Increased Institutional Support for International Water Cooperation



Recommendations

Headline Recommendation

Strengthen the UN system's support to member states and its coordination of water matters by establishing UN meetings on water at the highest possible levels, considering a scientific panel on water, and promoting international cooperation. Use the UNGA Water Action Decade as a platform for policy dialogue, exchanging best practices, and building global partnerships.

Detailed Recommendations

- Strengthen the capacities of UN-Water to discharge its function as the UN's coordination mechanism for all agencies working on the implementation of SDG 6 and other water-related SDGs.
- Consider the creation of an intergovernmental multi-stakeholder platform.
- Establish an annual or biannual Global Water Conference.
- Consider the creation of a global intergovernmental scientific platform on water.

Challenges

The aspirations for SDG6 and other water-related targets are high. Global leadership is required to define a political agenda and jump start or accelerate action in support of them. Achieving the water-related SDGs and implementing the recommendations of the HLPW require concerted efforts by all stakeholders.

Water matters at the local, regional, basin, and global levels. National mechanisms and existing water-sectorial platforms will not suffice. As water is a global common good, protecting and preserving it is a shared responsibility that requires international cooperation. Most water-related challenges can be addressed at the basin or national level. Further global water stewardship is needed to support climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Water challenges contribute to people's displacement, food insecurity, ecosystem loss and degradation, and virtual water trade, which cannot be addressed at the national level alone.

The changes we need

The UN should effectively support the cooperation of governments and other stakeholders to deliver on the commitments made in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement towards a water safe, secure, resilient, sustainable, and inclusive access world.

Findings and conclusions

- Strengthen the capacities of UN-Water to discharge its function as leader of the UN's coordination mechanism for all agencies working on aspects of freshwater and sanitation issues. This entails a more strategic allocation of resources to UN-Water to carry out its coordinating role and strengthen the accountability mechanism that should go beyond the institutional lines among UN agencies.
- Consider the creation of an intergovernmental platform—in line with the 2030 Agenda. This platform would provide space to facilitate a sustained, even stronger focus on water on the global agenda; coordinate efforts across geographical areas and levels of development; be able to align water policies with other policy / SDG agendas; provide legitimate guidance for UN-Water and the engagement of all stakeholders at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and other relevant forums; and promote scientific evidence-based knowledge to support decision making. It would contribute to fill the gap identified by the report of the Secretary General¹. It would provide an incentive for national discussions on water and sanitation, benefit Member States by facilitating discussions beyond the sector and ministerial silos, and bring together experts from different sectors and ultimately improve internal coordination.
- It would be the recipient of and review the reporting and recommendations of the Water Decade's inputs from the regional economic commissions; may take into account inputs from the parties to the UN Watercourses Convention (UNWC) and the existing water-sectoral platforms, and follow-up on the advice and legacy of High Level Panels (HLP on Water, HLP on Water and Peace, HELP on water and disasters). It should facilitate discussions and promote national actions to realize the ambition of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. It would advise and oversee/ guide the work of UN-Water, including the integrated monitoring of all water-related targets.
- The strengthened UN-Water could serve as the supporting secretariat of the intergovernmental platform and all UN water-related events, including High Level meetings and conferences.
- The intergovernmental platform for water and sanitation does not form a new standing institution, organization or agency. In its minimal form, it consists of yearly or biennial global water conference, open to interested stakeholders.
- Set up a comprehensive global water and sanitation monitoring framework started already by UN-Water to follow-up and review at the HLPF with high-quality data.
- Benefiting from the positive experience of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) a global intergovernmental scientific platform "Alliance of alliances" on water and sanitation should be considered to strengthen the global evidence base on major water-related challenges; stimulate external research; and provide fact-based, transparent, and comprehensive information.

¹ The report of the Secretary General "Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a better future for all" highlighted significant gaps in thematic coverages of SDGs, including for SDG 6.