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**United Nations Conference on the Midterm  
Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the  
Objectives of the International Decade for Action,  
“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028**

Preparatory meeting, 25 October 2022

**Preparatory process of the United Nations Conference on  
the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation  
of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action,  
“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028**

**Note by the Secretary-General**

*Summary*

The United Nations Water Conference will take place at a crucial point in time. From food crises and devastating droughts to the loss of lives because of floods and heavy storms, from energy insecurity to the climate crisis, migration and conflicts, water is at the core of almost all major challenges. These challenges are faced by every single country in the world.

In its resolution [75/212](#), the General Assembly requested the President of the General Assembly to hold a one-day preparatory meeting, by November 2022, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, to finalize the themes of the interactive dialogues and other outstanding organizational matters, ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders. In the same resolution, the Secretary-General of the Conference was requested to prepare a background note for the preparatory meeting.

The present note outlines proposed themes for the five interactive dialogues, based on consultation with Member States, stakeholders and members and partners of UN-Water. The themes will be considered on the basis of the present note and finalized at the preparatory meeting, which will take place on 25 October 2022. In addition, the Co-Hosts of the Conference in a letter dated 27 July 2022 to Member States presented their suggestions for the themes of the interactive dialogues for their further consideration.



## I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution [73/226](#), decided to convene, in New York, from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, subsequently referred to as the United Nations 2023 Water Conference. In its resolution [75/212](#), the Assembly reaffirmed its decision to convene the Conference.

2. The present note was prepared in response to paragraph 9 (b) of General Assembly resolution [75/212](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to prepare a background note presenting proposals for themes for the five interactive dialogues of the Conference, in consultation with Member States and with the support of UN-Water and relevant United Nations entities. The Assembly also requested the President of the General Assembly to hold a one-day preparatory meeting, by November 2022, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, to finalize the themes of the interactive dialogues and other outstanding organizational matters, ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders, with interpretation services on an as-available basis. The present note should be read in conjunction with the contributions received from Member States, stakeholders and members and partners of UN-Water,<sup>1</sup> as well as the outcomes of regional preparatory meetings organized by the regional commissions.

### **Matter of urgency**

3. Despite the past steady progress in pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 6, the world is far from on track to achieving that Goal and all water-related goals and targets by 2030. Considering the role of water in food and energy security, for equity and equality, for health and urban development, for the global economy and for stability and the inclusion of all, understanding this complexity and valuing water comprehensively and managing it inclusively is critical to the world’s security and a major foundation for a better future. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further increased the challenge and the world must quadruple the rate of progress if it is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Water is connected to all the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals, including the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, among others. Water can play a crucial role in achieving the Goals, together with sustainable development in every economy in its three dimensions. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of sanitation, hygiene and adequate access to clean water for preventing and containing diseases. Considering the cross-cutting nature of water, there is a need for relevant decision-making and policymaking to move away from a siloed approach. Taking this into consideration, the Conference will follow three principles: to be inclusive, cross-sectoral and action-orientated.

5. The United Nations 2023 Water Conference will help to accelerate progress by reviewing the objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (Water Action Decade), which aims to advance sustainable development, energize implementation of existing programmes and projects and mobilize action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under the proposed themes, the five interactive dialogues of the Conference will identify challenges and obstacles to implementing the Decade and propose actions and initiatives needed to overcome them.

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation and other information is available at the United Nations 2023 Water Conference website (<https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023/documentation>).

## II. Outcomes of the consultations on possible themes for the interactive dialogues

6. Between September 2021 and March 2022, three sets of consultations took place on possible themes for the five interactive dialogues: (a) consultations with Member States; (b) global online consultations with stakeholders; and (c) consultations among members and partners of UN-Water and other entities within the United Nations system. Through these consultations, the Secretariat and Co-Hosts of the Conference received proposals on possible themes for the five interactive dialogues.

### A. Consultations with Member States

7. In his letter dated 21 January 2022, the Secretary-General of the Conference sent a letter to all Member States to invite proposals on themes for the five interactive dialogues at the Water Conference, together with a brief description of the rationale and background material. The initial deadline of 22 February 2022 was extended to 10 March, to align with the submission date of the global online stakeholder consultation. As at 31 July 2022, a total of 21 Member States (United Arab Emirates, Angola, Denmark, Kyrgyzstan, Israel, Algeria, Colombia, Uruguay, Egypt, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, Sweden, Argentina, Peru, Turkey, Kenya, Burundi, Senegal and Ethiopia, in the order of submission), as well as the African Union and the European Union, had submitted a total of 73 themes. The full text of the proposals was posted on the website of the Conference.

8. In terms of the regional distribution of the submissions, sub-Saharan Africa submitted the most proposals (6 proposals), followed by Northern Africa and Western Asia (5), Latin America and the Caribbean (4), Europe<sup>2</sup> and North America (4), Eastern and South-East Asia (2), Central and Southern Asia (1) and Australia and New Zealand (1).

9. The most common themes identified by Member States can be broadly classified under the following five clusters:

- (a) Water, climate change and disaster risk reduction;
- (b) Water and peace and security;
- (c) Nature and water quality;
- (d) Universal access to water and sanitation;
- (e) Water for agriculture and food security.

10. Other themes highlighted by Member States were health, innovation and technology, governance, integrated water resources management, gender and financing.

### B. Stakeholder consultation

11. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat organized a global online consultation to receive proposals from all stakeholders with regard to the potential themes for the Conference interactive dialogues. The online consultation was open between 10 February and 10 March 2022.

12. A total of 146 inputs were received from interested stakeholders in 46 countries. Contributions originated from all regions of the world, with the following distribution: Europe (42 per cent), North America (14 per cent), Asia (14 per cent),

<sup>2</sup> A total of 27 States members of the European Union were consulted for submissions.

Africa (10 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (9 per cent), Oceania (2 per cent) and other (9 per cent). The majority of stakeholders self-identified as representing non-governmental organizations (41 per cent), followed by educational and academic entities (12 per cent); business and industry (10 per cent); scientific and technological community (8 per cent); and other (29 per cent). The main themes emerging from these consultations were as follows:

- (a) Water, sanitation and hygiene;
- (b) Water and gender;
- (c) Finance, investment and infrastructure;
- (d) Interlinkages between water and climate change;
- (e) Data collection and sharing.

### **C. UN-Water consultation**

13. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Water developed the contribution from UN-Water on proposals for the themes for the interactive dialogues. The UN-Water members and partners held multiple consultations and discussions between September and December 2021, including at the thirty-fifth UN-Water meeting, and provided the proposals to the Co-Hosts of the Water Conference in December 2021. The following main options emerged from the consultations as proposed themes for the five interactive dialogues:

- (a) Four workstreams of the Water Action Decade, plus the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework;
- (b) Five accelerators of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework;
- (c) Water-related Sustainable Development Goal targets and global agreements;
- (d) Major water challenges across sectors and the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **III. Possible themes for the interactive dialogues**

14. The Co-Hosts of the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, Tajikistan and the Netherlands, in consultation with the Secretariat presented the following suggestions for the themes of the interactive dialogues on 13 July 2022 at the special event on Sustainable Development Goal 6 held during the high-level political forum on sustainable development. They also sent a letter concerning this matter to all Member States dated 27 July 2022.

15. The proposal from the Co-Hosts takes into account the consultations that have taken place over the past months, which yielded input from Member States, United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders. The results of the consultations can be accessed at the website for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference. In addition, the regional commissions organized regional consultations and identified thematic priorities for the respective regions (see [A/77/249](#)). In addition to the consultations, the outcomes of the preparatory process, including of meetings organized by Water Dialogues for Results in Bonn, Germany, the ninth World Water Forum in Dakar, the fourth Asia-Pacific Water Summit in Kumamoto, Japan, the Ocean Conference and the high-level symposium on water held during the Conference in Lisbon, and the second International High-level Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 in Dushanbe, were also incorporated.

16. The proposal also takes into account the rapidly changing global context, the interconnected and interdependent nature of social, economic, political and ecological systems and the challenges that these pose to the world. It recognizes that the ongoing water and sanitation crises are threats to everyone, as poor water management increases the risks in all aspects of life. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the systemic, interconnected and cascading nature of risk and shared vulnerabilities and reminded the global community of its common destiny. Populations are growing, agriculture and industry are getting more water-intensive and climate change is worsening. Without a functioning, resilient and risk-informed water cycle for all people everywhere, human health and environmental integrity will always be threatened and a sustainable, equitable future will remain out of reach. With this in mind, the following suggestions for themes are proposed for further discussion and consideration by Member States:

**1. Water for health: access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation**

Target 6.1. Universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water

Target 6.2. Achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all

Target 6.3. Improve water quality

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

**2. Water for development: valuing water, the water-energy-food nexus and sustainable economic and urban development**

Target 6.3. Improve water quality

Target 6.4. Substantially increase water-use efficiency

Target 6.5. Implement integrated water resources management

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

**3. Water for climate, resilience and the environment: source to sea, biodiversity, climate, resilience and disaster risk reduction**

Target 6.5. Implement integrated water resources management

Target 6.6. Protect and restore water-related ecosystems

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

Target 11.5. Significantly reduce death and economic losses caused by disasters, including water-related disasters

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems

#### **4. Water for cooperation: transboundary and international water cooperation, cross-sectoral cooperation and water across the 2030 Agenda**

Target 6.5. Implement integrated water resources management

Target 6.b. Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide justice for all and build strong institutions

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

#### **5. Water Action Decade: accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the Secretary-General's action plan**

17. These five themes are supported by the five accelerators of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework (financing; data and information; capacity development; innovation; and governance) and the three principles of the vision for the Water Conference (that it should be inclusive, cross-sectoral and action-oriented).

## **IV. Rationales for the possible themes**

### **1. Water for health: access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation**

18. The importance of water for meeting basic human needs was globally confirmed at the first United Nations Water Conference, held in 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, by the adoption of an action plan for community water supply,<sup>3</sup> in which the Conference recognized that all peoples have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs.

19. On 28 July 2010, in resolution 64/292, the General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are an integral component of the realization of all human rights.

20. While significant progress has been made in recent decades to increase access to clean drinking water and sanitation, billions of people, mostly in rural areas, remain deprived of these basic services. In 2020, around 1 in 4 people lacked safely managed drinking water in their homes, nearly half the world's population lacked safely managed sanitation and 494 million people practised open defecation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, Argentina, 14–25 March 1977 (E/CONF.70/29)*, chap. I, resolution II.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, 2000–2020* (2021). Available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/progress-on-household-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-2000-2020/>.

21. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of sanitation, hygiene and adequate access to clean water for preventing and containing diseases.

22. Unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation and hygiene lead to an estimated 829,000 deaths from diarrhoeal disease every year. This includes over 800 children under the age of five dying every day from diarrhoea as a result of inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene services.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the annual economic losses for some countries are estimated to reach up to 7 per cent of gross domestic product.<sup>6</sup>

23. Equitable access to safe drinking water and hygiene is critical for global public health, a healthy environment and social and economic development. Universal access to sustainable and climate-resilient services for water, sanitation and hygiene contributes to poverty eradication, gender equality and universal access to education. As water scarcity increases with climate change, providing affordable, safe access to water poses a challenge to developing and developed nations alike and will threaten gains and future progress in poverty reduction. Thus, access to sustainable and climate-resilient services for water, sanitation and hygiene constitutes the bedrock for the Sustainable Development Goals to build on and to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030. Yet, 2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water (target 6.1 of the Goals) and an estimated 3.6<sup>7</sup> billion people lack safely managed sanitation services (target 6.2 of the Goals). To achieve universal access to safely managed water and sanitation by 2030, current efforts must be quadrupled.

24. A lack of access to services for water, sanitation and hygiene, including facilities and products for menstrual hygiene management, disproportionately affects vulnerable communities and the lives of women and girls. Without access to those services, they are often unable to go to school or work, limiting their educational and economic opportunities. Ensuring access to services for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as wastewater management and services, is also critical, especially in pandemic and humanitarian situations, necessitating coordinated decision-making at all levels for protection, prevention and preparedness.

25. Safe water and viable ecosystems are often predicated on good water quality. As such, further pollution reduction and control is imperative, whether through unified water quality standards and their enforcement, common measures to control pollution, or other mechanisms. Given the multiple dimensions and interlinkages tied to water and health, solutions will require partnerships and collaboration within the global community.

26. To achieve the critically important universal access to sustainable and climate-smart water, sanitation and hygiene services, the global community, including receiving and donor Governments, the private sector, civil society and local communities, need to take on their respective responsibilities and implement the UN-Water Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework and invest in the key accelerators. This means good governance must be enhanced and political leadership must be increased, and that work must be done to ensure effective coordination and regulation. There must be investment in public financing to unlock household and private investment for sustainable and climate-resilient services for

<sup>5</sup> Anette Prüss-Ustün and others, “Burden of disease from inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene for selected adverse health outcomes: an updated analysis with a focus on low- and middle-income countries”, *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, vol. 222, No. 5 (June 2019). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2019.05.004>.

<sup>6</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Financing water: investing in sustainable growth” OECD Environmental Policy Paper No. 11 (March 2018). Available at [www.oecd.org/water/Policy-Paper-Financing-Water-Investing-in-Sustainable-Growth.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/water/Policy-Paper-Financing-Water-Investing-in-Sustainable-Growth.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund, 2021.

water, sanitation and hygiene and to develop capacity at all levels to drive progress and sustain services. Reliable data must support decision-making and better accountability and innovation must be promoted, leading to better approaches and meeting emerging challenges.

27. Only with concerted efforts will Sustainable Development Goal 6 be reached by 2030.

28. A transformative and inclusive approach is needed to ensure the safety, equity, availability, accessibility and affordability of water and sanitation services for all, leaving no one behind.

## **2. Water for development: valuing water, the water-energy-food nexus and sustainable economic and urban development**

29. Water plays an integral role in sustainable socioeconomic and urban development. All societies need to recalibrate their water use and governance so as to respect the hydrological cycle and the requirements of nature. In a context of rising demand, complex interdependencies and feedback mechanisms, as well as of climate change that manifests in greater variability in the water cycle, difficult choices will need to be made across sectors and at different scales. Good decision-making will have to be informed by society's values, objectives, understanding of interdependencies (consequences of choices) and means. An agenda that prioritizes the common good is needed. Guiding principles, such as those for valuing water as proposed by the High-level Panel on Water, will need to be operationalized. This will be an all-of-society effort. Water is everyone's business; it is a key driver of sustainable growth and it is crucial for poverty alleviation as an input to almost all production, including in agriculture, industry, energy and transport, for healthy people to live in healthy ecosystems. To combat water scarcity and ensure supply, integrated water resources management provides a holistic lens relying on efficient water use and reuse to ensure equitable allocation.

30. Lack of water security is still considered to be one of the major global risks in terms of crises and development impact. Neglecting water can have potentially catastrophic impacts on economies and livelihoods and could reverse hard-won gains in poverty reduction, job creation and development. The *United Nations World Water Development Report 2021: Valuing Water*<sup>8</sup> shows that waste and careless use stem from the fact that too often water is thought of exclusively in terms of its cost price, without realizing its tremendous value, which is impossible to price.

31. More than 1.4 billion jobs worldwide (42 per cent of the world's total active workforce) are heavily water-dependent, including work in agriculture, mining and industries ranging from paper to pharmaceuticals. Moreover, another 1.2 billion jobs are moderately water-dependent; although they do not use large quantities, industries such as construction, recreation and transportation do need access to some water. In total, 78 per cent of global jobs need water.<sup>9</sup>

32. Sufficient water quantity and quality are especially important at the water-energy-food nexus. Vulnerabilities within food and energy systems are often driven or exacerbated by water scarcity, quality and temperature. The direct link between water and food security calls for the discussion of sustainable agriculture, including hydrologically chosen crops, water efficient irrigation and pricing that reflects water costs. This requires improved governance mechanisms to allow adaptive water management.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Paris, 2021). Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243938>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

33. At another nexus point, water finance, investment and infrastructure are both essential to sustainable development and call for a paradigm shift to unlock new economic opportunities. The idea of a blue circular economy relies on strategic and impactful water investment to promote equity, peace and sustainable water access. Such a circular economy could be driven by water resource recovery and help to reduce waste and cessation of the tide of pollution affecting waterways and the ocean.

34. All shifts in water management, agriculture and the economy also rely on the advancement of technological and regulatory innovations, combined with experience, such as indigenous knowledge. Future generations will need water to live. Digitalization could prove imperative to better manage and conserve water resources and to address water scarcity and climate resilience. As innovations emerge, progress in sustainable development will be further enhanced by cooperation for the availability of knowledge and technologies.

35. Prioritizing this theme as one of the themes of the interactive dialogues of the Conference aims to show the importance of the availability of water resources for every economy. It aims to discuss the existing problems in water use and distribution and protection of water resources by various sectors, and develop concrete solutions to address them and encourage these sectors to take urgent action.

### **3. Water for climate, resilience and the environment: source to sea, biodiversity, climate, resilience and disaster risk reduction**

36. It is well known that water and climate are inextricably intertwined with each other. Undoubtedly, climate change is adjusting daily life, primarily through the impact on water resources. Within the 2030 Agenda, water serves as an essential connecting factor for attaining the various Sustainable Development Goals. As such, failure to adapt to climate change not only puts the realization of Goal 6 at risk, it also jeopardizes the achievement of most of the other Goals. As water resources continue to be pressured and affected by multiple risk factors, including climate change, resiliency and coordinated adaptation strategies will become increasingly necessary.

37. Climate change will affect the availability, quality and quantity of water for basic human needs, threatening the effective enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation for potentially billions of people. The strategic planning and operation of water infrastructure is essential to ensure clean, adequate and affordable supply of water for all. To enhance the resilience of critical water infrastructure, there is a need to promote multipurpose and nature-based solutions and strengthen institutional collaboration and regulations. Placing water at the heart of these strategies is an essential way forward and would help the water community to deliver its message to the climate community and a broader audience.

38. Water has a critical role to play in climate change adaptation. Climate resilience through effective water management can be achieved through sustainable implementation of integrated water resources management and water can play a major role in achieving effective climate change adaptation.

39. Water-related ecosystems, such as lakes, rivers and vegetated wetlands, are among the world's most biologically diverse environments and provide multiple benefits and services to society, making them essential for reaching several of the Sustainable Development Goals. Although they account for only 0.01 per cent of the world's water and cover approximately 0.8 per cent of the Earth's surface, they provide a habitat for almost 10 per cent of the world's known species.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

40. In addition, water-related ecosystems have significant economic, cultural, aesthetic, recreational and educational value. They support water security, provide natural freshwater, regulate flows and extreme conditions, purify water and replenish aquifers. Other services also depend on these ecosystems, which provide water for drinking, agriculture, employment, energy generation, navigation, recreation and tourism.

41. Many ecosystems, particularly forests and wetlands, are also at risk. The degradation of ecosystems will not only lead to biodiversity loss, but also affect the provision of water-related ecosystem services, such as water purification, carbon capture and storage and natural flood protection, as well as the provision of water for agriculture, fisheries and recreation. Wetlands accommodate the largest carbon stocks among terrestrial ecosystems, storing twice as much carbon as forests. Taking into account that wetlands offer multiple co-benefits, including flood and drought mitigation, water purification and biodiversity, their restoration and conservation is of critical importance.

42. Water-related disasters have intensified owing to climate change. Nine out of 10 disasters triggered by natural hazards during the past decade were related to water.<sup>11</sup> Water-related disaster deaths have more than doubled in the past 10 years. Over 90 per cent of disaster-affected people were affected by water-related disasters that also accounted for nearly 95 per cent of infrastructure loss and damage.<sup>12</sup> There is a close nexus between the climate emergency and water-related disasters. Floods, droughts and storms have caused most of the human and economic impact of all disasters combined. Furthermore, over 733 million, or 10 per cent, of the global population reside in countries with high or critical levels of water stress.<sup>13</sup>

43. The *United Nations World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change* estimates that 74 per cent of all-natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water related. Furthermore, during this period the total number of deaths caused just by floods and droughts exceeded 166,000, affected over three billion people and caused almost \$700 billion in economic damage.<sup>14</sup>

44. The current impacts and future anticipated risks associated with extreme events demand sustainable solutions for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. It is necessary to improve inter-agency coordination in water resources and disaster risk management, especially in transboundary basins, where it remains fragmented throughout most of the world. Drought and flood monitoring systems are also an important component of risk reduction.

45. Climate change adaptation strategies must improve risk management and resilience to extreme weather events leading to floods and droughts. Strengthening multi-hazard early warning systems around water would provide additional tools. Cooperation and partnerships can also contribute to advanced and risk-informed water resilience along coasts and among basins, including the cryosphere. Cooperation for groundwater is vital, as groundwater is an important resource for water security under climate change and drought.

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<sup>11</sup> See UN News, “Water-related hazards dominate list of 10 most destructive disasters”, 23 July 2021. Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096302>.

<sup>12</sup> See Sendai Framework Monitor. Available at <https://sendaimonitor.undrr.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> See UN-Water, *Summary Progress Update 2021: SDG 6 – Water and Sanitation for All*, July 2021. Available at [www.unwater.org/app/uploads/2021/12/SDG-6-Summary-Progress-Update-2021\\_Version-July-2021a.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/app/uploads/2021/12/SDG-6-Summary-Progress-Update-2021_Version-July-2021a.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Paris, 2020). Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372985.locale=en>.

#### 4. **Water for cooperation: transboundary and international water cooperation, cross-sectoral cooperation and water across the 2030 Agenda**

46. Water resources inherently transcend boundaries and sectors and are fundamental to ecosystems' health and well-being and thus our life support systems. This calls for enhanced cooperation to manage and protect these resources for sustainable development. Transboundary waters account for 60 per cent of the world's freshwater flows,<sup>15</sup> and support more than 40 per cent of the world's population. A total of 153 countries have territory within at least one of the 286 transboundary river and lake basins and 592 transboundary aquifer systems.<sup>16</sup> These systems are coming under increasing pressure from population growth, pollution, mismanagement and climate change. To ensure conflict prevention and sustain long-lasting flourishing economies, countries will need to work closely together to optimize the benefits and decrease the risks from these shared systems equitably across all stakeholders. These are not easy problems to solve. In many cases, these basins involve complex interactions between surface and groundwater systems, which need to be better understood, are strongly coupled to food and energy security and can touch on regional relations and economic growth.

47. Effective legal and institutional frameworks at global, regional and basin levels play a crucial role for cooperative water management.

48. Cooperation over water offers multiple benefits and contributes not only to water and sanitation for all (Goal 6), but many other Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to poverty alleviation (Goal 1), food security (Goal 2), health and well-being (Goal 3), clean energy (Goal 7), climate change (Goal 13), ecosystem protection (Goals 14 and 15) and peace and security (Goal 16).

49. For cooperation to be effective, there must be an increase in political will and heightened public awareness and commitment to promoting sustainable and integrated water resources management. Further cooperative decision-making will need to be inclusive in nature, involving local participation in conflict resolution and stakeholder engagement from all related sectors and across different scales.

50. Climate change, population growth and droughts that lead to water scarcity can damage productivity, disrupt supply chains and put water users in competition with each other. These risks affect sectors in many different ways, but cooperation and innovation are absolutely key to achieving resilience and to protecting the economy. Cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration between academia, practitioners and policymakers are the key to providing the highest level of water, energy and food security, sustainable development and adaptation in the face of climate change and other challenges.

51. In addition to cooperation in water management, regulation and governance, cooperation on data-sharing is also relevant to efficient water use and sustainable development. As such, data collection and sharing are critical for reporting, monitoring and decision-making activities related to Sustainable Development Goal 6. The standardization and openness of data management are also proven instrumental tools that inform decision-making by water utilities, commissions and authorities, as well as broader water users.

<sup>15</sup> See UN-Water, *Summary Progress Update 2021*.

<sup>16</sup> Christina Leb and others, *Promoting Development in Shared River Basins: Tools for Enhancing Transboundary Basin Management* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018). Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/244761521135162532/pdf/124326-WP-P160278-PUBLIC.pdf>.

## **5. Water Action Decade: accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the Secretary-General's action plan**

52. Water is critical for sustaining a healthy planet with healthy societies and flourishing economies. Investing in water is needed in order to eradicate poverty and address hunger. Water-related challenges, including limited access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, increasing pressure on water resources and ecosystems and exacerbated risks from climate change, population growth, droughts and water related-disasters, have received increasing attention in the global development arena and require urgent action by the international community.

53. To be successful, Member States and the United Nations system will need to respond in a coordinated and effective manner. In December 2016, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution [71/222](#), entitled “International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028”, to help put greater focus on water during a period of 10 years. On 22 March 2018, the Secretary-General released his plan for the Water Action Decade during a high-level event convened by the President of the General Assembly. The plan outlines current activities and capabilities of the United Nations system and international organizations and the operational set-up envisaged to support Member States in the implementation of the Water Action Decade.

54. The Water Action Decade provides a unique and solid framework to support the efforts of the international community to overcome water-related challenges. It is an important and timely platform to exchange views, raise awareness, define a common road map and take steps and interact on a wide range of water-related issues to maintain a resilient and sustainable society moving forward. The water action agenda will be pushed forward in the second half of the Decade through relevant existing processes.

55. The Water Action Decade facilitates reinforcing partnerships in the water sector from different perspectives, based on a cross-sectoral comprehensive approach in defining the most suitable road map for each country and simultaneously uniting various efforts by calling for action around the globe.

56. Work centred around the Water Action Decade addresses the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives, the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects and the furtherance of cooperation and partnership at all levels in order to help to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda.

57. The United Nations 2023 Water Conference represents the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the objectives of the Water Action Decade. Proposing this theme for one of the interactive dialogues of the Conference will promote discussion concerning progress that has been achieved and existing gaps and obstacles and concerning how to accelerate action towards achieving internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those in the 2030 Agenda.<sup>17</sup> The dialogue would also help to strengthen cooperation at all levels and

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<sup>17</sup> In its resolution [73/226](#), in addition to deciding to convene, in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, the General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General, with the support of UN-Water, the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other entities of the United Nations system, to prepare a report for the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, to assess progress in the implementation of the first half of the Decade. The Assembly reiterated that request in its resolution [75/212](#). That report is contained in document [A/77/210](#).

facilitate access to knowledge and good practices, as well as involve financial institutions and the donor community, as much as possible, in the financing of appropriate programmes and projects in the field of water.

## **V. Conclusion**

58. The United Nations 2023 Water Conference in March 2023 presents the global community with a unique opportunity to energize all relevant actors, across sectors, through improved cooperation, partnership and capacity development. In the journey towards the Conference, there is a need to strive for innovative solutions that create impact and set a clear agenda for the second half of the Decade and further until 2030, while promoting a longer-term approach and perspective, going beyond 2030.

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