



22 March 2017 – In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly designated 22 March as [World Water Day](#)

. Each year on this day, the UN World Water Development Report ( [WWDR](#)

) is published by the United Nations World Water Assessment Programme. The Report is a joint effort between the different UN agencies which make up UN Water. It gives a comprehensive overview of the state of the world's freshwater resources and elaborates on different strategic water issues. Each edition has a specific thematic focus, the spotlight of the 2017 report is on [waste&nbsp;water](#)

The corresponding World Water Day campaign 'Why waste water' is all about reducing and reusing waste water in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses waste water more specifically in SDG target 6.3.

It calls on us to “improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing the release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe re-use globally” until 2030. Achieving this goal could help other goals progress, such as life below water or health and well-being. The Report is part of an ongoing assessment project to measure the progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Today, over 663 million people are living without a safe water supply close to home, forced to spend countless hours on making their way to faraway water sources. Due to limited access to water, many of them have to cope with the negative health impacts of using contaminated water. The sources of drinking water for 1.8 billion people are contaminated by faeces. Unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene cause around 842,000 deaths each year. In the coming years, water shortages and lack of access to water are likely to limit economic growth in many parts of the world.

At the launch of the report in Brussels today, Mr Richard Conner, Editor-in Chief of the report, said that “waste water should not be a burden but a valuable resource. In a world where demands for freshwater are ever growing, and where limited water resources are increasingly stressed by over-abstraction, pollution and climate change, neglecting the opportunities arising from improved waste water management is nothing less than unthinkable in the context of a circular economy.”

Due to population growth, accelerated urbanization and the rising demand for water, the generated quantity of waste water is continuously increasing on a global level. During every part of the water cycle, water must be carefully managed: from procuring, distributing, and using fresh water to the collection, treatment, and use of waste water. However, most cities in developing countries do not possess adequate irrigation systems or resources for waste water management.

Globally, over 80% of the wastewater from our homes, cities and industrial sites goes back to nature without being treated or reused in any way. In addition to the detrimental effects this has on the environment, it also results in a loss of valuable nutrients which could be salvaged through proper treatment. Wastewater can be reused in many ways when properly treated— on our gardens, on public green spaces as well as in industry and agriculture. By making better use of this resource, we can improve the water cycle for the whole world.

Even though wastewater is often seen as a nuisance, its treatment is an integral component of the water cycle and presents a solution to various problems societies face, such as water shortages. The costs of waste water management are strongly outweighed by benefits to human health, the environment, and economic development. Waste water management provides an affordable and sustainable source of water, energy and other recoverable materials. Continued failure to address the problem of waste water would compromise progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taking into account the growing demand for water, reusing and recycling is rapidly becoming a valid alternative to simply disposing of used water altogether.

## **Water: a resource flushed down the drain?**

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