



United Nations 2023 Water Conference

For Prelims: United Nations, SDG, Water conference, Jal Kranti Abhiyan, National Water Mission, National Rural Drinking Water Programme, NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index, Jal Jeevan Mission, Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Atal Bhujal Yojana.

For Mains: Global Water Scarcity and related Steps taken, Water Resources, Conservation of Resources.

Why in News?

Recently, the [United Nations](#) held its **first water conference in 46 years on March 22-24** in New York. The conference coincided with the **mid-term review of the International Decade for Action.**

- The U.N. recognized that we are not doing enough to meet [SDG 6](#), which aims to provide clean water and sanitation for everyone by 2030.
- The urgent need for action was demonstrated by a report "**Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028.**"

What is a Water Conference?

- **About:**
 - The water conference **brings together people from different countries and organizations to work together on solving global water challenges.** Water problems are usually local, but by working together, countries can learn from each other, share technology, and invest in solutions.
 - The **UN 2023 Water Conference's theme, "Our watershed moment: uniting the world for water,"** aimed to support the achievement of water-related global goals and objectives, including those enumerated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **Background:**
 - The **last water conference was held in 1977** (in Mar Del Plata, Argentina) and resulted in a **global action plan to provide safe drinking water for everyone.** This plan helped reduce the number of people without access to safe drinking water in many developing countries.

What are the Outcomes of the New Water Conference?

- The complexity of today's water problems was reflected in the conference's proceedings, resulting in fragmented discussions, and **no binding commitments.** Instead, there were **713 diverse voluntary commitments by philanthropic donors, governments, corporations, and NGOs.** The following are some commitments announced at the event, with examples of projects that showed potential:
 - **Technology:**
 - There were specific innovations in wastewater treatment or solar treatment of water in remote areas, and several proposals for incubation platforms, including the **IBM Sustainability Accelerator, focused on water management.**

- **Data and Models:**
 - Before every large investment, we must anticipate potential impact. Simulations are often important to do this, and they need large amounts of input data. Cost-effective approaches to data-generation included sensors and satellite data. Other efforts, like the **World Meteorological Organization's Hydrological Status and Outlook System**, offered data analysis tools.
- **Knowledge Sharing:**
 - Solutions to most of these problems already exist, but each region and country often reinvents the wheel. We need to accelerate cross-learning.
 - One useful tool here was the **W12+ Blueprint, a UNESCO platform** that hosts city profiles and case studies of programs, technologies, and policies that address common water security challenges.
- **Capacity Building:**
 - Many people lack access to basic services because they are unable to advocate for themselves and because infrastructure projects are designed for and by powerful actors in society. Efforts like the **Making Rights Real initiative** offered to help marginalized communities and women understand how to exercise their rights.
 - The **'Water for Women Fund'** offered support mechanisms for more effective and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene outcomes for women.
- **Incentives:**
 - The conference highlighted that the lack of incentives is a major hindrance for farmers and industries to use water efficiently and sustainably.
 - The integration of [environmental, social, and corporate governance](#) into the **Water Action Agenda** is a positive step towards effective water governance.
 - However, the success of these commitments depends on how they are carried forward during the HLPF (High-level Political Forum) and the COP28 climate talks to be held in Dubai. It is crucial for consumers to be willing to **pay a premium for sustainably produced goods to encourage farmers** to adopt sustainable practices.

What are the Challenges Need to Address?

- The water sector is particularly **prone to fragmentation** because water problems tend to be local and need local solutions.
- The conference had ambitious goals, including identifying game-changing ideas, making recommendations to policymakers on how to speed- and scale-up change, **placing water at the centre of the climate agenda**, and learning from the experiences of others, transfer technology, and invest.
- Improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation is not enough to ensure sustained access to these resources. **Groundwater over-abstraction, which is mostly driven by agricultural pumping**, is a major problem that leads to water scarcity and contamination.
 - In places like **Punjab or the Cauvery delta**, where there is **heavy irrigation, the only solution is to pump less water**. This, however, requires agricultural policies to change, which in turn requires collaboration among different agencies and ministries.
- The problem is no longer just about access to water and sanitation, but also about sustaining agriculture, industry, and natural ecosystems.
- The remaining SDG 6 targets aim to **address this issue by promoting better governance, improving efficiency of irrigation water use**, restoring water quality in lakes and rivers, and improving wastewater management. These problems cannot be solved by infrastructure alone, but **require tough political choices, agency empowerment, and strengthening democratic processes**.

What are India's Initiatives on Clean Water, and sanitation?

- [Swachh Bharat Mission](#)
- [Jal Jeevan Mission](#)
- [Jal Kranti Abhiyan.](#)
- [National Water Mission.](#)

- [National Rural Drinking Water Programme.](#)
- [NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index.](#)
- [Jal Shakti Abhiyan.](#)
- [Atal Bhujal Yojana](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. What are the salient features of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan launched by the Government of India for water conservation and water security? **(2020)**

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