

STATEMENT FOR THE 2023 UN WATER CONFERENCE

Water underpins every aspect of human and environmental existence and is a crosscutting element of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is therefore crucial for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Yet, according to the recently launched 2022 UN SDGs Report, around 2 billion people still do not have access to safely managed drinking water services, and about half of the world's population is not served by safe sanitation (most of them living in low- and middle-income countries). The report concludes that meeting drinking water, sanitation and hygiene targets by 2030 will require a fourfold increase in the pace of progress.

These numbers clearly show that we have been doing things wrongly. We need to ask why and learn from our mistakes. To ensure the needed acceleration towards universal access to drinking water and sanitation, developing countries must leapfrog traditional governance arrangements, business and financing models, and technological approaches in order to engineer water and wastewater systems that are tailored to their local contexts.

The shift in mindset needed to achieve this is challenging – but possible. Water has historically been a building block of a high-carbon economy. Today we can see a window of opportunity for turning water into a building block for the new low-carbon economy. Instead of planning huge investments in new infrastructure and services that would most probably be carbon-intensive, Global South countries can do things differently, promoting energy-neutral, efficient and productive use of water where the capture of value from water and waste is maximized. They must avoid the slow, costly, mechanistic and heavy legacy of centralised water systems – and can do so by moving to off-grid, distributed, flexible, and circular systems.

In this context, the next 20 years can be seen as the Golden Age for wastewater and sanitation. Great innovations are taking place in the space of non-sewered sanitation. Resource recovery and reuse can potentially generate money to make wastewater and sanitation systems financially sustainable. Countries in the Global South are now in a very strong position, as they are embarking on their wastewater and sanitation journey at a time when the various technologies to realise these options are converging.

The [International Water Association \(IWA\)](#), as the largest membership association for the global water sector, has an important role to play in this change process. Through our programmes and communities, we provide an open platform in which both innovators and adopters of new technologies and approaches can exchange insights and experiences, generating creative friction and thus bridging the gap between science and practice.

IWA's recently launched [Inclusive Urban Sanitation initiative](#) aims to reshape the global agenda on urban sanitation over the coming years. It forms part of IWA's work to promote inclusive, resilient, water-wise and sanitation-secure cities. Supported by input from a wide range of stakeholders (the public sector, operators, academics, regulators and other key actors), the initiative will build on current approaches to progress a widely applicable framework that can support elaboration and exchange of actionable guidance, case studies and peer exchanges and so advance inclusive urban sanitation, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

IWA also believes that young water professionals should be at the forefront of the design, development and implementation of current change processes. Through our [Young Water Professionals programme](#), we invest in and empower youth action within our association and the wider water sector, providing a space for our young members to network, develop professionally, and gain visibility. In this context, IWA will bring a delegation of young water professionals to the 2023 UN Water Conference, to actively participate in the discussions on how to accelerate action towards SDG 6, and later develop a publication on the critical role young people have in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IWA believes the severe water challenges that the world faces today require an unprecedented global response. This is why it is working together with its global membership of around 10,000 across some 140 countries, and in wider partnerships, to contribute to progress in water management globally and so build a water-wise world.



Kalanithy Vairavamoorthy, PhD

Executive Director

International Water Association