

YEMAYA



1 - (Source: K.Raasakka)



WWQA
World Water Quality Alliance

THE WORLD WATER QUALITY ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

May 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.

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THE WWQA AND PLASTIC: A look at the work of the Plastic Workstream





Plastic debris in the oceans is a well-known and serious environmental problem. Less known is that it can also affect freshwaters and their use, as shown in the example of Korogocho in the April issue of YEMAYA. Public awareness is generally rising, but there is still a lot of uncertainty about the true plastics loads in inland waters and how they could be assessed or monitored with reasonable effort. The plastics workstream of WWQA aims to address these knowledge gaps by providing guidelines for harmonization of methods to monitor plastics in freshwater, by testing these methods in carefully selected case studies, and by analyzing the specific barriers that researchers and authorities face in quantifying plastic contamination.

A way to harmonized methods

Accumulation of plastic garbage in waterways varies with water level, season and hydrological conditions in specific sites. This has to be considered when one wants to find out if measures against plastic contamination show any success. Therefore, methods are being developed which allow quick assessment over time rather than generating detailed information from snapshot samples. Such methods include collecting and weighing shoreline debris and allocating the material to a handful of simple categories as well as counting floating debris from bridges over defined time spans. Both approaches can be implemented together with citizen scientists.

Three recent case studies

The WWQA Plastics Workstream tested training and use of these simple and harmonized methods for monitoring plastic loads in three different rivers, the Rhine from Switzerland to The Netherlands, the Odaw River in Ghana, and the Mekong River in Cambodia. In the Rhine, plastic transport was highly variable but showed a general increase towards the mouth. Hotspots were seen in urban areas, confluences with tributaries and the estuary. A first analysis of possible observer bias was also conducted in this study. In the Odaw river, floating, terrestrial and riverbank plastics were compared systematically. The urban part had most mobile plastic, which may stem from the urban area itself or from upstream. Peaks of terrestrial and riverbank plastics were detected in different places along the river, and they may be caused by illegal waste dump sites or by hydraulic accumulation zones. Further studies are needed to see if they are consistent over time, which may facilitate cleanup actions. In the Mekong River, more than 40 % of the transported plastic waste originated from Phnom Penh City, and the largest difference of upstream and downstream debris was seen in single-use items. The harmonized approach allowed to compare plastic pollution in the three different rivers. Mean plastic transport was highest in Mekong, followed by Odaw and Rhine. In all cases, soft polyolefins (in single use plastics) were the dominant plastic type.

Barriers analysis

While the case studies have revealed great potential for the application of monitoring guidelines in different contexts, our research also hints to complex barriers to plastic monitoring in freshwaters. In the cases in Ghana and Cambodia, we have identified a diverse set of barriers – from general barriers such as the existence of legal frameworks or clear responsibilities towards more specific technical, human, and financial barriers in collecting and analyzing data, up to specific knowledge barriers regarding the involvement of stakeholders and managing relationships among others. This, again, calls for targeted capacity development activities and for readjusting monitoring goals from rather costly microplastics monitoring to less cost-intense (macroplastic) monitoring strategies.

Further steps

As a next step, the WWQA Plastics Workstream engages Ghanaian citizens in the monitoring of plastics based on the UNEP guidelines and analyses how citizen-based monitoring affects the citizen's knowledge, awareness, and further engagement in addressing plastics pollution. Based on the analyses, the project team will co-develop a regional blueprint for citizen-based plastic monitoring along the UNEP's guidelines together with experts from research and practice.

Contribution by [Dr. Katrin Wendt-Potthoff](#), UFZ, WWQA Plastics Workstream

UDYAMA: India's Experience



UDYAMA is a learning organization founded in 1997 in India with the aim of developing capacity building for local communities. The organization's role is geared towards strengthening the local community to make them self-reliant. This is done through development communication and capacity-building workshops aimed at promoting Resilient Communities. The strategic approaches used to achieve this include micro-macro linkages, institution building for partnership and process development, and programme diversity with value-based assurance.

UDYAMA has become a new hub of Local Water Forums of the WWQA in India. It represents the type of organisation which the WWQA has over the last 12 months reached out to with the objective of dramatically extending the number and type of local community action which the Alliance is determined to develop and replicate throughout the world. This ambitious programme will be further enhanced in the period 2023 – 2027 and is designed to ensure that the WWQA is an essential mechanism creating a link between supranational strategy and tangible action on the ground. This approach demonstrates the determination of the WWQA to transform knowledge and data into action whilst creating a socio-political consensus in local communities around the globe.

UDYAMA has implemented several projects supported by the government of Odisha such as the promotion of farmers' producer organizations, work to enhance agricultural productivity UDYAMA and has set up more than 3500 micro water related projects. Other projects include community led Covid readiness and recovery, fair climate initiative, and accelerating opportunities while minimizing adverse impacts on livelihoods in migration. The projects implemented have helped rethink cultural customs, education, and gender roles, and allowed access to opportunities for promoting positive transformation and building resilience.

The approaches and implementations have brought together more organizations and local support for projects that create sustainable and resilient ecosystems. The integration of technology into research and projects that UDYAMA is implementing is aimed at Green, Clean, and Blue Technologies that will create resilient livelihoods and support the adaptation to changes in climate. UDYAMA has partnered with the American India Foundation to work on watershed restoration, ecosystem-based communities, and stream rejuvenation to create regenerative agriculture and protect soil biodiversity.

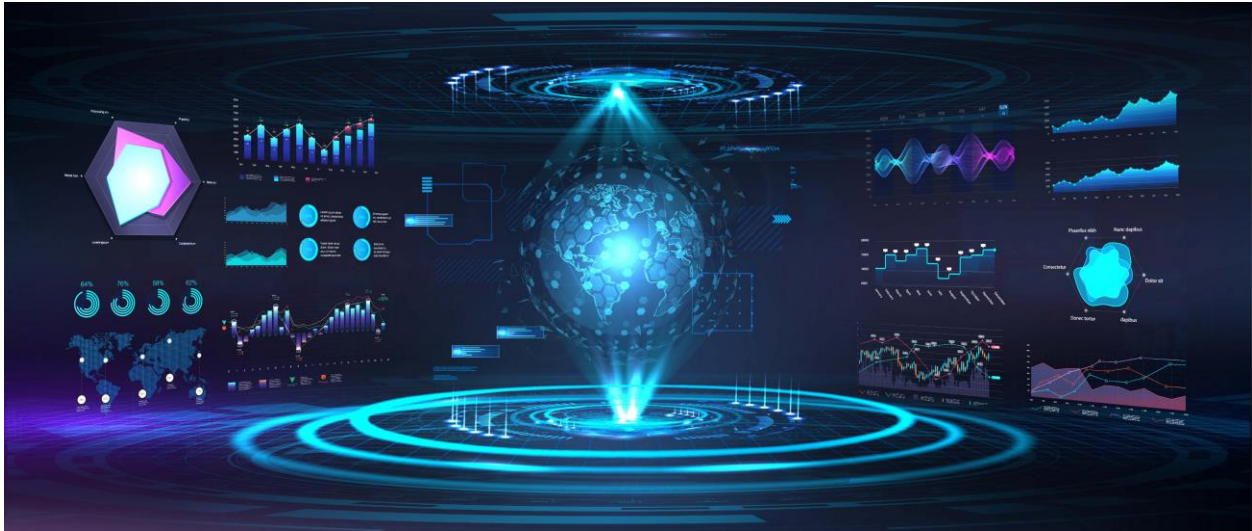
Website on <https://www.udyama.org>

Twitter <https://twitter.com/UDYAMA>

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QdYGPny7ng>

Content provided by Udyama, written by WWQA Coordination Team

THE DIGITALISATION OF WATER: Supporting Society's Capacity to Achieve SDG 6



The resolve of society to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were not weakened but strengthened as a result of the sanitary, socio-political and economic crisis caused by the appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Water Sector is (and must be) at the core of the environmental debate. The latest UN data estimates that 3.6 billion people, almost half the global population, live in areas that are potentially water-scarce at least one month per year and by 2050, more than 5 billion people could suffer water shortages due to climate change, increased demand and polluted supplies (1). No attempt to establish a sustainable society can be successful if it does not involve the water sector in all its facets. An important advance towards such progress is that regarding digitalization.

The global water sector is changing as it begins to embrace a digital transformation, to drive sustainable water management. The transformation for utilities is a migration from a data-rich environment to more of a knowledge-rich environment.

Digital technology applications - such as remote sensing, asset management (operation and maintenance), resources allocation and prioritization, customer engagement, predictive analytics (e.g., asset failure prediction), artificial intelligence, augmented reality and virtual reality (e.g., water utility maintenance and training) and cybersecurity - provide the means to dramatically advance the management of water. Digital water represents the very essence of future environmental progress.

Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, including commodity sensors, data analysis, cloud computing, intelligence amplification (or cognitive augmentation) and blockchain, entail new possibilities to analyze, automate, correct in real time, forecast and minimize risks. They can help water and sanitation

companies address many of the challenges they face, such as extending the useful life of ageing assets; reducing leaks, attacks, and other anomalies in the distribution network; improving water quality, service levels and the reliability of the supply; promoting water conservation, managing energy and materials use or increasing turnover through greater operational efficiency. Furthermore, digitalization can contribute to reducing costs for water utilities and their customers, engaging end-users and influencing behavioral patterns. Finally, digital water management can and must provide the basis for a more purposeful design and revision of existing and future statutory legislation.

The ICT4WATER Cluster in which a number of WWQA members are involved, undertook a study in 2020 (2) which demonstrated that there exists the need to ensure that utilities and all water-related stakeholders are aware of the possibilities offered by existing digital tools such as efficient satellite monitoring which would enhance their capability to comply with national statutory monitoring requirements.

The role of digitalization in achieving a more effective relationship with water end-users is vital. It is important to distinguish between citizen science and citizen engagement. Both activities benefit from digital support. Whilst citizen science provides researchers with an effective alternative source of on-site data with the additional advantage of raising citizen awareness regarding local water issues, citizen engagement seeks to channel the citizen's enhanced awareness into a proactive involvement both in the co-creation and subsequent implementation of water-based policies. The effective use of Digital Social Platforms (DSPs) and Augmented Reality (AR) offer the water sector a wide range of exciting mechanisms to improve transparency and public perception, capable of demonstrating in a clear and accessible manner both economic and practical benefits thus activating a common sense of purpose. Such practical communication and non-professional involvement result in a far broader social consensus providing a far more solid base for policy continuity. Effective communication is vital. A lesson that the water sector would do well to learn. Engagement must be embraced by all environmental actors including those traditionally expected to be purely technical and supranational administrations must take action to ensure that entities such as utilities are correctly trained in such social-oriented activities.

Numerous digital technologies can improve both the design and implementation of water-based regulations by providing supporting evidence or acting as an implementation monitoring instrument, whilst also observing the true situation of infrastructures together with that of environmental and climatological conditions. The resulting data is more objective in its assessment and permits the optimization of resources, a capacity to predict, diagnose and provide real-time information, which in turn enhances transparency and efficiency. Compliance with existing legislation such as the European Drinking Water Directive (DWD) and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) is far more verifiable whilst the policy of pricing can be better adjusted to the reality on the ground by employing digital solutions. With regards to event prediction, it is essential that the measurements obtained are integrated with the appropriate modelling and data analytics on a standardized platform which would thus permit the establishment of clear information-exchange protocols.

Many challenges still need to be addressed. For example, the assessment of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) is difficult due to the physical number of wastewater pipes in any given urban area. The price of

existing monitoring equipment can be dissuasive for modest operators and the application of systems such as smart meters vary greatly from one country to another. Nevertheless, such applications do contribute to a tangible improvement in water operations which, in turn, can result in the reduction of environmental damage. A digital-water approach permits the enhanced control of emissions from wastewater treatment plants, improved real-time monitoring of water-based operations, enhanced reliability of water services, increased water-use efficiency and subsequently an important reduction in energy demand. Employing digital management technology, end-of-waste criteria can be harmonized thus mitigating resource abstraction and pollution, an important cornerstone of the circular economy. Such effects require administrative support in the form of revised national and supranational directives capable of supporting digital solutions for the detection of pesticides, heavy metals, E. coli and other pollutants of emerging concern during recent months, or even viruses such as COVID-19.

It is extremely important not to underestimate the negative effect that sectoral fragmentation coupled with an aversion to what is perceived as high capital expenditure has had on the incorporation into existing operational systems of digital technology. Water is an issue of such fundamental social, economic, and environmental importance that it demands a rapid and efficient series of solutions. The resistance on the part of operators to invest in, for example, applications to monitor pollutants from stormwater and combined sewage systems online will not be overcome unless required to do so by law. In the same way, given that the water market is not one of the commercially most attractive due to its reduced size, policy is required to ensure that a fragmented market is upscaled. Emphasis should be initially placed on aspects where there would be greater demand such as the optimizing of operational expenditures (OPEX) and capital expenditures (CAPEX) and the employment of Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP) as a policy strategy is a recommendation that would establish a more sustainable market for digital technology suppliers. As is the case with citizen engagement and corporate transparency, administrations must ensure that the water sector receives sufficient access to competence development programmes on advanced data management. Both the technical and managerial areas of a utility would benefit from such an approach. Just as importantly, so would society as a whole.

As was clearly advocated during the course of the UN 2023 Water Conference held in New York, society cannot afford the luxury of a subjective water sector, just as it cannot ignore the fundamental importance of water. Whilst countless manufacturers and service providers benefit from the advantages of the digital age, whether one industry or another fails to embrace the most recent advances does not endanger the future of society as a whole. The supply and the treatment of drinking water and wastewater, the control of stormwater, the monitoring of both the quantity and the quality of water in the natural environment has always, does and will determine the health of the planet, the physical, social and economic well-being of society and the extent to which the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals become the pillars of a new reality or are relegated in the future to the shelves of unfulfilled policy.

Contribution from Dr. Richard Elelman, EURECAT, Member of the Strategic Advisory Committee and Social Engagement Platform

(1) European Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Elelman, R., Wencki, K., Chen, A., et al., The need for digital water in a green Europe : EU H2020 projects' contribution to the implementation and strengthening of EU environmental policy, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/661606>

(2) European Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Elelman, R., Wencki, K., Chen, A., et al., The need for digital water in a green Europe : EU H2020 projects' contribution to the implementation and strengthening of EU environmental policy, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/661606>

The May Interview – Almotaz Abadi, Deputy Secretary General of the Union of the Mediterranean

How did you become involved in the world of water?

I have a Master's degree in water resources management and another degree in Governance, and post graduate degree in leadership and multilateral cooperation on resources. I have acquired a technical - political knowledge and diplomatic practices through my enrolment in the Aid Coordination & Management and coordination of donor community and the Governments in the Mediterranean region initiated in my country Palestine dealing with different sustainable development portfolios including water as a regional actor. I expanded this knowledge over the last 20 years working with international donors, international and regional organizations as well as policy advisers and policy influencers in the region.

At the Union of the Mediterranean (UfM), before becoming the Deputy Secretary General in charge of Water, Environment and Blue Economy, I had led the initiatives to revitalize the water political process in the Mediterranean, including achieving a Ministerial Declaration and approving a regional water strategy. My country of origin featured as one of the scarce resources in water and faces challenge to access its water resources, that gave me the leap to act and try to build a new narrative to enhance the cooperation on water and beyond. Water is life and we can give water life by enhancing cooperation around it.



2 - Image provided by Almotaz Abadi, Deputy Secretary General of the Union of the Mediterranean

What are the principal roles of the Union for the Mediterranean?

*The UfM is an inter-governmental organisation that brings together 43 countries to enhance regional cooperation and dialogue through the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives addressing inclusive and sustainable development, stability and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area. As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process, the launch of the UfM in July 2008 was a true reflection of its Member States' shared political commitment to the enhancement of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Established in March 2010, the UfM Secretariat is the first permanent structure dedicated to the implementation of this partnership. Ever since its creation, the organisation has continuously worked to promote political dialogue across the Euro-Mediterranean region, in view of creating an area of peace, security, stability and shared prosperity that addresses the legitimate aspirations of its citizens. The last few years have marked a turning point for the organisation, exemplified by the adoption of a roadmap for action by the Member States' in January 2017. This roadmap, entitled *The Union for the Mediterranean: an Action-driven Organisation with a Common Ambition*, underlines the key role of the UfM as a unique framework for political dialogue and regional cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area, whilst focusing its work on the socio-economic root causes of the growing challenges that the region is facing. In 2022, the roadmap for action remained the comprehensive strategic framework for the work of the UfM, reinforced by five priority areas recognised by its Member States to ensure the organisation plays a crucial role in the post-pandemic recovery, leaving no one behind and paving the way for the creation of more resilient societies and economies in the region. In 2022, the UfM has enhanced its action on the ground through milestone initiatives, bringing the organisation closer to its highest mandate: that of tangibly improving lives for the citizens, especially those of vulnerable populations such as women and youth. It also aimed at shifting regional efforts on trade, investment, and entrepreneurship policies towards the creation of decent jobs while enhancing the power of research and innovation as solutions for a better future.*

The promotion of sustainable, green, low-carbon and circular resource efficient sectors is also one of the UfM key priorities to unlock an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in the region. The UfM is also creating a momentum by bringing together its partners to unlock access to finance for the blue

economy and water sectors and to raise awareness of climate and environmental challenges in the Mediterranean to take action to find common solutions.

What are the objectives of the UFM with regards to water?

As one of main climate change hotspots, the Mediterranean region already has over 180 million people who are water poor, while at the same time today, 3 out of 4 jobs are water-dependent. Joining forces to address the challenge of water security is therefore of utmost importance, not just as a means of allowing economic growth to flourish, but also to safeguard greater stability for communities and tackle one of the root causes of migration. Put simply, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals will always be hampered without first securing this fundamental human right for all. The Union for the Mediterranean has prioritized leading the development of a regional Water Agenda to address this precise problem. The UfM Water Agenda comprises its [Policy Framework for Actions 2030](#) and the [Financial Strategy for Water](#). The Policy Framework is organised around four themes: the water-energy-food environment nexus; water and climate; water, employment and migration; and water supply, sanitation and hygiene. The Financial Strategy for Water aims to facilitate water-related investments while enhancing the financial sustainability of the water sector.

Are you optimistic regarding the environmental future of the Mediterranean region?

The Mediterranean region is facing various environmental issues such as air and water pollution, climate change, unsustainable use of natural resources, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss. These problems are not limited to one country or region but are shared among the entire Mediterranean basin.

However, despite these challenges, there are many positive developments and actions happening in the region. Governments, organizations, and individuals are taking steps to address environmental issues and promote sustainable practices. For instance, in the Euro-Mediterranean region we have two great examples that are translating these concerns into compelling actions such as the European Green Deal and the UfM Environment Agenda, so called [Greener MED](#), which is a regional structured framework that, based on the coordination of existing and future programmes and projects, creates political and operational convergence to accelerate the transition of the Mediterranean region towards a green, circular and inclusive economy. Furthermore, many efforts are being exerted to increase the use of renewable energy sources, reduce pollution, promote eco-tourism, and protect wildlife and marine habitats.

While there is still much work to be done, these efforts provide hope for a more sustainable, inclusive and environmentally friendly future for the Mediterranean region. It will require continued dedication and collaboration from all stakeholders to ensure that these positive developments are sustained and

expanded upon in the future, and this makes me optimistic about the environmental future of the Mediterranean region.

What is your opinion concerning the results of the UN 2023 Water Conference celebrated in New York?

The UN 2023 Water Conference, the first major UN gathering on the subject in almost 50 years, was timely to underline the alarming situation of water around the world as we all know that we are off-track to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 6, but also to put in evidence the devoted efforts and hope we are still having and exerting change to save this precious element.

The UN Water Conference brought together stakeholders from around the world to discuss and to identify new strategies for addressing water-related challenges, such as scarcity, pollution, and climate change. The conference provided a platform for countries and organizations to make commitments and announce initiatives aimed at advancing water-related sustainability. This was the case of the UfM as we were given the opportunity in this immense gathering, to make the voice of the Mediterranean heard by showcasing the progress and challenges of the water sector in the region through our side-event, the 'Water Finance in the Mediterranean: Accelerating the implementation of SDG 6 by enhancing the financial sustainability of water management.'

And we really hope that the UN Water Action Agenda, the key outcome of the Conference, can make a difference and can "give our world's lifeblood the commitment it deserves" as stated by António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

THE WWQA BULLETIN BOARD



SDG INDICATOR 6.3.2: Data Drive Launch 2023



2023 | DATA DRIVE

UN-WATER INTEGRATED MONITORING
INITIATIVE FOR SDG 6



The GEMS/Water SDG indicator 6.3.2 team are excited to be engaging with countries again this year in the third round of data collection . To launch this and other SDG 6 data drives, UN-Water hosted [the SDG 6 data drive](#) kick-off webinars on May 2nd which were targeted at indicator-specific, and the overall SDG 6 national focal points. To maximise global reach there were two sessions, one in the morning with simultaneous translation into Arabic and Russian, and a second in the afternoon for French and Spanish speakers. Over 200 participants joined these sessions that helped to connect the focal points' efforts with something bigger, both in their own countries and globally. These webinars provided the:

- Bigger picture of SDG 6 monitoring and reporting and information on how the data are used;*
 - The processes and timeline for the 2023 data drive, including cross-cutting support available to countries; and,*
 - Updates on all IMI-SDG6 activities across indicators taking place in their country during 2023.*
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GEMS/Water as the implementing programme within UNEP for SDG indicator 6.3.2, presented on this indicator and answered questions about the data drive process and methodology. One of the key updates for this year's data drive is the launch of the new [SDG Water Quality Hub](#). This new hub, which is targeted initially at our national focal point network, includes links to support resources in multiple languages and a dashboard to view previous submission information. The Hub also allows users to review their submission in real-time thereby streamlining the reporting process. Our aim for this year is to add to the 97 Member States that have already reported on this indicator, and to support them to embed the information generated into the national decision-making process.

When looked at closely, this SDG indicator is much more than an indicator about national water quality – it is also an indicator of a country's capacity to monitor and assess their freshwaters. For example, it provides information on how extensive a monitoring network is, what type of water bodies are included, a country's analytical capacity as well as data management capacity, and how well suited the assessment procedure is to ensure water resources are protected. This critical information allows capacity development resources to be targeted to improve how the indicator methodology is implemented, which in turn will ensure that the information generated is improved to support protection and restoration measures of rivers, lakes and groundwaters.

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 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 June Issue of YEMAYA

- *The WWQA and Citizen Science*

- *Globe WQ*
 - *The June Interview – Nynke Hofstra, Assistant Professor at Wageningen University, Chair of the Technical Advisory Committee of the WWQA*
 - *Great Torrington Water Forum*
 - *The Pathway to a World Water Quality Assessment*
 - *The WWQA BULLETIN BOARD*
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-The World Water Quality Alliance Conference 2023

-Social Media Pages



*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.