

## **Imminent risk of a global water crisis (UNESCO/UN-Water)**

*Paris-New York, 22 March* — **Between two and three billion people worldwide experience water shortages. These shortages will worsen in the coming decades, especially in cities, if international cooperation in this area is not boosted, warn UNESCO and UN-Water in the latest edition of the UN World Water Development Report.**

Globally, 2 billion people (26% of the population) do not have safe drinking water and 4.6 billion (46%) lack access to safely managed sanitation, according to the report, published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water and released today at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York.

Between two and three billion people experience water shortages for at least one month per year, posing severe risks to livelihoods, notably through food security and access to electricity. The global urban population facing water scarcity is projected to double from 930 million in 2016 to 1.7–2.4 billion people in 2050. The growing incidence of extreme and prolonged droughts is also stressing ecosystems, with dire consequences for both plant and animal species.

“There is an urgent need to establish strong international mechanisms to prevent the global water crisis from spiraling out of control. Water is our common future and it is essential to act together to share it equitably and manage it sustainably,” said the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay.

“There is much to do and time is not on our side,” said Gilbert F. Houngbo, Chair of UN-Water and Director-General of the International Labour Organization. “This report shows our ambition and we must now come together and accelerate action. This is our moment to make a difference.”

### **International cooperation: the key to access to water for all**

Nearly every water-related intervention involves some kind of cooperation. Growing crops require shared irrigation systems among farmers. Providing safe and affordable water to cities and rural areas is only possible through a communal management of water-supply

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and sanitation systems. And cooperation between these urban and rural communities is essential to maintaining both food security and uphold farmer incomes.

Managing rivers and aquifers crossing international borders makes matters all the more complex. While cooperation over transboundary basins and aquifers has been shown to deliver many benefits beyond water security, including opening additional diplomatic channels, only 6 of the world's 468 internationally shared aquifers are subject to a formal cooperative agreement.

On this World Water Day, the United Nations calls for boosting international cooperation over how water is used and managed. This is the only way to prevent a global water crisis in the coming decades.

### **Partnerships and people's participation increase benefits**

Environmental services, such as pollution control and biodiversity, are among the shared benefits most often highlighted in the report, along with data/information-sharing and co-financing opportunities. For example, 'water funds' are financing schemes that bring together downstream users, like cities, businesses, and utilities, to collectively invest in upstream habitat protection and agricultural land management to improve overall water quality and/or quantity.

Mexico's Monterrey Water Fund, launched in 2013, has maintained water quality, reduced flooding, improved infiltration and rehabilitated natural habitats through co-financing. The success of similar approaches in Sub-Saharan Africa, including the Tana-Nairobi river watershed, which supplies 95% of the Nairobi's freshwater and 50% of Kenya's electricity, illustrate the global potential of such partnerships.

Inclusive stakeholder participation also promotes buy-in and ownership. Involving the end-users in planning and implementing water systems creates services that better match the needs and resources of poor communities, and increases public acceptance and ownership. It also fosters accountability and transparency. In displacement camps in the Gedo region of Somalia, residents elect water committees that operate and maintain the waterpoints that supply tens of thousands of people. Committee members partner with local water authorities of the host communities to share and manage water resources.

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The United Nations World Water Development Report is published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water and its production is coordinated by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme. The report gives insight into the main trends concerning the state, use and management of freshwater and sanitation, based on work by Members and Partners of UN-Water. Launched in conjunction with World Water Day, the report provides decision-makers with knowledge and tools to formulate and implement sustainable water policies. It also offers best practice examples and in-depth analyses to stimulate ideas and actions for better stewardship in the water sector and beyond.

### Read more

- [UN 2023 Water Conference](#)
- [World Water Day](#) celebrated on 22 March
- [UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme \(WWAP\)](#)

### Media Contacts:

UNESCO: François Wibaux, [f.wibaux@unesco.org](mailto:f.wibaux@unesco.org), +33145680746

UN-Water: Daniella Bostrom Couffe, [daniella.bostrom@unwater.org](mailto:daniella.bostrom@unwater.org), +41796609284

UNESCO WWAP: Simona Gallese, [s.gallese@unesco.org](mailto:s.gallese@unesco.org), +390755911026

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