

Putting Water on the Global Agenda



Water is an essential resource, yet its critical importance is often underrepresented in global policy discussions. With climate change, population growth, and industrialization putting increasing pressure on freshwater sources, the world is facing a looming water crisis. Access to clean water is a human right, and addressing water scarcity is central to achieving sustainability, food security, and health for all.

According to the United Nations, over 2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and water scarcity affects more than 40% of the global population. As the demand for freshwater outpaces supply in many regions, the global community must urgently place water at the center of the international agenda.

To elevate water on the global agenda, it is crucial to integrate water management into climate action plans, international development goals, and geopolitical strategies. Policymakers must prioritize investment in water infrastructure, conservation technologies, and collaborative solutions that promote equitable access to this life-sustaining resource. Furthermore, international bodies, governments, and civil society need to advocate for stronger water governance, ensuring that global water security becomes a cornerstone of future planning.

The Need for Global Water Governance

To effectively manage this global crisis, it is imperative that water becomes a key issue in international negotiations, development strategies, and environmental policies. Despite its transboundary nature, water governance remains fragmented, with inconsistent regulations and conflicting interests between nations and regions. International cooperation is essential to managing shared water resources, particularly in regions where rivers, lakes, and aquifers cross national boundaries. Multilateral agreements and frameworks, such as those promoted by the UN Water Convention, must be strengthened to foster collaboration, prevent water-related conflicts, and ensure equitable access for all.

By putting water at the forefront of global discussions, we can safeguard ecosystems, promote economic development, and ensure that future generations have the resources they need to thrive. The time to act is now.

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Director

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Zambia joins UN Water Convention to boost cooperation to address drought and water challenges

as



10 September 2024

In response to severe drought and ongoing water scarcity, Zambia has joined the UN Water Convention to improve water management both within and across its borders. The country, which declared a National Crisis and Emergency in February 2024 due to a drought that has severely impacted food and energy production for its population of over 21 million people, sits within the cross-border Zambezi and Congo River basins.

Zambia is the 55th country (and 12th from Africa) to join the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UN Water Convention), following closely the accessions of Cote D'Ivoire and Zimbabwe in July. This further consolidates the strong momentum for water cooperation in Africa, where more than 90% of freshwater rivers, lakes and aquifers are shared by two or more countries.

Honourable Engineer Collins Nzovu, MP, Minister of Water Development and Sanitation of Zambia, recognized that “Zambia’s accession to the United Nations Water Convention is a strong instrument to help us reach water-related sustainable development goals and to support global adaptation action which will lead to enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation in transboundary water resources management particularly now as we face the devastating effects of climate change in the region”.

Southern Africa is facing extreme water stress where several countries have declared national drought emergencies in the past year. Alongside Namibia as the first Party in the region in 2023 and Zimbabwe in 2024,

well as Botswana and Tanzania currently in accession processes and Malawi having indicated its readiness to start the process, this creates the enabling conditions for others to join and maximize the relevance and usefulness of the UN Water Convention and its related tools.

The recent results of the 3rd reporting exercise measuring progress to achieve SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation further demonstrate Zambia’s commitment to strengthen transboundary cooperation over increasingly scarce shared water resources, improving from having 70% of all its shared basins covered by operational agreements for cooperation in 2020, to 77.7% in 2023. Despite this progress, challenges remain, and the Water Convention can help, specifically via its Programme of Work and associated tools and guidance materials.

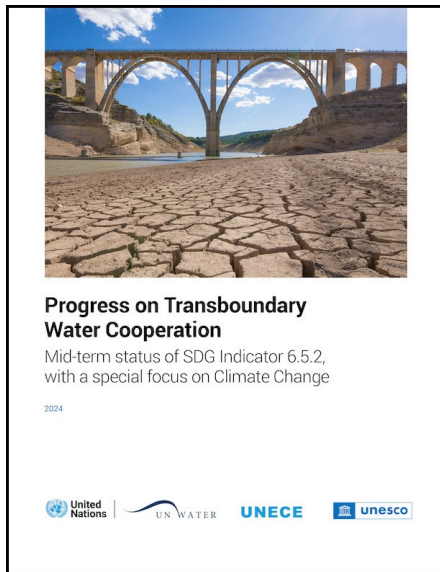
Zambia is already a party to several basin agreements and a member State of the associated river basin organisations-including Zambezi River Authority (ZRA), Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM) and Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA). Since 2022, the Convention has also been assisting Zambia to become a Party to the Commission Internationale du Bassin Congo-Oubangui-Sangha (CICOS). Zambia is also a party to the 2000 Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses.

The Water Convention has also facilitated the First round of Technical & Planning Negotiations of the Draft ‘Agreement on the Establishment of the Luapula River and Lake Mweru Authority’ between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zambia in April 2024

In addition, in December 2023, Zambia, Ghana and Hungary embarked on a Convention Twinning Initiative that aimed to support accession and also involves transboundary water allocation, hydro-diplomacy among its technical areas of cooperation.

Source : <https://unece.org/climate-change/press/zambia-joins-un-water-convention-boost->

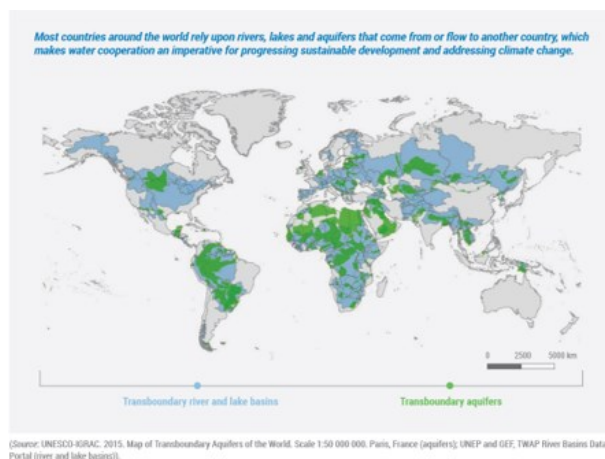
Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation – 2024 Update



01 October 2024

Target 6.5 is: “By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.”

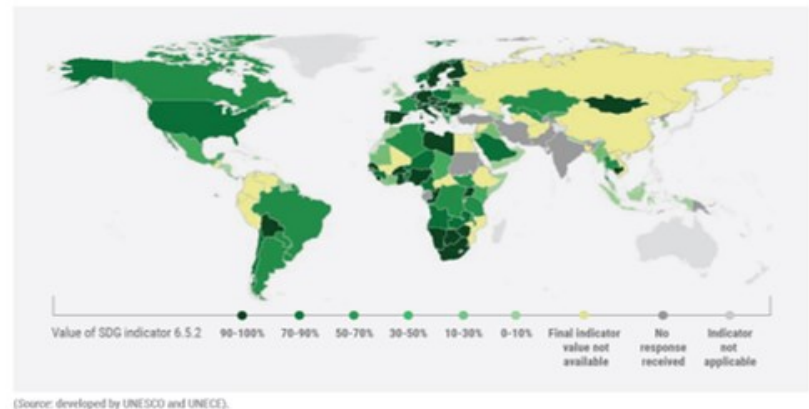
Indicator 6.5.2 looks at the area of a country within transboundary basins and assesses the extent to which that area is covered by operational cooperation arrangements. Transboundary basins are river, lake and aquifer systems shared between two or more countries. Arrangements are “operational” when there is a joint body, meetings between countries take place and information is exchanged at least once per year, and joint or coordinated management plans or objectives for the basin(s) have been set.



3.1 Global progress in transboundary water cooperation

3.1.1 Overview of SDG indicator 6.5.2 value

Figure 10: Global map of SDG indicator 6.5.2 value per country (2024).



Transboundary waters are of great significance globally. An estimated 313 rivers and lakes, and 468 aquifers, are shared by two or more countries, and a total of 153 UN Member States are reliant on waters that either flow from or flow to another country. Transboundary rivers alone account for 60 per cent of the world’s freshwater flows, and river and lake basins are home to more than three billion people.

This report presents the global status on transboundary cooperation and acceleration needs to achieve target 6.5 by 2030, based on the latest data on indicator 6.5.2.

The global average of the SDG indicator 6.5.2 value is 59 per cent. This means that, for the 117 countries where the SDG indicator can be calculated, on average, a country has 59 per cent of its transboundary basin area covered by operational arrangements. This figure has not changed significantly since 2017 and 2020. A significant portion of transboundary basin area therefore remains uncovered by cooperative arrangements.

Source: <https://www.unwater.org/publications/progress-transboundary-water-cooperation-2024-update>

UN Secretary-General: Rising seas mean rising “misery”

UNITED NATIONS – For the first time, the United Nations convened a high-level meeting to address the global threats posed by rising sea levels. Secretary-General **António Guterres** warned attendees on Wednesday that “rising seas mean a rising tide of misery.”

Nations define themselves by their territorial boundaries. But those participating in the high-level meeting were seeking to update international law to reflect the reality of a warming planet and sinking coastlines. The Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations **Dennis Francis** described the mood as “one of consensus and solidarity.”

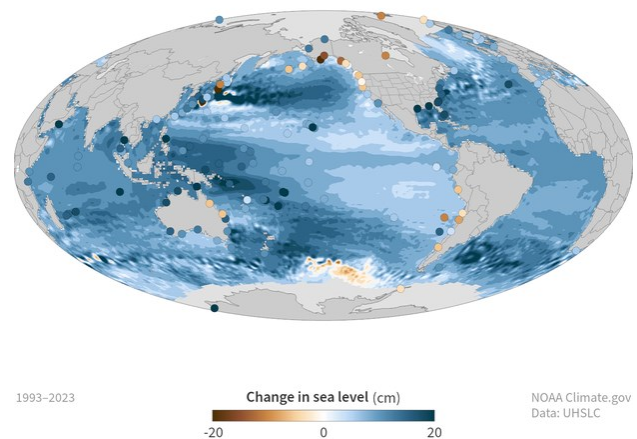


A study cited by the IPCC — the UN’s top climate change body — projected that the island nations of Tuvalu, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati may become completely uninhabitable by 2100. If that projection comes true, around 600,000 citizens will become climate refugees.



Creating a new global consensus is essential to address this crisis, but how does one convince

SEA LEVEL CHANGE (1993-2023)



people who live far inland, or climate change deniers, to care about this issue?

Francis described sea level rise as a “hydra” affecting “everything,” far more than just coastal and island communities. Displaced persons, food insecurity, and groundwater salinity are likely to affect much more than the roughly one billion who currently live in low-lying coastal areas.

In an interview with GZERO Media, Dr. **Nadya Vinogradova Shiffer** — who directs the NASA Sea Level Change Team — offered a simple answer: by using data for “clarity.” Even if someone doesn’t believe they’re sick, a fever doesn’t lie, she told us.

NASA released this interactive tool using previous tide gauges to predict future sea level rise scenarios through 2150. Spoiler: It’s not good.

Source:: <https://www.gzeromedia.com/unga79/un-secretary-general-rising-seas-mean-rising-misery>

Pakistan urges India to comply with Indus Water Treaty

Islamabad's remarks come after New Delhi formally seeks review of water sharing deal brokered by World Bank in 1960

Ahmad Adil and Aamir Latif

|19.09.2024



Pakistan on Thursday asked India to comply with the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), a 64-year-old water sharing agreement between the longtime rivals.

"The Indus Waters Treaty is an important treaty that has served both Pakistan and India well over the last several decades. We believe it is the gold standard of bilateral treaties on water sharing, Pakistan is fully committed to its implementation.

"We expect India to also remain committed to the treaty," Foreign Office Spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch told reporters during a weekly press briefing in Islamabad.

Her remarks came after India formally sought a review of the agreement brokered by the World Bank in 1960.

"Pakistan believes that it is our collective responsibility to maintain ecological balance, protect our environment and avoid measures which may have adverse implications for the environment," she added.

The two countries, she went on to say, have a mechanism of Indus Commissioners and believe "all issues pertaining to this Treaty

can be discussed in this mechanism." New Delhi had sent a notice to Islamabad on Aug. 30 under Article XII (3) of the Indus Water Treaty.

"India's notification highlights fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances that require a reassessment of obligations under various articles of the treaty," the report said, quoting unnamed sources.

The two longtime rivals share the water of six rivers under IWT, a water-sharing agreement brokered by the World Bank in 1960.

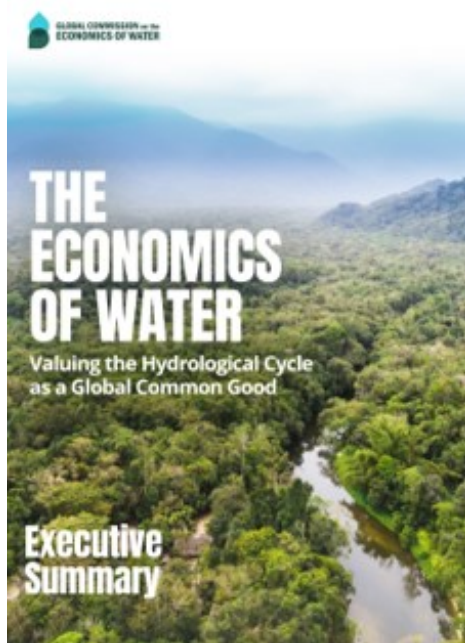
Under the agreement, the waters of the eastern rivers – the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi – have been allocated to India, while the three western rivers – the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab – go to Pakistan..Pakistan accuses India of "continuously violating" the treaty by building dams on the western rivers, whereas New Delhi thinks Islamabad controls more water than New Delhi as a result of the treaty.



India is also locked in a water dispute with China on the construction of dams and proposed diversion of the Brahmaputra River, which originates in Tibet and provides a third of India's needs for irrigation.

Source: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-urges-india-to-comply-with-indus-water-treaty/3334470>

From crisis to opportunity



The world faces a growing water disaster. For the first time in human history, the hydrological cycle is out of balance, undermining an equitable and sustainable future for all.

We can fix this crisis if we act more collectively, and with greater urgency. Vitally too, restoring stability of the water cycle is critical not only in its own right, but to avoid failing on climate change and safeguarding all the earth's ecosystems, as well as on each and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will preserve food security, keep economies and job opportunities growing, and ensure a just and liveable future for everyone.

Decades of collective mismanagement and under-valuation of water around the world have damaged our freshwater and land ecosystems and allowed for the continuing contamination of water resources. We can no longer count on freshwater availability for our collective future. More than 1,000 children under five die every day from illnesses caused by unsafe water and sanitation. Women and girls spend 200 million hours each day collecting and hauling water. Food systems are running out of fresh water, and cities are sinking as the aquifers underneath them run dry.

We have, fundamentally, put the hydrological cycle itself under unprecedented stress, with growing consequences for communities and countries everywhere.

Our policies, and the science and economics that underpin them, have also overlooked a critical freshwater resource, the “green water” in our soils and plant life, which ultimately circulates through the atmosphere and generates around half the rainfall we receive on land.

Most gravely, while itself a victim of climate change, the degradation of freshwater ecosystems including the loss of moisture in the soil has become a driver of climate change and biodiversity loss. The result is more frequent and increasingly severe droughts, floods, heatwaves, and wildfires, playing out across the globe. And a future of growing water scarcity, with grave consequences for human security.

Nearly 3 billion people and more than half of the world's food production are now in areas where total water storage is projected to decline. We need bolder and more integrated thinking and a recasting of policy frameworks to address these challenges. The Global Commission on the Economics of Water (GCEW) calls for a new economics of water:

- One that recognises the hydrological cycle as a global common good: understanding that it connects countries and regions through both the water that we see and atmospheric moisture flows; that it is deeply interconnected with climate change and the loss of biodiversity with each rebounding on the other; and that it impacts on virtually all the SDGs.

Why we must govern the water cycle as a global common good

It starts with recognising that the problems we face are not only local. Communities, countries and regions are interdependent not just through transboundary blue water – as globally, more than 263 watersheds and 300 aquifers span political boundaries – but through atmospheric moisture flows that travel great distances.



Current approaches tend to focus on water resources rather than the economic drivers that shape the water cycle. They also deal predominantly with the water we can see – the “blue water” in our rivers, lakes, and aquifers. They overlook a critical freshwater resource, namely “green water” – the water stored as soil moisture and in vegetation, which returns to the air through evaporation and transpiration. As it circulates naturally, green water generates around half of all rainfall over land, the very source of all our freshwater. Further, current approaches too often assume stable patterns of water supply year after year, but this is no longer true: as land-use changes and global warming destabilise the water cycle, rainfall patterns are shifting.

Most dangerously, disruptions to the water cycle are deeply intertwined with climate change and the depletion of the world’s biodiversity, with each reinforcing the other. A stable supply of green water in soils is crucial to sustaining the natural systems that absorb more than a quarter of the carbon dioxide emitted from fossil-fuel combustion. Yet the loss of wetlands and soil moisture, together with deforestation, is depleting the planet’s greatest carbon stores, accelerating global warming.

In turn, rising temperatures trigger extreme heatwaves and increased moisture loss, severely drying landscapes and heightening the risk of wildfires. When viewed holistically the impact of water scarcity on both people and nature now jeopardises virtually every one of the SDGs.

Left unchecked, it will result in growing gaps in nutrition in populations already at risk, the greater spread of diseases, widening inequalities within and across nations and increased conflict and forced migrations. The water cycle must therefore be governed as a global common good: recognising, first, our interdependence through both blue and green water flows; second, the wicked interaction between the water crisis, climate change, and the loss of the planet’s natural capital; and third, how water flows through all our 17 SDGs. A destabilised water cycle is a large-scale collective and systemic problem, which can only be fixed through concerted action in every country and collaboration across boundaries and cultures.

A shared understanding of the common good is crucial. Otherwise, what might look good for one country today could easily create problems for that same country tomorrow, as well as for others around the world.



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We need to build a future,
Where people live in harmony with nature

HPA

Think Forward .Lead Forward