

The UN Water Conference and Azerbaijan

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After almost 50 years, the first UN Water Conference of the twenty-first century took place in New York in mid-March 2023, co-hosted by the Netherlands and Tajikistan. Although water is an essential common good and the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depend directly or indirectly on water, it has not received the necessary attention on this scale for years.

Water and sanitation issues are faced all over the world. In both developing and developed countries, seasonal water shortages take place even in water-sufficient countries in advanced industrialized countries like Sweden. Due to climate change, increased demand for water from industry and agriculture is becoming progressively challenging. Therefore, it is impossible to maintain sustainable economic development, human health, and environmental integrity without efficient water resources management that considers climate change adaptations. Both UNDP Associate Administrator Usha Rao-Minari and Richard Connor, the lead author of a report issued jointly by UN-Water and UNESCO have reinforced the need for better management of this precious natural resource before we hit a global crisis.

The conference achieved its overarching awareness goal of uniting the world for water: hundreds of ministers, dozens of heads of state, and over 2,000 participants from various organizations worldwide came together on 22-24 March 2023. The conference highlighted the importance of common action toward better resource management and implementing financial mechanisms to cope with the potential water crisis.

Azerbaijan also joined the conference, with the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources leading the country's delegation. Each state and registered legal entity had a chance to organize

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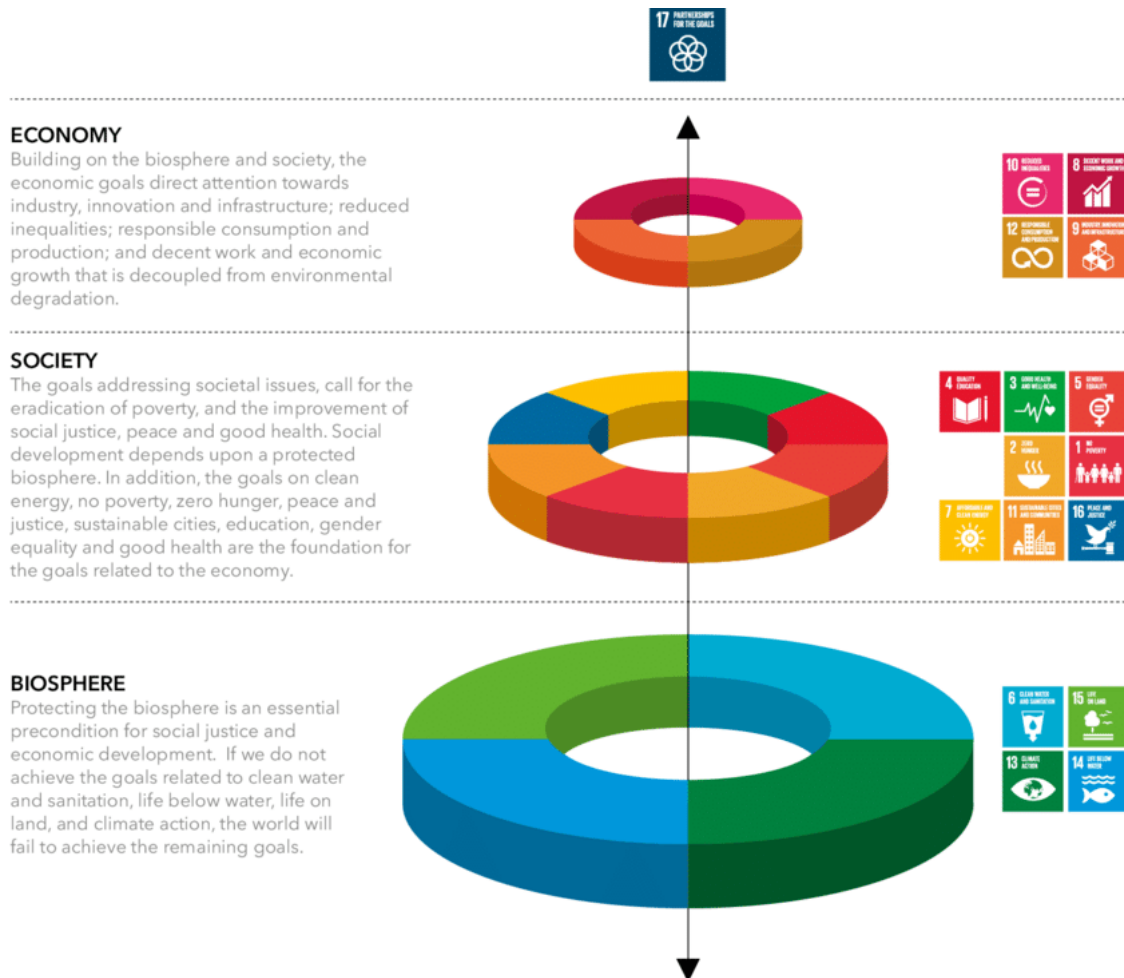


Figure 1. SDG Hierarchy. Source: Stockholm Resilience Center

one main on-site side event and, unlike other South Caucasus countries, Azerbaijan utilized its right by arranging one flagship side event. Azerbaijan’s side event focused on its reforms, stakeholder engagement, and innovation initiatives devoted to accelerating SDG6 achievement in Azerbaijan. It was co-organized by the Water Commission of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, Amelioration OJSC, FAO-Azerbaijan, the International Organization for Migration, and Arizona State University and focused on the global challenges of clean water availability and accessibility and Azerbaijan’s current position in this regard. It also helped showcase Azerbaijan’s achievements towards achieving Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and transboundary water challenges as a downstream country. The event also covered cooperation with international organizations on water resources management and the upcoming National Water Strategy. Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources Mukhtar Babayev shared Azerbaijan’s readiness to become a regional digital data hub to provide (1) global freshwater information services and (2) an early warning system to ensure data exchange and to strengthen the resilience of the regional countries.

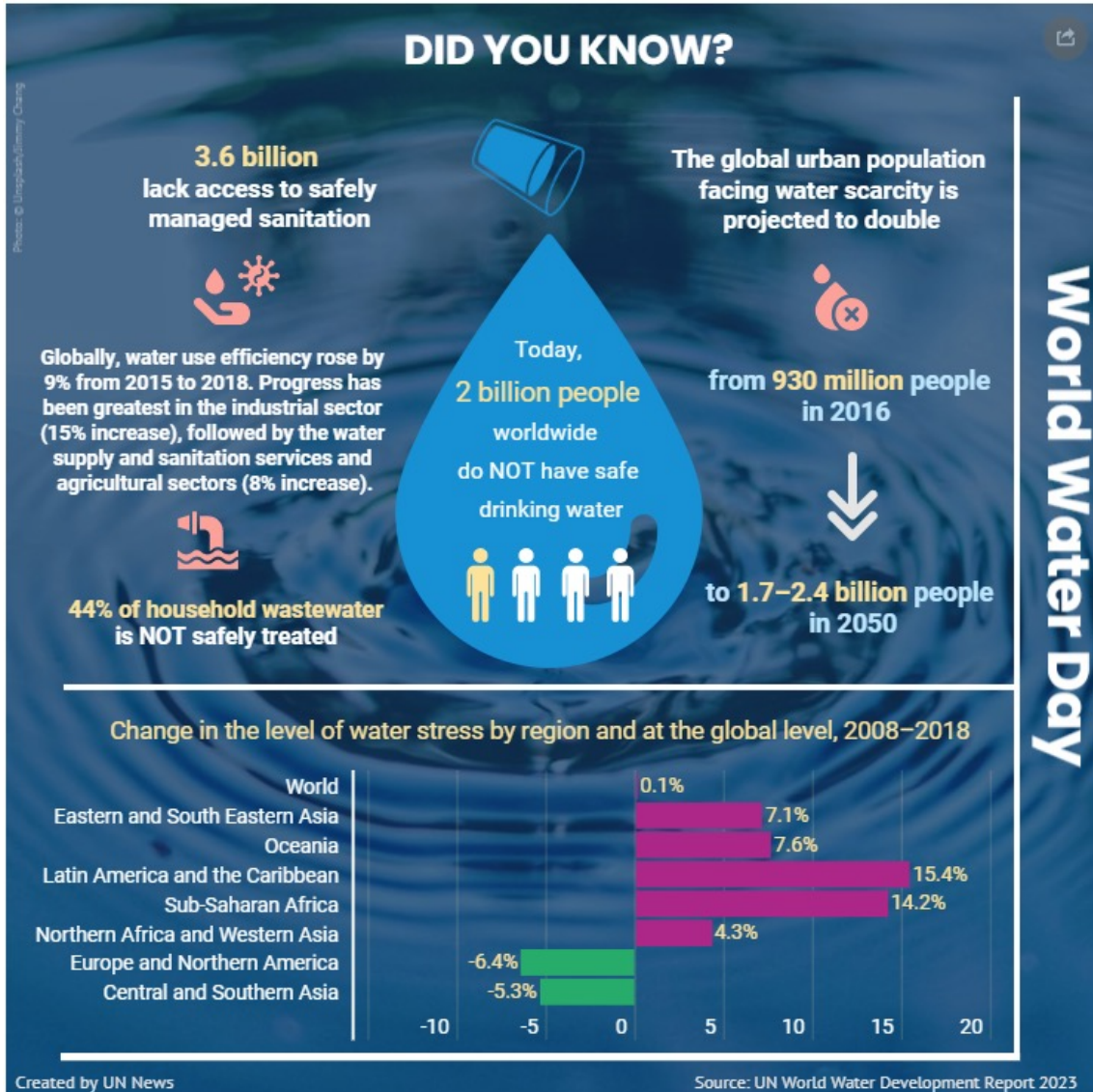


Figure 2. Source: <https://infogram.com/english-1h7k230nop91g2x>

Azerbaijan partnered with France in other main side events for IWRM at the Caspian basin level and the Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health for Cross-Sectoral Cooperation in the South Caucasus.

The UN Water Conference resulted in the adoption of the Water Action Agenda, which is not a legally binding document but consists of voluntarily registered, action-oriented commitments. Additionally, the President of the UN General Assembly provided a summary of the recommendations and solutions raised during the interactive dialogues, special and side events. Although Azerbaijan has shared its readiness to cooperate with other countries in the region for the establishment of digital platforms and data exchange, these commitments are not registered in the Water Action Agenda due to the unresponsiveness of the necessary parties.

Here is the list of commitments in which Azerbaijan is involved. The registration of the commitments is still open and the progress of each of them can be followed through these links:

1. [Accelerating UN SDG 6 in public & private markets](#) by Thomas Schumann Capital.
2. [OECD support to strengthen water management in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia \(EECCA\) through the GREEN Action Task Force](#) by the OECD.
3. [Driving action on water, sanitation, hygiene, and health in the pan-European region through the Protocol on Water and Health](#) by the Joint Secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health.
4. [Water for the entire world by 2030](#) by One Million Wells.
5. [Thomas Schumann Water Security Fund](#) by Thomas Schumann Capital.
6. [Accelerating transboundary water cooperation through increased accession to and strengthened implementation of the Water Convention](#) by the Water Convention Secretariat.
7. [Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition](#) by UNECE.
8. [Space4Water Project](#) by the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs.
9. [World Water Walk](#) by United Progress.
10. [UNICEF's Game Plan to Accelerate Safely Managed Sanitation for All](#) by UNICEF.
11. [ASTM International Capacity Building Commitment to Memoranda of Understanding Partners for Sustainable Development Goals](#) by ASTM International.
12. [To assess the progress of 1000 global companies on their impact toward SDG 6](#) by the World Benchmarking Alliance.
13. [City Water Index and associated resources to enhance urban water resilience, access, and management](#) by Economist Impact.
14. [IBM Sustainability Accelerator: Water Management](#) by IBM.
15. [Accelerating Women's Inclusion in Water](#) by the Asian Development Bank.
16. [Asia and the Pacific Water Resilience Initiative](#) by the Asian Development Bank.
17. [Dakar Action Plan for the basins of lakes, rivers, and aquifers](#) by the International Network of Basin Organizations.