United Nations 2023 Water Conference
Mid-term Review of the Water Action Decade:

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYMS</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECLAC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESCAP</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESCWA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWRM</td>
<td>Integrated Water Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ACRONYMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>KEY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ARAB REGION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>KEY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>KEY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND CENTRAL ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>KEY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>KEY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITY AREAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 2018 adopted a resolution on the “Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Sustainable Development’ 2018-2028” (RES/73/226). The resolution calls for a conference on the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the objectives of the Water Action Decade to be convened in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023. Also known as the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, the event was preceded by regional and global preparatory meetings and informed by water-related meetings convened at the regional and global levels.

The three main objectives of the Water Action Decade are to: (i) advance sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives; (ii) energize implementation of related programmes and projects; and (iii) inspire action to achieve internationally agreed-upon water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through enhanced cooperation and partnerships at all levels.

UN-Water is an inter-agency coordination mechanism on water within the United Nations family that supports efforts to ‘deliver as one’ in response to water-related challenges. UN-Water regional discussion groups were set up under the UN-Water Expert Group on Regional Level Coordination, established by UN-Water at its 30th meeting (Rome, 2019). The regional discussion groups comprise UN-Water members and partners, as well as other non-profit international, regional or subregional organizations with specific regional expertise on water-related issues and an established regional presence, or extensive regional or sub-regional networks of members or partners.

The following booklet summarizes input from the five United Nations Regional Commissions and UN-Water regional discussion groups to the United Nations 2023 Water Conference. The Regional Commissions submitted their input to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which serves as the Secretariat for the Conference. The inputs inform the United Nations Secretary-General’s report on the midterm comprehensive review before submission to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, as well as the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

This booklet provides a snapshot of the agreed input from the regional discussions to the global event, reflecting the diversity of views and experiences. It also showcases progress, opportunities and challenges identified in the five regions as well as cross-cutting issues of common concern.

Additionally, the document provides an overview of progress made in each of the five regions against the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation, and other water-related global mandates. Further, the document is aligned with the priorities within the vision statement of the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, “Our watershed moment: uniting the world for water”, which outlines that water is a fundamental part of all aspects of life. Water is inextricably linked to the three pillars of sustainable development. It is cross-cutting and supports the achievement of many SDGs through close linkages with climate, energy, cities, the environment, food security, poverty, gender equality and health, among others.
With climate change profoundly affecting our economies, societies and environment, water is indeed the biggest deal breaker to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UN 2023 Water Conference, 2022

Beyond the 2030 Agenda, the Water Action Decade also supports the intended outcomes of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris Agreement/Glasgow Climate Pact, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The proposed targets under the new post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework reflect the need to reduce loss of nature and maintain and recover healthier ecosystems, including freshwater ecosystems, and achieve improved outcomes for biodiversity. The Paris Agreement aim to improve climate mitigation and adaptation strategies is supported by national, subnational, regional and global efforts to improve water resource management, tackle water scarcity, and enhance resilience to prepare for the cascading climate crises in which water will become increasingly scarce and more variable. In turn, this also supports the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through better understanding of water risks. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda supports these initiatives through prioritizing financial flows for national water policies.

The following snapshots look at progress on water related goals and targets for the Water Action Decade, grouped thematically to determine regional progress and key challenges. Each region’s recommendations align with components of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, taking stock of the region’s capacity to finance, track, inform, innovate and govern the implementation of effective policies to tackle key water resource challenges.

All data included in this report are taken from the mid-term comprehensive reviews of the United Nations Water Action Decade implemented by the United Nations Regional Commissions across the five regions.
Caption: 7 February 2022, Ethiopia, Oromia and Somali regions - Halima Mehamed, 50 and a mother of 12 lost more than half of her livestock by the severe drought in her village in Gode Woreda, Waylo-dig Kebele in Somali region of Ethiopia.

Photo Credit: © FAO/Michael Tewelde
Water is nature’s most precious resource for Africa and the world. Water basins, catchment areas and ecosystems should therefore be valued, nurtured and protected to safeguard livelihoods and keep the threats caused by climate change at bay. Water is also central to the continent’s socioeconomic development and an important enabler for the achievements of the SDGs and the Agenda 2063. To this end, we have made the blue economy one of our programmatic priorities. Overall, Africa must commit to prudent use of water resources while maintaining the integrity of associated ecosystems to sustain its flow, for if water sources dry up, it would be the end of life as we know it!

Antonio M.A. Pedro
Acting Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Acting Executive Secretary of ECA
The majority of economies in Africa are heavily dependent on agriculture and natural resources that are inextricably linked to the availability of water and are highly sensitive to impacts of climate change. Being a cross-cutting resource, water is also crucial to the achievement of most SDGs and African Union Agenda 2063 aspirations through its close connections to multiple crucial issues related to development in Africa, including climate, energy, cities, the environment, food security, poverty, gender equality and health.

Despite the concerted efforts and commitment of African countries to solve the challenges of access to safe water and sanitation, the continent is lagging in progress towards many SDG targets and Agenda 2063 objectives because of the increase in population numbers, development demands, climate change impacts and the constraints of COVID-19, as well as a shift in budget focus to address the pandemic. The gap in achieving the objectives of the Water Action Decade in all SDG 6 targets has thus remained huge, as expressed in the latest Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Reporting System report that shows that among the population of 1.3 billion, 418 million lack a basic level of drinking water services; 779 million lack basic sanitation services (including 208 million practicing open defecation); and 839 million still lack basic hygiene services. Accordingly, Africa must do more in the second half of the decade for the continent to attain the objectives set in the Water Action Decade.

To address this challenge, the African Union at the heads of State and government summit level have taken decisions on policy actions aimed at accelerating access to safe clean water and sanitation that include: (i) a Continental Africa Water Investment Programme as part of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa – Priority Action Plan 2; (ii) an international high-level panel on water investments for Africa to champion and develop actionable pathways for mobilizing resources and closing the existing water investment gap in Africa; (iii) a climate change and resilient development strategy, adopted in 2022; (iv) an integrated African strategy on meteorology, weather and climate, approved in 2022; (v) and the African Union adopting the green recovery action plan as part of COVID-19 recovery.

Within this context and in response to the United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/212 call for regional consultations to review progress in implementing Water Action Decade goals, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission and the African Ministers’ Council on Water and African Development Bank jointly organized two regional stakeholders consultations leveraging each institution’s comparative advantages to review progress made and reaffirm commitments to accelerate implementation in the second half of the decade.

The first regional consultation for Africa provided a platform for stakeholders to take stock and reaffirm their commitment to solving the water crisis and to collectively implement the actions needed to achieve SDG 6 on water and the Agenda 2063, as well as formulate a common approach to the mid-term review conference and set out a road map for effective preparations towards the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

The second consultation focused on policymakers and senior government officials and was hosted by the Tanzanian Government in Dar es Salaam 7-8 November 2022. It provided a platform for inputs from government officials, the refining of the key messages developed in Addis Ababa in June 2022, harmonizing actions advocated for at the Ground Water Summit and taking them to the Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, and enhancing country-level ownership and accelerated implementation.
Ensuring access to safe clean water, sanitation and hygiene for all continues to be a challenge for many African economies. At the mid-term of the Water Action Decade, the continent is at great risk of not achieving the objectives set. As the single most important resource that cuts across all SDGs, greater focus must be made to bring water to the fore among priority sectors in policy, planning and budgetary systems.

Weak governance of both national and transboundary water resources undermines their effective and efficient management and use and therefore weakens guarantees of human health, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity. More needs to be done to improve water governance within overall national governance, strengthening the institutions established and fostering strong cooperation over transboundary water resources.

Inadequate and unpredictable financing weakens the capacity of African countries to increase investments in the water sector and to meet rising and competing demands for this vital resource. Governments need to create enabling environments to encourage private sector investment so as to augment meagre public resources and ensure sustainability in service delivery.

Climate change and rapid urbanization are heavily impacting the availability of water resources for economic development in African countries that are dependent on rainfed agriculture, while spontaneous and unplanned settlements are affecting the health and livelihoods of communities because of poor quality and polluted water systems. The decline in resource availability has hastened the competition and conflict over limited resources and this trend is predicted to worsen over time. Countries must develop effective and reliable strategies for coping and adapting to climate variability and change to increase resilience to extreme events.

Weak information systems in the majority of African countries mean limited capacity to collect data and monitor water resources, which affects countries’ capacity to collect sufficient quality data and produce critical analysis for the effective and sustainable management and use of this resource. Countries need to build effective systems and capacity for research and development to enable data and information sharing and advance actions to accelerate the achievement of the Water Action Decade goals.

Inadequate early warning and disaster preparedness leaves African economies, ecosystems and societies highly vulnerable to water-related disasters. This is linked to lack of finance, indebtedness, poor infrastructure and minimal capacity to generate and use information in a timely manner, which weakens many countries’ ability to put in place appropriate early warning systems and avert and manage water-related disasters that are occurring more frequently. Countries must invest more in appropriate early warning systems and develop effective strategies to prevent and manage water-related disasters.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the two regional consultation rounds in 2022, the following key messages were adopted for accelerated implementation in the second half of the Water Action Decade.

**Adopt the Dakar Declaration of the 9th World Water Forum:** Endorse adoption of the “Dakar Declaration: A Blue Deal for Water Security and Sanitation for Peace and Development” and invite the international community and all stakeholders to contribute to the effective implementation of the goals outlined in the 9th World Water Forum.

**Increase domestic allocations and investment in the water and sanitation sector in Africa:** It is imperative to raise the profile and value attached to water and sanitation in national systems for economic planning. Take actions related to financing and investment, including innovative and diverse sources of financing for the accelerated implementation of SDG 6. Promote increased efficiency of water use as well as reuse of treated wastewater and agricultural drainage for agriculture and industrial uses.

**A call to action to realize the full potential of the sanitation economy to benefit business and society in Africa:** Realize the untapped potential of private sector participation in the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene services for all as a profitable business. There is an urgent need to address the sanitation failures associated with the disease burden, which constrains the productivity of the labour force and degrades the environment. The African Sanitation Policy Guidelines provide the framework for promoting the sanitation economy.

**Enhance water-related disaster risk reduction and management capabilities in Africa:** Promote proactive approaches to flood and drought management centred around the pillars of monitoring, forecasting and early warning vulnerability and impact assessment, as well as preparedness, mitigation and response.

**Consolidate evidence-based and timely decision-making at all levels:** Prioritize investment for monitoring, evaluation, knowledge and information management and learning. Member States need to foster research and the application of knowledge and innovation to inform sector interventions targeted at improving assessment and monitoring, water governance and management, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene services delivery.

**Establish an African Ministers’ Council on Water multi-donor trust fund and a partners platform for transboundary water to facilitate transboundary cooperation.** Increased investment (from public, private or public-private partnerships) should be put towards scientific and innovative actionable research to enhance understanding of water resources and the links between research, policy and governance of transboundary water resources (particularly transboundary aquifers).

**Revitalize UN-Water Africa** for coordinated, efficient and effective responses to national and regional requests for expertise and technical support.
ARAB REGION

Caption: Abandoned irrigation canal, Draa-Tafilalet Region, Morocco.
Photo Credit: Romain Vidal
Water-scarce Arab countries face special challenges when seeking to achieve their sustainable development goals.

It is because for the Arab region, water scarcity is a matter of security. Water security. Human security. Food security. It is a matter of peace and security. Security which allows us health, prosperity and dignified life.

Water-scarce countries do not have the luxury to continue with business-as-usual. Water diplomacy is needed. Transboundary cooperation is necessary. Increasing finance for water is central. Water security is crucial. We must act now.

Rola Dashti
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of ESCWA
BACKGROUND

The Arab region is one of the most water-scarce regions in the world. Over 392 million people in the Arab region live with less than 1,000 cubic metres of fresh water per person per year, and 19 of the 22 Arab countries are considered water scarce.\(^1,2,3\) Nearly all Arab States draw upon transboundary water resources that cross one or more international boundaries. These conditions affect water security, energy and food security, as well as health, livelihoods and ecosystems. This situation is exacerbated by climate change, changing consumption and production patterns, inadequate finance and ongoing conflicts that affect the availability, accessibility, reliability, quality and affordability of water and sanitation for all. In 2020, over 49 million people in the Arab region did not have access to basic drinking water facilities and more than 72 million lacked access to basic sanitation services.\(^4\) The mid-term comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade presents a seminal opportunity for the region to collectively review progress made in achieving SDG 6 and to advance the role of water as a core determinant in achieving progress towards sustainable development in the water-scarce Arab region. At the current rate of progress, water-related goals and targets will not be achieved.

Arab regional engagement in the Water Action Decade constitutes resolutions, recommendations and positions adopted by Arab States in intergovernmental and regional forums, including those adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States, and regional consultations on water.

ESCWA, in coordination with the Arab Ministerial Water Council, led regional-level coordination and preparations for the mid-term comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade. This was supported by a regional inter-agency, multi-stakeholder task team, established by ESCWA in 2018 to coordinate the regional review of SDG 6 at the first regional preparatory meeting on water issues, convened a week after the launching of the Decade (Beirut, March 2018). The regional consultation resulted in a joint outcome document that consolidated the regional views of member States, regional organizations and experts on water-related priorities. Four priority areas were identified: (i) strengthening integrated water resources management (IWRM) to cope with water scarcity; (ii) enhancing cooperation on transboundary water resources; (iii) water is a core component of climate change adaptation and natural disaster risk reduction; and (iv) access to water services for all through improving water-related infrastructure.

The Arab regional preparatory meeting for the mid-term comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade was then convened by ESCWA in partnership with the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council in May 2022. Preparations were supported by an expanded consultative group that included members of the United Nations Regional Collaborative Platform Issue-Based Coalition on Water, Food Security and Nutrition and members of the UN-Water Regional Discussion Group for Arab States. It consolidated regional priorities and progress on internationally agreed-upon water-related goals to inform the global mid-term review in an outcome document. The main accelerators for moving forward towards the achievement of the goals were discussed, including Arab States’ initiatives and commitments to accelerate the achievement of the internationally agreed-upon water-related goals and targets.

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1 Scarcity classification is based on the Falkenmark water scarcity index for total annual renewable water resources per capita for the year. Three basic thresholds were identified; conditions of water stress for values below 1,700 m³ per person per year; scarcity for values below 1,000 m³ per person per year; and absolute scarcity for values below 500 m³ per person per year (Falkenmark, 1989).
4 Calculated based on WHO and UNICEF, 2021.
Integrated water resource management is essential for alleviating the impacts of further scarcity of freshwater and improving water security in the Arab region. Despite noted progress in IWRM implementation between 2017 and 2020, the region still needs to double its implementation rate in order to reach SDG target 6.5 by 2030, with the financing dimension showing the least progress. The following are crucially needed: coherent governance and effective coordination within and across sectors; evidence-based decision-making and policy coherence; improved availability of data and information access and sharing; leveraged innovation and technologies; improved master planning and management at basin level; stronger political will; multi-stakeholder engagement and a participatory approach; and unleashing the potential of women and young people.

Water for All: despite being ahead of global averages on SDG 6 targets on access to water and sanitation services, significant disparities remain between urban and rural areas, and situations of conflict and occupation present barriers to ensuring access to these services. Water and sanitation services are a human right and should be available to all, with special attention paid to the needs of impoverished and vulnerable groups, irrespective of their ability to pay for services. There is also a need to safeguard water services from conflict-related and other kinds of hazards, before and during crises, so as to prevent the reversal of development progress and the decline in water services resulting from protracted conflicts in the region.

Transboundary water cooperation is crucial as almost all Arab countries largely depend on transboundary water resources to meet their water needs, with a high percentage of transboundary river basins and aquifers lacking cooperative transboundary arrangements. Strengthening transboundary cooperation is essential for achieving water security in the region. Challenges in transboundary water cooperation include a lack of dedicated funding, limited data availability and data exchange, especially on groundwater resources, and the need for cooperative and knowledge-based water management that is supported by governance structures for transboundary cooperation, involving legal, technical and financial mechanisms.

Water and climate change: climate change affects water availability in the region, which is among the most vulnerable to climate change in the world. Adaptation to climate change is all about water in the water-scarce Arab region, which received 8.5 times more debt funding than grants and 3.5 times more support for mitigation than adaptation, with the most vulnerable countries not being reached. At the regional level, the six least developed Arab countries received just 5 per cent of total commitments and only 18 per cent of adaptation commitments (2013-2019). Increased investment is needed to strengthen resilience to climate change and extreme events, such as droughts and floods. Science can inform policies that enhance water and climate resilience, such as climate analysis provided through the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region at the regional, country and basin levels.
Water resource management and water use efficiency: estimated at $19/m³, the region lags behind global averages for water use efficiency, at $10/m³. Efforts to improve have achieved mixed success in the region; while some regional progress was achieved with the adoption of the SDGs, lack of data renders it difficult to assess progress. Irrigated agriculture uses a major share of water while producing low economic output in the region, which negatively impacts water use efficiency. Better agricultural water management can be achieved by improving irrigation efficiency and productivity through modern farming and irrigation systems, adopting smart farming systems, selecting drought and salt tolerant crops, increasing research and development, providing farmers with appropriate training in adopting modern farming systems, and increasing farmers’ participation in decision-making.

Water across sectors/non-conventional water resources: the region has a great need for cross-sectoral cooperation to enhance water availability and productivity. Cross-sectoral partnerships, cooperation, technologies and financing mechanisms, as well as institutional frameworks that link water and other relevant sectors, should be promoted. The use of non-conventional water resources in water-scarce countries should be supported through appropriate technology transfer, financing and capacity development that engages national and regional institutions and research centres as well as local knowledge.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Arab regional consultation process in preparation for the mid-term comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade identified several crucial accelerators for the achievement of its goals and water security for the region, including water financing, innovation, knowledge promotion, networking and capacity development.

Financing for water is a major challenge in the region, particularly for least developed countries and conflict and post-conflict countries. International concessional funding is needed, as well as public and private investment in the water sector. Governments are encouraged to improve enabling environment regulatory frameworks and explore new approaches for encouraging investment in environmentally sustainable water and sanitation-related infrastructure and services, while ensuring the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. International climate funds are encouraged to support projects that link water sector benefits with peace and security outcomes, with an aim to target financing and grants to fragile conflict and post-conflict States. The water sector should be supported through enhanced access to innovative and blended financing, including collaborative efforts by the public and private sectors to de-risk investment in fragile countries. Examples of blended finance include Islamic Development Bank efforts to work with philanthropic organizations, the Green Climate Fund, and opportunities presented by the ESCWA Climate/SDG Debt Swap-Donor Nexus Initiative. In addition, more climate finance is needed for adaptation and specifically for adaptation related to water. This should be in the form of grants and not debts.
Data to inform decision-making, monitoring and implementation: Data availability, accessibility and sharing should be improved, especially in transboundary settings, to better inform decision-making. Collaboration across regions and countries can support greater sharing and access to data. This should be further supported through the establishment of national and regional water data platforms and the use of new technologies, such as earth observation and big data, combined with improved data analysis.

Innovation: There is a need to foster an enabling environment to encourage innovation, technology access and private sector engagement in the water sector. Innovation should draw upon local solutions and indigenous knowledge, and it requires intensified research and development and linkages across sectors. Opportunities also exist for localizing the desalination industry to reduce costs. The private sector has an important role to play with innovation, upscaling and dissemination. However, innovation should not be limited to technology only; it also concerns knowledge. Water resource management can be improved by innovations in governance. Young people are key actors in innovation and technology for accelerating action on water.

Capacity development and regional knowledge networks: Regional cooperation and partnerships support the achievement of the Water Action Decade goals. For resource mobilization, using the comparative advantages of various partners increases synergy and is an effective way to mainstream water initiatives and interventions, as well as to enhance efficiency and impact. Capacity development programmes that provide start-ups with entrepreneurial, finance and marketing skills as well as technical training for water demand management and water-saving technologies should be implemented. Professional training in different areas of water is needed to strengthen knowledge and innovation; this also includes capacity development on water diplomacy. Given the high-water demand of the agriculture sector in the region, farmers should be trained on modern and efficient irrigation systems through the establishment of irrigation consultancy services.
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Caption: Terraced paddy fields, Sonla, Vietnam.
Photo Credit: Quang Nguyen Vinh.
Water is a critical natural resource and one of our most precious public goods, indispensable for human development, health and wellbeing. This is true especially for Asia and the Pacific, which only has 36 per cent of the world’s water resources but 60 per cent of the world’s population.

We must ensure that we protect water-related ecosystems, and we pursue integrated solutions to create synergies with climate goals, such as agriculture and energy.

2018-2028 is the UN International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, and the UN 2023 Water Conference will help build momentum and exchange solutions that can lead to accelerated actions across our region.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of ESCAP
BACKGROUND

The Asia-Pacific region has made considerable progress on improving economic and social welfare over the last decade. Water resources have contributed greatly to this transformation through water and sanitation hygiene (WASH), provision of basic services, agricultural expansion, food security and nutrition, and ecosystem services. This was most notable during the COVID-19 pandemic, where WASH and innovations in WASH service delivery were at the forefront of disease prevention. As a result, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, progress has been made to elevate water issues at the national and regional levels across the Asia-Pacific region. However, the region is currently not on track to achieve any of the SDG 6 targets by 2030.

Access to sustainable water resources is increasingly threatened due to overuse and pollution, growing populations, increasing water demands, water scarcity, a changing climate, rapid urbanization, inadequate sanitation services and a lack of transboundary cooperation. Despite the urgent need for solutions, it is often challenging to know where to begin. The most notable threat to SDG 6 progress is water stress. In the effort to ensure food security for growing populations, the status of available freshwater resources has largely been neglected in some parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

The mid-term comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade presented the Asia-Pacific region with a timely opportunity to review its progress against SDG 6 goals and objectives. The Asia-Pacific regional preparatory process is facilitated by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The regional consultation for Asia and the Pacific involved representatives of ESCAP member and associated member States, as well as the members of the UN-Water Asia-Pacific regional discussion group.

A zero draft input document to the conference was prepared by the ESCAP secretariat as a basis for discussion. It highlighted regional progress on the Water Action Decade, gaps in implementation, best practices, as well as recommendations to accelerate the Environment and Development implementation of SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and the implementation of the Water Action Decade in Asia and the Pacific. The zero draft input document was then shared with experts nominated by member and associate member States of ESCAP, as well as with members of the UN-Water regional discussion group for written consultation. The zero draft input document has subsequently been revised to incorporate comments received during the written consultation, resulting in the document that formed the basis of discussions at the regional consultation.
While there is significant variation in the status of key water resources in the Asia-Pacific region, during the regional preparatory process for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, the stakeholders involved identified specific challenges and obstacles for the region, summarised below:

**Water disasters:** The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most natural disaster-prone regions in the world, according to the World Meteorological Organization, and water-related hazards have dominated disasters over the past 50 years, making climate and disaster risk reduction a key priority for water resource management. Between 2011 and 2020, the Asia-Pacific region accounted for around three-quarters of the world’s population affected by disasters, and almost all of those affected were victims of water-related disasters such as floods, droughts and storms, highlighting the heavy social cost the region bears in relation to disasters. As the global community continues to fall short of key emissions targets under the Paris Agreement to slow global temperature rises, the Asia-Pacific region is beginning to experience more frequent and intense droughts, floods and cyclones; melting glaciers; earlier and shorter monsoon seasons; and disruption to groundwater recharge, including intrusion of seawater into aquifers as a result of rising sea levels. The current annual losses from both hydro-meteorological and geophysical natural hazards are estimated to be around $780 billion. These impacts are likely to hamper progress in achieving SDG 6 (as well as other relevant SDGs) and roll back progress already made, especially if adaptation and mitigation strategies are not swiftly implemented.

**Urban-rural divide in WASH access:** Expanding access to water and sanitation has been a priority for the Asia-Pacific region over the past two decades, however there are still some persistent challenges for the region. In 2020, 93 per cent of the region’s population enjoyed access to basic drinking water services; however, only an estimated 64 per cent had access to a safely-managed drinking water service that was accessible, available on premises and free of contamination. Only about half of the rural population had access to safely-managed drinking water services (52 per cent) and safely-managed sanitation services (48 per cent). Reaching marginalized populations in hard-to-reach rural areas, widely dispersed small communities, migratory populations, or people living without basic WASH services in informal settlements around cities and towns continues to pose a major challenge.

**Water pollution:** Water quality is degrading across the Asia-Pacific region due to increasing water scarcity, droughts and floods, urbanization, over-fertilization, industrialization and economic activity. Since the 1990s, water pollution has increased in most rivers in the region. Land-based plastic pollution, severe pathogens and other hazardous chemicals affect stretches of rivers, and the health of up to 134 million rural and remote inhabitants is at risk due to contact with polluted surface water. Among the most vulnerable are indigenous groups, women and children. Water pollution also gravely impacts oceans, marine biodiversity and ecosystems, while degrading coastal areas. It is projected that 70-80 per cent of untreated urban wastewater is discharged into freshwater reservoirs and oceans each year, leaving water systems open to organic pollutants and other hazardous chemicals.

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Increasing water scarcity: The most critical issue facing water resources and freshwater ecosystems in the region today is increasing water scarcity. The Asia-Pacific region is home to 60 per cent of the world’s population, whilst having only 36 per cent of global water resources, making its per capita water availability the lowest in the world. The region’s growing water scarcity is exacerbated by increasing water demand for agricultural production. The agricultural sector in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in South, East and Southeast Asia, continues to grow, extracting record quantities of water resources. Irrigated agriculture currently accounts for approximately 85 per cent of extracted groundwater in most Asian countries. Over the coming decade, water over-withdrawal will likely intensify as the population expands at a rate of 0.6 per cent per annum, with an additional 322 million people by 2030. The key challenge for the region moving forward is managing and prioritizing quality water resources for both human and ecosystem use against the backdrop of increasing water scarcity and direct competition between different sectors.

Poor implementation of water policy instruments for IWRM: There have been steady improvements in the implementation of IWRM across the Asia-Pacific region; in 2021, the Global Water Partnership and United Nations Environmental Programme-DHI noted that 13 countries in the region had high or very high levels of implementation, 19 had medium-high, 21 medium-low, and 5 low. However, despite the implementation of IWRM strategies, water management challenges remain prevalent due to limited implementation of water policy instruments. For example, no country in Asia systemically and regularly monitors water withdrawal and use, information needed for rational water planning and allocation. Siloed policymaking, weak monitoring, poor intersectoral coordination, inadequate data and lack of resources and capacity remain major hindrances in countries with limited implementation of policy instruments.

Transboundary river cooperation: There are currently 780 million people in South and Southeast Asia that are dependent on transboundary rivers. Asia is home to 57 transboundary river basins, which account for 39 per cent of the continent’s land surface. Of these river basins, only 10 are covered by basin-wide agreements, 15 are partially covered and 32 are not covered. In Central, East, South and Southeast Asia combined, only 6 out of 15 countries have 90 per cent or more of their shared river basin areas covered by operational arrangements. As a result, implementing IWRM in transboundary contexts is increasingly challenging.

Transboundary aquifer cooperation: There are significant gaps in water policy and agreements for transboundary aquifers across the Asia-Pacific region. A global inventory of transboundary aquifers identified 129 in Asia, covering approximately 9 million km², or about 20 per cent of the entire region. In Asia, transboundary aquifers experience high Aquifer Stress Index levels, defined as groundwater exploitation rate divided by aquifer recharge. Notably, over 50 per cent of aquifers in Asia report high Aquifer Stress Index levels. In Southeast Asia, the increasing over-exploitation of groundwater abstraction in the Mekong Delta region has resulted in the continuous depletion of groundwater resources and related environmental issues, such as land subsidence, salinization and ripening of acid sulphate soil. However, despite this growing threat, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region do not have effective legal and institutional instruments to regulate the use of groundwater resources, and only a limited number of bilateral agreements exist for transboundary aquifers.
To accelerate progress on the delivery of SDG 6 and reverse the current regression on some targets, the following actions are recommended for priority consideration:

**Improve governance and cooperation through inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches** and develop a shared vision from local to transboundary levels for water and wastewater management within and across basins. This should be informed by rights-based approaches and gender-responsive principles and standards, including water accounting, water allocation processes and river basin planning and evaluation, accountable institutions, and better management. Such efforts should include initiatives that encourage and foster women’s leadership and effective participation in these processes.

**Improve data collection and sharing** that underpins water accounting, informs sustainable management and use of water resources, increases access to safely-managed drinking water and sanitation services, promotes transparent allocation of water, improves water quality and groundwater status, and helps model future scenarios. This task involves academic and research institutions, agencies and Governments at all levels and needs to be accompanied by active and open data sharing and cooperation between these institutions and countries. This entails improving the capacities and funding of national statistical offices to support the collection of location-, age- and sex-disaggregated data that informs these efforts.

**Strengthen national institutions** and institutional coordination across administrative scales, especially on water quality, wastewater and groundwater management, climate change and disasters, climate finance for national water accounting and allocation, and professionalization for young people, as well as decentralization (including enfranchisement of marginalized water users).

**Increase funding**, especially for water accounting, WASH, wastewater management and disaster risk reduction, and support for regional collaboration. This includes regulations to direct investment towards effective water management, clean production systems and to prevent pollution and disasters. Increase public financing for WASH services for marginalized populations who may not benefit equally from economic prosperity and overall improvements in basic services.

**Use integrated approaches** that address protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, promote nature-based solutions and foster citizen action for river restoration. This will enhance the linkages between water and disaster risk-reduction, climate adaptation and mitigation, energy and health. Prioritize improving water quality by regulating polluters, enforcing and incentivizing compliance, and investing in water treatment and infrastructure.

**Enhance agricultural production with consideration of climate change adaptation and water supply limitations** and increase water storage where possible to secure water availability (while taking care of river and ecosystem health), through diversification of crops and improved understanding of water use efficiency measures that address misconceptions surrounding water savings. Maximize the potential for re-use of domestic wastewater and treated effluent in agriculture.

**Support gender equality, disability and social inclusion** through inclusive methodologies for consultation and outreach to different stakeholders in the design and implementation of relevant policies and strategies. This is crucial to promoting transparency of policy processes and regulatory arrangements. Engaging marginalized groups in evaluating impacts of policies and related interventions allows policymakers to assess their efforts in terms of their responsiveness to these groups’ challenges and needs.
EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND CENTRAL ASIA

Caption: Anti-mudflow protection facilities on the Dushanbe River, Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Photo Credit: Freepik@user33070112
Water is key for health, environment, peace, climate action and sustainable development in the UNECE region and globally. We need to make it a catalyst for cooperation and partnership rather than a driver of conflict – including among the 153 countries worldwide that share water resources. I encourage all UN Member States worldwide to join the Water Convention to support transboundary water cooperation. I also invite all countries in the Pan-European region to join the Protocol on Water and Health. These key instruments can translate commitments into action towards the achievement of SDG 6 and other Sustainable Development Goals.

Olga Algayerova
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of UNECE
Despite some progress, the Europe, Central Asia and North America region is not on track to achieve SDG 6. This hampers the achievement of many other goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Over the last years, the region has made important progress towards achieving water and sanitation for all, but efforts need to be accelerated to address the significant challenges that persist. While the population of the region enjoys relatively high access to basic sanitation and drinking water services, access to safely-managed services is significantly lower, with important differences between urban and rural populations. Efforts to protect and restore essential water-related ecosystems are disparate across the region, with considerable degradation of lakes, rivers and wetlands occurring in many countries and basins, including the fragmentation of river systems and increasing pollution to water bodies. The availability of freshwater resources is changing, driven by economic development and climate change. Diffuse pollution and wastewater discharges remain significant, and some pollutants are of public health concern. Floods and droughts in 2022 have shown the severity of climate change impacts on water. Progress is needed on implementing IWRM as well as transboundary water cooperation, especially on aquifers and in some basins, particularly in South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) assists Governments and stakeholders in acceleration of progress to achieve SDG 6, including through advice, coordination and exchange of experience. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) hosted by ECE is a crucial global legal instrument and intergovernmental platform that helps to strengthen cooperation for the sustainable use of transboundary water resources. Through its intergovernmental platform, projects on the ground and activities, for example on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus and adaptation to climate change, the Water Convention promotes water governance and contributes to regional integration and peace.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences have focused attention on the importance of access to WASH services, they have also hampered progress. The Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by ECE and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, is a unique legally binding instrument aimed at protecting human health through better water management and by reducing water-related diseases. It provides a practical framework for translating into practice the human rights to water and sanitation and for implementing SDG 6. ECE work on economic cooperation, energy, innovation and statistics allows the tackling of the interconnected challenges of sustainable development in an integrated manner.

The Pan-European regional preparatory meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference (Geneva/hybrid, 12-13 April 2022) organized by ECE and chaired by Austria aimed at contributing a regional perspective to the effective review and implementation of the Water Action Decade in order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The meeting discussed regional challenges and good practices, identified regional priorities and inspired commitments and initiatives that create impact and contribute to the implementation of the Water Action Decade. It highlighted actions and priorities on access to water and sanitation, transboundary and intersectoral water cooperation, ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, pollution prevention, floods and droughts, financing water, and circular economy. Key messages and actions needed to strengthen WASH resilience to climate change and future pandemics were discussed during the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Geneva, 16-18 November 2022) and submitted as input to the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.
There is considerable diversity between sub-regions of Europe, Central Asia and North America in the range of freshwater challenges. However, during the Pan-European regional preparatory meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, the stakeholders identified specific challenges and obstacles for the region, summarized below:

**Gaps in access to WASH services:** In the Europe, Central Asia and North America region, about 175 million people still do not have access to safely-managed drinking water services; around 245 million people lack access to safely-managed sanitation facilities; and 140,000 practice open defecation, making them vulnerable to water-related diseases. Annually, 2,700 people in the region die from WASH-related diarrheal diseases. Making progress in this area is key for human health and well-being, including preparedness and response to possible future pandemics, socioeconomic development and human dignity. Despite overall progress at the regional level, there are marked disparities between urban and rural areas, problems of affordability and access by vulnerable groups and in settings such as schools, hospitals and workplaces.

**Pollution of water bodies:** Thanks to advances in wastewater treatment, point source water pollution has decreased overall across the region. However, diffuse pollution and wastewater discharge remain significant in many countries. Persistent organic pollutants are also a great public health concern. Plastic pollution, including macro, micro and nano plastics, is a common concern for freshwaters and seas. The fast development of the mining sector, also driven by the growing demand for clean energy technologies and digitalization of economic sectors, represents additional pollution risks when not coupled with strong policies and enforcement mechanisms.

**Climate change impact and ecosystems threats:** Climate change impacts are exacerbated through various water-related phenomena, water-borne diseases and changes in aquatic ecosystems. Climate change already costs the Europe, Central Asia and North America region billions of dollars annually. Financing of water-related climate projects has been limited and setting up bankable projects is difficult in some sub-regions. Freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the region are threatened, including by flow alteration from, for example, dams and embankments, as well as impacts of climate change. Overuse of groundwater is also a growing challenge in many sub-regions.

**Weak governance:** Growing water demands in view of increased water stress and scarcity call for improved vertical and horizontal governance and intensified cooperation among stakeholders, sectors and countries. The Europe, Central Asia and North America region represents the most advanced region globally with regards to transboundary water cooperation as the Water Convention has strongly driven progress in this respect. Since its adoption in 1992, more than 90 agreements have been developed on shared waters. However, challenges and gaps remain, especially on aquifers and in many basins, mainly in South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The number of agreements dedicated to transboundary aquifers is extremely small. For the vast majority of transboundary aquifers covered by agreements or arrangements within the Pan-European region, such agreements or arrangements are not specific to an aquifer.
Knowledge gaps: water-related data and information are critical for advancing progress across all water-related targets and indicators in the Europe, Central Asia and North America region and globally. While many capacity-building activities on water take place in the region, needs persist, especially in some sub-regions and on certain topics such as the integrated management of surface waters and groundwater, application of a circular economy approach, climate change adaptation and gender mainstreaming in water management.

Financing gaps: the need to mobilize adequate public and private financial resources and explore financial innovation and partnerships is apparent for advancing progress across all water-related targets and indicators in the region.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority actions and recommendations based on lessons learnt and good examples in the Europe, Central Asia and North America region can be summarized as follows:

Increase access to WASH services in particular, but not only, for vulnerable groups: significant investments in water and particularly in sanitation infrastructure are needed. Such investments need to be climate smart and promote sustainable and circular economy approaches. For instance, nature-based solutions represent effective and affordable approaches for increasing access to safe sanitation in sparsely-populated rural areas. Policies and investments need to focus on flattening inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as inequalities linked to affordability and to access by vulnerable groups and in settings such as schools, hospitals and workplaces. Strong institutional and governance frameworks, which integrate water and health issues and foresee effective mechanisms for public information and public participation, are also key to make drinking water and sanitation available, safe and affordable for all. The Protocol on Water and Health and its many tools are effective vehicles for strengthening national governance for implementing SDG 6 and the human rights to water and sanitation. A risk-based approach, such as water or sanitation safety plans, coupled with strong monitoring and surveillance are key to protecting human health and the environment.

Improve water quality: overall, better and more coherent implementation of the existing legislation — including the Water Framework Directive, the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and the Groundwater Directive — would help to tackle diffuse pollution and improve water quality and availability. In particular, action must focus on preventing diffuse pollution and pollution at source, including by increasing the safety of industrial installations to prevent the risks of accidental water pollution, and by strengthening early warning systems. The guidance provided under the Water Convention and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents proves useful. Further research and action in this area, including in relation to emerging concerns such as micropollutants, are also needed.
**Promote climate resilience and ecosystem restoration:** water should foremost be mainstreamed into nationally determined contributions, climate change and disaster risk reduction actions, policies and plans. Integrating climate change issues in basin management planning is another important area. Developing adaptation strategies and measures, including joint ones in transboundary basins, is important along with improved regulation and monitoring. Restoring water bodies and water related ecosystems, including through reforestation, and expanding protected natural areas has proven effective in enhancing biodiversity and has brought important socioeconomic benefits. Still, efforts need to be scaled-up.

**Strengthening cooperation:** as most of the water resources in the region are shared, strengthening transboundary water cooperation is key for sustainable development, regional integration, peace and stability. Legal agreements over transboundary freshwater resources and associated joint bodies are fundamental. The Water Convention should be used to spur the development of agreements where they are missing and to strengthen joint bodies. Strengthening cooperation on transboundary aquifers is a clear priority.

**Improve data sharing and innovation:** increasing access to and exchange of data is vital to enable decision makers to employ quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data for analysis, planning and implementation of effective cross-sectoral action in order to leave no one behind on SDG 6. Decision makers need to combine traditional knowledge with modern technology and innovative methods by involving multiple stakeholders to increase the sustainability of water use and ensure sustainable water management, especially in water-stressed areas and transboundary basins. For groundwater, “making the invisible visible” via data and information collection, monitoring and exchange is imperative for tackling data gaps and strengthening governance. Scaling up capacity development and communication on groundwater resources is crucial for any progress in this area, and adequate resources should be provided to ensure this.

**Diversification and better use of financing sources:** Governments and national and international financial institutions need to improve targeting and effective use of existing funding, mobilize domestic resources, and attract additional and long-term investment from private and public sources to achieve SDG 6. The use of innovative financing and the creation of public-private partnerships should also be envisaged. Financing mechanisms should incorporate a human rights-based approach and integrate balanced gender representation. Investments in the water supply and sanitation sector should be supported by sector reforms to ensure sustainability.
Caption: 20 February 2020, Rupununi river, Guyana – Herman Phillips, 63, right, holding his bow near the Rupununi river. Phillips has lived his whole life in the Rupununi region based on a subsistence existence.

Photo Credit: © Brent Stirton/Getty Images for FAO, CIRAD, CIFOR, WCS
Water is the most valuable resource for maintaining human life, improving the quality of life in cities, and supporting local and regional economies. However, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 for clean water and sanitation requires a “big push”. The latter relies on strengthening capacities and governance as well as encouraging innovative sustainable investment that guarantees socioeconomic and environmental benefits.

José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of ECLAC
In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, 1 in 4 people do not have access to safely-managed drinking water (161 million people), and 7 out of 10 do not have access to safely-managed sanitation (431 million people). At the current rate of progress, SDG 6 will not be achieved by 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Considering this, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has led the development of the following initiatives to promote the acceleration of compliance with SDG 6 through coordination and exchange spaces that are preparatory activities for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

To promote the acceleration of the achievement of SDG 6, ECLAC has organized regional water dialogues since 2021. The 2023 edition, held 1-3 February in Chile, led to a collective and multi-stakeholder Regional Water Action Agenda that consists of commitment and prioritized actions for public, private and civil society actors in Latin America and the Caribbean. In preparation for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, the thematic sessions and voluntary commitments focused on: (i) water and climate (with a special focus on Caribbean countries); (ii) water and sustainable development (highlighting both governance and finance-related challenges); (iii) water and cooperation; (iv) water, energy and food; and (v) valuing water.

ECLAC also organized two open online consultations to explore regional priorities regarding water resources in the Caribbean sub-region for the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries. The results showcased pressing issues, which differed strongly by gender and by sub-region. Women respondents highlighted the problems of lacking and low-quality access to drinking water and sanitation services, while male respondents highlighted inadequate governance arrangements. In the Caribbean, the water-related climate change impact was highlighted while in Central America, drinking water and sanitation infrastructure was prioritized. In South America, water stress was raised as a particularly key issue for sustainable development.

In March 2022, ECLAC coordinated the consolidation of the Regional Group of Experts on Water Resources in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, whose mandate is to join efforts to promote the achievement of SDG 6, exchange relevant information and explore opportunities for collaboration to support the countries of the region in their journey to improve capacity-building, adopt new technologies and access finance for development. The expert group comprises representatives from over 20 of the most prestigious water-related institutions in the region. Together with these experts, ECLAC is committed to monitoring and supporting progress on the voluntary commitments expressed in the Regional Water Action Agenda of 2023 from public, private and civil society stakeholders. Actions regarding water and climate resilience, investment, innovation and integrated management were highlighted along with the need to set up participatory and democratic water governance mechanisms.
The region’s political and environmental diversity brings up different challenges between countries. However, a collection of regional challenges on water management in the Latin America and the Caribbean region can be identified as follows:

**Heterogenous water availability:** The Latin America and the Caribbean region has a per capita water endowment four times higher than the world average, however its reserves are heterogeneously distributed. While the average level of water stress is low at 3.5 per cent, the same indicator reaches 19 per cent for the Caribbean sub-region. The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report highlights that seven Caribbean countries are on the global list of the most water-stressed nations. The situation within countries is even more heterogeneous. During the driest months of the year, the most densely populated areas of Latin America record high water stress values (500 m³/person/year), comparable to the Middle East and North Africa.

**Gaps in access to safe drinking water and safely-managed sanitation:** The most vulnerable income quintile has 25 per cent less access to safely-managed drinking water than the wealthiest quintile and may proportionally pay up to two times more for drinking water and sanitation services. Similarly, there are marked differences between the levels of access in urban and rural areas. Inequalities in access to safely-managed drinking water are also apparent between countries in the region and are directly related to their gross domestic product (GDP).

**Impact of climate change:** Climate projections for 2050 and 2070 associated with temperature increases indicate an increase in precipitation in the western Amazon and southern South America of between 10 to 15 per cent, and a trend towards drought and reduced precipitation of up to 20 per cent in northeastern Brazil, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

**Quality and pollution of water bodies:** In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the proportion of water that is safely treated does not exceed 45 per cent. Almost a quarter of river stretches are estimated to be affected by severe pathogenic pollution, with a substantial increase of nearly two-thirds from 1990 to 2010. In 2016 alone, 5.7 million disability-adjusted life years were estimated to have been lost in the region due to diseases related to lack of access to safe water and sanitation, valued at $1.8 billion in 2016.

**Weak governance:** In the region, there are challenges in governance and management. Water governance is usually fragmented at the national level and lacks sufficient political visibility and hierarchy. In most cases, the water authorities are atomized and lack adequate coordination. There is a dispersion of water management in multiple institutions with various roles (extractors/producers, distributors/suppliers, regulators, inspectors and users). This, together with the territorial dispersion of institutions (national, provincial, municipal, urban/rural), often makes effective organization difficult. Also, the regulatory frameworks require updates to encourage innovation and efficiency, while monitoring is insufficient due to low budgets and technical capabilities.

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ECLAC proposes four pillars of action to promote a sustainable and inclusive water management transition in Latin America and the Caribbean as a regional strategy for the achievement of SDG 6.

1. **Human rights to water and sanitation.** To close the coverage gap that exists in the region by 2030, a great investment boost is needed.

2. **Equitable and affordable access.** Transform regressive tariff rates into progressive social tariff rates and subsidies for the most vulnerable segments of society, while concurrently ensuring responsible water consumption.

3. **Reversal of negative externalities.** Reduce the overexploitation of water resources and growing conflicts over their use through greater supervision and the introduction of instruments and regulations that promote more sustainable water use.

4. **Promoting innovative practices.** Transform the current linear water management into circular water management, providing incentives to the private sector to adopt cutting-edge and circular technologies.

ECLAC proposes that these pillars of actions are undertaken through public policy recommendations based on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework as follows:

**Investment and financing:** It is estimated that investing 1.3 per cent of the regional GDP annually for ten years would make it possible to universalize access to safely-managed drinking water and sanitation. This would lead to multiple socioeconomic (generating 3.6 million jobs each year) and environmental benefits. For the latter, it is essential to secure long-term public and private funding sources. In rural areas, the State is indispensable in the development of infrastructure, the establishment of subsidies and the regulation of providers.

**Data and information:** Timely, reliable and standardized information is required to improve water management. To date, the capacities of countries in the region to report on SDG 6 vary considerably. Changes are required at all levels to generate disaggregated data, especially for vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged groups. In addition, there is a need to share information transparently within and across sectors and borders.

**Capacity-building:** The lack of technical knowledge is one of the main limitations evident in the region’s governance systems for water resources, mainly at the local level. Further development is necessary to improve service levels and to create and retain employment in the water sector. Capacity-building is also central to designing incentives, new institutional and financial arrangements, and alliances for water security.

**Innovation:** It is necessary to promote investment and regulation policies in the productive sectors that strategically depend on water, encouraging the adoption of technologies that promote the reuse and recovery of water and lead to more circular and efficient water systems.

**Governance:** Besides the adoption of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in countries’ legal frameworks, it is essential to make progress on international treaties for transboundary waters that represent over two thirds of all superficial water in the region. There is also a need to set up mechanisms for the conservation of glaciers and wetlands. An effective national institutional framework is fundamental to implementing policies and plans for sustainable IWRM, for which an independent national water authority with sustained funding, political hierarchy and independence is indispensable.

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CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITY AREAS

Despite the five regions’ vastly different levels of access to water resources and their specificities, there are a considerable number of similarities in both key issues and recommendations for progress. Notably the following key issues have been identified as common themes between the five regions:

**Climate change:** While all five regions have been impacted by climate change to varying degrees, climate change is not contained to one country or region. The spill-over effects of climate change, including but not limited to environmental catastrophes, human displacement and climate migration, in one region are felt globally. As the regions face the changing nature of the climate and its impacts on water resources, there is a consensus that more transboundary collaboration, supported by data and finance, is required to support adaptation and mitigation efforts.

**IWRM and siloed policy making:** The successful implementation of IWRM is challenging in many contexts due to siloed policymaking, weak monitoring, poor intersectoral coordination, inadequate data and lack of resources, with limited implementation of policy instruments. This is highlighted in the Asia-Pacific and African regions, where capacities to implement effective IWRM approaches are low due to weak governance structures. This calls for more systematic approaches to IWRM policymaking – both at national and transboundary levels – that consider the wide range of water-using sectors and innovative approaches to managing competing priorities.

**Water Scarcity:** Each of the regions experience varying degrees of water scarcity. In the African and the Arab regions, water scarcity has long been a persistent challenge. However, regions that have long been considered water-rich such as the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe are now experiencing water scarcity in seasonal or local contexts. This phenomena is driven by the degradation of water quality via water pollution and environmental degradation of water sources due to overuse, aggravated by climate change. Overuse and water pollution are largely driven by the growing demands of populations, economies, industry and agriculture, putting enormous competing pressures on a scarce resource. In order to better address the nature of increasing water scarcity, greater emphasis is required on innovation in non-conventional water resources and on the collection of data on water and demand in order to account for water availability and prioritize quality water resources for both human and ecosystem use.

**Water pollution:** As global populations grow and inevitably industrialize, all five regions are set to experience greater water pollution, whether due to a lack of infrastructure to safely manage pollution or accidental pollution. Tackling polluters at the source is one of the key global challenges for water resource management. Due to the interconnected, or transboundary, nature of water, there is a need for countries and regions to work together to tackle this pervasive ecological threat.
Transboundary cooperation: Each region contains vast populations that are dependent on transboundary water resources for food security, livelihoods and economic activity. The persistent challenges associated with establishing cooperative agreements or arrangements for transboundary rivers and aquifers are hindering national progress towards achieving water and sanitation for all. This calls for greater cooperation over shared water resources, including the development of operational arrangements for transboundary water cooperation (SDG target 6.5), especially with the increased impacts of climate change.

The urban-rural divide in WASH delivery: WASH infrastructure in rural areas continues to significantly lag behind urban WASH infrastructure across all five regions, with inequalities compounded in rural contexts. This challenge calls for policies and investment focused on flattening inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as inequalities linked to affordability and to access by vulnerable groups and in settings such as homes, schools, hospitals, public facilities and workplaces.

While the common key issues are wide-ranging, the solutions and recommendations for a positive pathway forward for each of the regions is consistent. There is a call in each region for the health of water resources to be prioritized against the competing demands of population growth and economic growth. There is a call for water resource management to be approached in an integrated manner with informed policy and decision-making processes via the accurate and timely collection of water data (on availability and withdrawals) across all water-using sectors to enable countries to implement effective water accounting and allocation approaches.

There is a call for the prioritization of finance for all water resource management, especially rural infrastructure, to bridge the inequalities between urban and rural dwellers, including vulnerable and disenfranchised groups, in access to WASH and clean drinking water. Access to finance is a leading challenge in all the regions, calling for the need to diversify and innovate financial approaches to achieve this goal.

All five regions recognize the need to strengthen data-sharing capacities so as to improve transboundary and regional cooperation. In regions where data is lacking, there is a consensus that data collection and reporting is required to improve national water resource management initiatives.

While the five regions have identified key issues and challenges, there is also an opportunity to promote South-South cooperation and exchange, as some regions include countries that are leading the way in terms of water management innovation, climate adaptation/mitigation, or transboundary cooperation.

Recognizing that we are all inevitably connected by our water resources, rivers, aquifers, lakes, seas and oceans, localized challenges quickly become national, regional and global challenges calling for a global push to accelerate efforts to meet SDG 6 targets by 2030. Acceleration efforts should focus on financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation and governance, as outlined in the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. The United Nations Regional Commissions are united to collaborate as One United Nations to accelerate the achievement of SDG 6 and all water-related goals and targets.
### Sustainable Development Goal 6

**Ensure access to water and sanitation for all**

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<th>6.1</th>
<th>By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all</th>
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<td>6.1.1</td>
<td>Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services</td>
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<th>6.2</th>
<th>By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations</th>
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<td>6.2.1</td>
<td>Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water</td>
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<th>6.3</th>
<th>By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally</th>
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<td>6.3.1</td>
<td>Proportion of wastewater safely treated</td>
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<td>Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality</td>
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<th>6.4</th>
<th>By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity</th>
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<td>6.4.1</td>
<td>Change in water-use efficiency over time</td>
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<td>6.4.2</td>
<td>Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources</td>
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<th>By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate</th>
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<td>6.5.1</td>
<td>Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (0-100)</td>
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<td>6.5.2</td>
<td>Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation</td>
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<th>By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes</th>
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<tr>
<td>6.6.1</td>
<td>Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.a</th>
<th>By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.a.1</td>
<td>Amount of water- and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>6.b</th>
<th>Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.b.1</td>
<td>Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>