, we launched the Water Action Agenda (WAA) – a platform that validates, evaluates, helps scale and replicate these transformative commitments. We call on the world community to join the conference with compelling, transformative, and innovative commitments to drive and accelerate the change needed for all.

And to change, we need to get the economics of water right. The report by the Global Commission on the Economics of Water^[4] to be presented during the Conference should provide fresh, sorely needed ideas and perspectives about how to achieve better water governance and speed up actions across the world.

The conference must provide a roadmap for countries, sectors and river basins seeking better outcomes for all, on all water related challenges, for accelerating the delivery of the SDGs. Water presents us with our best opportunity to do so, if we radically change the way we understand, value and manage water. This is a topic none of us can afford to ignore. For water is, after all, the very wellspring of life on Earth.

Water as a source of our life deserves to be highly respected, valued, and praised. Let's be united for water action in New York in March and beyond!

** The views expressed in this blog are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*

[1]<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/new-economics-and-governance-of-water-by-mariana-mazzucato-et-al-2022-09>

[2]<https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/state-of-global-water-resources-report-informs-rivers-land-water-storage-and>

[3]Ibid.

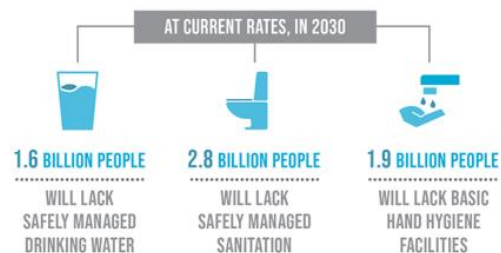
[4]<https://watercommission.org/>



SDG 6 IN NUMBERS



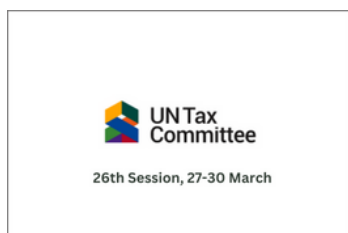
MEETING DRINKING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE TARGETS
BY 2030 REQUIRES A **4X** INCREASE IN THE PACE OF PROGRESS



MORE FROM UN DESA

- Shaping the future of global statistics
- Prioritizing the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable through risk-informed development cooperation
- How the planet's "lungs" contribute to our health and well-being
- Urgently transforming institutions for a greener, more inclusive, and more resilient world
- One year of the war in Ukraine leaves lasting scars on the global economy

COMING UP



[MORE EVENTS](#)

FIND US ALSO ON:



© United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
[Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)