

**Foreword by
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Foreword by Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General, United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization

With the release of this third edition of *The United Nations World Water Development Report*, it is clear that urgent action is needed if we are to avoid a global water crisis. Despite the vital importance of water to all aspects of human life, the sector has been plagued by a chronic lack of political support, poor governance and underinvestment. As a result, hundreds of millions of people around the world remain trapped in poverty and ill health and exposed to the risks of water-related disasters, environmental degradation and even political instability and conflict. Population growth, increasing consumption and climate change are among the factors that threaten to exacerbate these problems, with grave implications for human security and development.

The current Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the state of the world's fresh-water resources. It also, for the first time, shows how changes in water demand and supply are affected by and affect other global dynamics. It represents a considerable collaborative achievement for the 26 UN agencies that make up UN-Water and are engaged in the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), which leads the monitoring and evaluation behind the Report. UNESCO is very proud to have played a pivotal role in the launch of this flagship programme and to continue to support its work by housing the WWAP Secretariat. I am confident that this third volume will prove crucial as a working tool for policy-makers and other stakeholders, providing solid evidence from which to develop an effective and sustainable approach to water issues.

The Report could not come at a more important time. We have passed the halfway point towards the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and despite progress, massive challenges remain. Millennium Development Goal 7 calls for halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. While the world is on track to achieve the water target globally, large regions of the world and many countries lag behind, and some risk backsliding. This is particularly the case in sub-Saharan Africa and low-income Arab states. On current trends the sanitation target will be missed by a wide margin in the majority of developing countries. But water is linked not only to Millennium Development Goal 7. It also directly affects, as this Report establishes, the achievement of all eight Millennium Development Goals, including, notably, the first goal, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Water is a cross-cutting issue that demands a coordinated approach. Our success in avoiding a global water crisis is directly linked to our ability to address other global challenges, from poverty eradication and environmental sustainability to fluctuating food and energy costs and financial turmoil in world economies. It is therefore imperative that global risks, including those associated with water, be dealt with in an integrated manner. We must develop interdisciplinary tools that can take into account different drivers such as climate change and financial markets to achieve sustainable water management. This

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requires the engagement of all stakeholders, particularly government leaders, as well as global coordination through the UN system.

Water is essential to facing today's global challenges and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. As such, it should be a priority for the United Nations and the global community as a whole. Be assured that UNESCO stands ready to play its part in this process.



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