

YEMAYA



1 - (Source: K.Raasakka)



WWQA
World Water Quality Alliance

THE WORLD WATER QUALITY ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

April 2023

The World Water Quality Alliance is convened by the United Nations Environment Programme and supported by the Swiss Confederation. It is proud to present its monthly newsletter entitled YEMAYA named after the ancient African goddess of the ocean and motherhood. She is associated with fertility, femininity, protection, healing, and childbirth. Symbolized as a water creature her domains are the seas, rivers, and lakes. She is honoured and revered in the African diaspora, particularly in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and the United States.

We, the World Water Quality Alliance Coordination Team, welcome articles about anything related to water quality. Tell us your experiences. Describe the challenges you and your people face. Talk to our global community, talk to people from around the World. Send your articles to wwqa-coordination@un.org.

IN THIS ISSUE

- **THE 2023 UN WATER CONFERENCE – THE RESULTS OF THE EVENT FROM THE WWQA PERSPECTIVE**
 - **KOROGOCHO – AN EXAMPLE FOR INNER CITIES**
 - **THE WWQA AT THE ARAB WATER WEEK**
 - **THE APRIL INTERVIEW – NINA RAASAKKA, THE COORDINATOR OF THE WWQA**
 - **THE WWQA BULLETIN BOARD**
-

- *THE WWQA CONFERENCE 2023 – Nairobi*
-

THE 2023 UN WATER CONFERENCE – The results of the event from the WWQA perspective



The UN 2023 Water Conference took place at the United Nations headquarters in New York and online from 22-24 March 2023, co-hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Tajikistan, to urgently scale up action to address the water crisis and ensure equitable access to water for all. The event gathered together around 10,000 participants composed of world leaders, civil society, business leaders, young people, scientists, academics, the UN System and others from across sectors — agriculture, energy, environment and water — around a common goal: to urgently tackle the water crisis and set the world back on track to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6. This was the first high-level conference on water organized by the UN in 46 years - since the 1977 Mar del Plata conference organized in Argentina.

While no binding commitments were made at the UN 2023 Water Conference, it did see water treated as a prominent and central issue vital to achieving all 17 SDGs. In agreement with this, UN member states converged on several ideas, notably for the UN to appoint a high-level Special Envoy for Water to represent the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and to strengthen UN-Water, the coordination mechanism responsible for water action among UN agencies. One of the main outcomes is the Water Action Agenda, collected through voluntary commitments to accelerate progress in the second halves of both the Water Action Decade 2018-2028 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are currently over 700 commitments registered from UN agencies, member state governments, multilateral banks, NGOs and the private sector. As one example, Switzerland submitted 5 commitments to contribute to the UN's work, including in the areas of the Water Convention and transboundary cooperation.

The conference also increased the visibility of the 1992 convention. Moving forwards, the conference outcomes will receive concrete follow-up in three key upcoming Summits: the SDG Summit during the UN General Assembly in September 2023, the Summit of the Future in 2024, the World Social Summit in 2025, and through the annual High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development and SDG6 Special Event taking place in July 2023.

Over 150 side events took place at the UN 2023 Water Conference, running in parallel with five interactive dialogues and General Assembly plenaries. In general, lacking water quality data (both surface water and groundwater) was prominently mentioned, as was the importance of partnerships and cooperation for achieving SDG6, and the importance of climate resilience and nature-based solutions as part of necessary actions for addressing critical water related challenges the world is faced with.

The World Water Quality Alliance, its workstreams and partners, participated in the conference in force and in particular in the following side events:

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- Youth workstream participated in 4 side events giving prominence to the importance of social engagement by youth groups.*
 - The White Paper [‘Embedding Lakes into the Global Sustainability Agenda’](#) of the Ecosystems Workstream was launched on 22 March at the [‘From UNEA to General Assembly: Taking action for Sustainable Lake Management - as a catalyst to accelerate global commitment in the Water Action Agenda’](#) side event.*
 - Special emphasis on groundwater and the need for increasing monitoring of groundwater quality as part of the WWQA and Friends of Groundwater participation in the side event [‘Groundwater: An invisible cross-sectoral fundament for implementation of the Water Action Agenda’](#) and WWQA participation in the launch of the [GloWAL Network launch](#).*
 - The Alliance and the Pathway to a World Water Quality Assessment were mentioned as part of UNEP’s support to the UNESCO-proposed ‘game-changer’ intergovernmental mechanism Science-based Global Water Assessment. A virtual side event led by Aisha Faith Nankanja of Rural Water Initiative for Climate Action (RWICA): Citizen Science for Improving Water Quality and Public Health: A Holistic Approach. This session included a presentation from the team at National Water Resource Management Agency of Sierra Leone that focussed on their work to engage citizen scientists in the monitoring and management of the Rokel River basin, and to use the data generated to report on SDG indicator 6.3.2.*
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Key reports were launched prior to and during the UN 2023 Water Conference relating to water quality include the following:

- *Measuring Progress: Water-related ecosystems and the SDGs which looks at progress on the 92 environment-related SDG indicators (including SDG 6.3.2 that tracks ambient water quality), interlinkage analysis between water-related indicators and other economic and social indicators, and using big data and citizen science data to close the data gap.*
 - *UN World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and cooperation for water: this year's edition of the UN system's principal authoritative report on water describes how building partnerships and enhancing cooperation across all dimensions of sustainable development are essential to accelerating progress towards SDG6 and realizing the human rights to water and sanitation.*
 - *Status of Water Quality in the Amazon Basin, the first water quality report for the whole Amazon Basin was launched during a side event at the UN 2023 Water Conference by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), in cooperation with the Amazon Basin countries.*
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KOROGOCHO – An example for inner cities



Korogocho is a slum area of Nairobi overlooked by a mountain of refuse in what is called Dondora. It is one of the largest and most densely populated informal settlements in the city, with over 200,000 residents. The community is known for its high levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime, as well as its lack of basic services such as clean water, sanitation, education and healthcare. One of the biggest challenges facing residents of Korogocho is that many residents are forced to rely on unsafe water sources or pay exorbitant prices for bottled water, while open sewers and inadequate waste management systems create serious health hazards. Additionally, the important lack of healthcare facilities in the area means that residents often have to travel long distances to access medical care or forgo it altogether. Korogocho is a district that has given birth to survivors. Tough, resilient people who are not prepared to surrender to their fate but who seek to create a better environment for their neighbours and their families. The people are welcoming, realistic and capable of initiating their own recovery. Water quality is a vitally important issue in the slums of Nairobi. Korogocho is fighting this problem head on. On the banks of the River Nairobi, where before, there was only human refuse, mountains of plastic and debris reducing the river to a few centimetres of dirty trickles of sludge wending its way through waste, there is now a green oasis on the banks of a broad flowing river created by Komb Green Solutions.

Komb Green Solutions is a cooperative movement which was created in 2017 by the youth of Korogocho who sought a means of escaping from the vicious circle within which they found themselves due to the socio-cultural disadvantages which confront them from the moment they are born.

In 2017, under a slum upgrading programme, a new bridge linking Dandora and Korogocho was constructed as a way of improving mobility. The construction of the bridge employed several young people from Korogocho as casual labourers and security officers. After the completion of the bridge in January 2018, Mzee Muchina, Dredrick Okinda, and Christopher Waithaka, mobilised other young people in the area to get rid of the dumpsite next to the bridge and along the Nairobi River to create a safe space for themselves and their community.



2 - (Source: R. Elelman)



3 - (Source: R. Elelman)

The dumpsite acted as a den for thieves and was a place where drug peddlers and users would hide to undertake their illegal activities. The youths identified the need to create a green and safe space for children to play and for young people to relax without being harassed by police. Providing a safe space for women to just rest was the other motivating factor. The group wrote a proposal requesting resources to upgrade the slum and it was successful. In turn, they received gabions, stones, and also some trees. They were successful because the organisers of the slum upgrade programme recognised the capacity of Green Comb to provide security to look after the materials used to construct the bridge and the social unity which the group was promoting.

The restoration of the riverbanks along the Nairobi River in Korogocho entailed removing solid and human waste. It took one year to remove all the waste and construct a gabion. The team planted grass and trees. The park was officially opened to the public on 19th November 2018. The park was named the "People's Park" and it's the only resident-initiated green zone along the Nairobi River. The work by Komb Green Solutions, their attitude, their capacity to involve their community, their commitment to their cause is an impressive example for youths in inner cities anywhere in the world. Honest about their backgrounds, unpretentious and dedicated, they have shown what can be done by a group of motivated people who refuse to be beaten by the system.

They have given the world of environment and water an example which should be highlighted. The WWQA will support these intelligent, resourceful, courageous people in any way the Alliance can. But above all, the district of Korogocho has offered a lesson in the face of unbelievable odds, which will help other local communities around the world to find the ambition and the means to ensure clean water for all through, for example, the work of the WWQA's Local Water Forums.

The Team at Komb Green Solutions created a video where they themselves speak about their journey and the challenges they have conquered as well as challenges they continue to face:

<https://youtu.be/rqyxrXYoWhY>

The WWQA at the Arab Water Week



The Arab Water Week (AWW) is a biennial international assembly in the Arab region that attracts decision makers, water management practitioners, and professional organisations from the international arena and across the region. The 6th AWW took place in Amman from the 5th – 7th March 2023 and was organised by the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) in partnership with the

Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) and the League of Arab States- Arab Ministerial Water Council (LAS- AMWC).

AWW provided the World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) with the opportunity to define and enhance communication channels, create synergies and partnerships that complement and maximize the impact of on-going work in the water nexus for the benefit of all countries in the region.

The engagement of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) for the World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) is crucial. The MENA region is facing significant water-related challenges, including water scarcity, inadequate water supply infrastructure, and poor water quality. These challenges have far-reaching consequences for the region's social, economic, and environmental well-being, including health risks, agricultural productivity, and economic development. The MENA region is the first to deal with scarcity and with the rapid effects of climate change, other regions of the World can learn a lot from the MENA region. In addition, the MENA region is home to some of the world's most critical water resources, including the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. In conclusion, the engagement of the MENA region is essential to address critical water-related challenges, promote sustainable water management practices, and ensure the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the region. It is a region which must therefore be not only involved in all global water forums but must be recognised as a leader and initiator in addressing one of the principal environmental issues of our era. WWQA has taken important steps to embrace the Arab world in its fight to guarantee clean water for all.

THE APRIL INTERVIEW: Nina Raasakka, the Coordinator of the WWQA

What inspired you to work in Water?

Since a very young age I've had a great love for all things nature and somehow it has always been clear to me that I wanted to work in the environmental sector. Some of my favorite classes in high school included biology and chemistry, which led me to study environmental management at university as a multi-disciplinary subject that would allow me to have a technical understanding of the multiple and diverse drivers of environmental degradation and contribute to creating policy solutions to better address these. Very early on in my career I worked at the European Commission Directorate-General for the Environment's Water Unit on the EU's policy on water scarcity and droughts. This was followed by several years working in the climate risk management and climate change adaptation space where both water and data obviously plays a critical role so it was a natural transition to work in water quality related issues, in a role that cuts across and calls for coordination across several disciplines.



What does the UN 2023 Water Conference mean for water quality?

Lack of water quality as well as issues with data sharing were mentioned several times at the side events that I attended and there was a clear agreement that more data, through monitoring, sharing of data particularly among transboundary basins is required. The convergence of member states' views around appointing a Special Envoy for Water would be a powerful signal that water, both in good quality and quantity, is vital for achieving all 17 SDGS, and the need to ensure water resource management is considered as an integral part of climate and biodiversity actions. I was also encouraged to see that climate resilience and nature-based solutions for water resource management featured prominently in discussions and side events pointing to the importance of breaking out of the siloes given the central role of water in tackling the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change, and biodiversity. The importance of data was also emphasized, but especially its connection to action on the ground through solid partnerships.

It is encouraging to see over 700 commitments submitted to the Water Action Agenda, but we need to find a way to monitor their implementation and it will interesting to follow what agreements will be taken in this regard.

What do you foresee for WWQA in the next 2 years?

I see a great emphasis on connecting data to action and increasing the efficiency of data communication to influence policymaking at local, national, regional and international level.

Working with Local Water Forums is critical as we are working with the people and communities who are at the forefront and directly facing specific challenges related to poor water quality.

Youth will be influencing policies of the tomorrow but also suffering from ever degrading water resources (both quality and quantity-wise). Those who are children now will be adults in 2050 – that is a year mentioned as part of climate and other models and which seems rather faraway, but in practice is on the doorstep for children today and it is distressing to think about what type of future awaits them if local, national governments and the international community do not take action now.

On the technical side, working together with the technical workstreams of the WWQA, we will be releasing the Pathway to a World Water Quality Assessment as a repository of all information about the water quality that aims to become a depository of data linked to water quality.

Outside water (or not necessarily), what are your hobbies?

*Clean water is actually inherent to my hobbies when I think about it... Some of my favorite things to do are spending time in nature, birdwatching, hiking, reading with a good cup of tea (with a penchant for dystopia, including dark stories of a rather dark future when it comes to water). A great book I read recently cuts across both of the last 2 hobbies mentioned and may be of interest to those with a similar thematic interest: *The Memory of Water* by Emmi Itranta.*

THE WWQA BULLETIN BOARD



THE WWQA CONFERENCE 2023 – Nairobi

The World Water Quality Alliance is delighted to announce the dates of The WWQA Conference 2023, which this year will be held at the United Nations in Nairobi from the 18th until the 20th of September 2023. The WWQA has organised this event to promote local dialogue, engagement and exchange, to highlight how the data generated by the World Water Quality Assessment can be transformed into practical local action and how, as a result, all members of society can maintain a permanent dialogue with decision-makers at a supranational level.

Development aid experts, scientists and water experts are invited to actively observe, learn from and engage with the members of the WWQA workstreams. As was the case in the 2022 Conference held in Konstanz, the Local Water Forums will be a key element of the event. They are composed of local politicians, businesspeople and researchers, but most importantly of all, ordinary citizens representing all genders, ethnic groups, low-income sectors and the full social reality of where they live, who have become engaged in the issue of water quality together with neighbourhood cultural actors capable of communicating the importance of water quality and stimulating an emotional response. They will be joined by Youth organisations who have recognised the need to not only become engaged but, more importantly, to initiate and lead actions that address issues that will directly affect the future of their generation and the future of their respective communities.

Over three days, the onsite and online event will discuss the results and achievements of the WWQA as a whole, the outcomes of the UN Water Conference in New York, the work of Local Water Forums and the initiatives undertaken by the WWQA Youth Platform. The role of citizen science will be discussed. Above all, the conference will seek to establish permanent ties between the high-level strategist and the local stakeholder, between youth and society as a whole. It will promote and support the transformation of scientific knowledge into practical actions, and it will enhance the role of the local community as the means of resolving one of the most important global challenges of our times, water quality.

For those wish to attend please register at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pXJn8XPgws>

In the May Issue of YEMAYA

- *The WWQA and Plastics – A look at the work of the Plastics Workstream*
 - *UDYAMA – The experience of India*
 - *The Digital Transformation of Water*

- *The May Interview – Almotaz Abadi, Deputy Secretary General of the Union of the Mediterranean*
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*Unless otherwise indicated, all contributions are by the WWQA coordination team.

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YEMAYA welcomes articles, opinions and audio-visual material related to the issue of water quality. Please send any contribution to wwqa-coordination@un.org with a short 100-word biography, the name of your organisation and a phone number where you can be contacted.