

4. UN Water Conference and Key Takeaways

Prelims Syllabus: Environment

Mains Syllabus: GS-III Environment & Biodiversity | Climatic Change Conservation, Environmental Pollution & Degradation, Eia



Why in News?

- The UN 2023 Water Conference was held in New York from March 22-24.
- It was the first such meeting on water in 46 years.
- The conference aimed to identify game-changing ideas and make recommendations to policymakers on how to speed up and scale up change in the water sector.

What is the UN Water Conference?

- The UN Water Conference is an international conference that aims to better align activities by governments, companies, NGOs, and funders around a few grand challenges in the water sector.
- It serves as a platform for countries to learn from the experiences of others, transfer technology, and invest. The last UN Water Conference was held in 1977.
- It resulted in the first global 'Action Plan' recognizing that all people have the right to access safe drinking water and sanitation.
- This led to several decades of global funding and concerted effort to provide drinking water and sanitation for all.

Themes of the conference:

The Conference has five themes that support the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework:

- **Water for Health:** Access to 'WASH' (Global Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene) including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

- **Water for Sustainable Development:** Valuing water, the water-energy-food nexus and sustainable economic and urban development.
- **Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment:** Source to sea, biodiversity, climate, resilience and disaster risk reduction.
- **Water for Cooperation:** Transboundary and international water cooperation, cross sectoral cooperation and water across the 2030 Agenda.
- **Water Action Decade:** Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade for Action, including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan.

Purpose of the conference

- International conferences on water aim to better align activities by governments, companies, NGOs, and funders around a few grand challenges.
- They help countries learn from the experiences of others, transfer technology, and invest.
- Water problems tend to be local and need local solutions, so there is a challenge of mobilizing globally to solve local water problems.

Water challenges discussed:

- While access to safe drinking water and sanitation is challenging, extending services to underserved populations is relatively uncontroversial.
- However, improving access to water and sanitation no longer translates directly to sustained access.
- The water problem is no longer about access to water and sanitation; the remaining SDG 6 targets address the need to sustain agriculture, industry, and natural ecosystems.

Outcomes of the 2023 Conference

- The conference's proceedings resulted in a lot of talk, fragmented discussions, and no binding commitments.
- There were 713 diverse voluntary commitments by philanthropic donors, governments, corporations, and NGOs, with 120 relevant to India.
- Commitments included a \$50-billion commitment from the Indian government to improve rural drinking water services under its Jal Jeevan Mission.

Examples of Commitments:

- **Technology:** Specific innovations in wastewater treatment or solar treatment of water in remote areas, and a number of proposals for incubation platforms.
- **Data and Models:** Cost-effective approaches to data-generation included sensors and satellite data. Other efforts offered data analysis tools.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** One useful tool was the W12+ Blueprint, a UNESCO platform that hosts city profiles and case studies of programs, technologies, policies that addresses common water security challenges.
- **Capacity Building:** Efforts offered to help marginalized communities and women understand how to exercise their rights.
- **Civil Society:** Platforms for collective action by civil society groups lobbying for changes in regulations.
- **Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance:** The conference concluded that effective water governance hinges on these broad areas, and weaving them into the Water Action Agenda is a step.

