THE WORLD WATER QUALITY ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

September 2024

The World Water Quality Alliance is convened by the United Nations Environment Programme and supported by the Swiss Confederation. It proudly presents its monthly newsletter, YEMAYA, named after the ancient African goddess of the ocean and motherhood. She is associated with fertility, femininity, protection, healing, and childbirth. Her domains are symbolized as water creatures: 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 water quality. Tell us about 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.

Celebrating World Rivers Day

This month in YEMAYA, we're turning our focus to a global celebration that's as dynamic as the waterways it honors: World Rivers Day. This annual event underscores the crucial role rivers play in sustaining ecosystems, economies, and communities around the world. With rivers in almost every country facing increasing challenges—from pollution to climate change—our collective responsibility to protect these vital lifelines is more important than ever. As advocates for water quality, we understand that healthy rivers mean a healthy planet. Let’s come together to raise awareness and champion stewardship for these natural treasures.

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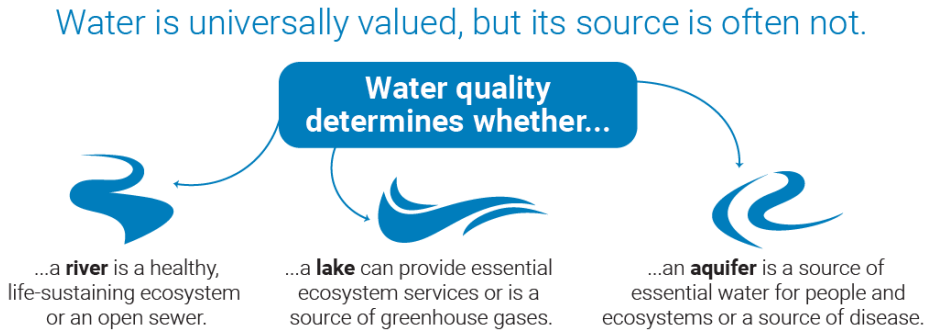
Launch of the 2024 SDG Indicator 6.3.2 Progress Report

Through UNEP GEMS/Water's work on SDG Indicator 6.3.2 (proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality) we now have a clearer picture on global water quality, but equally important, this

work has for the first time, presented clear evidence about the scale of the water quality gap globally. This cannot be ignored. Filling it is essential if we are to protect lives, livelihoods, biodiversity and reduce impacts of the climate crisis. Monitoring alone is not the answer, but it definitely helps!

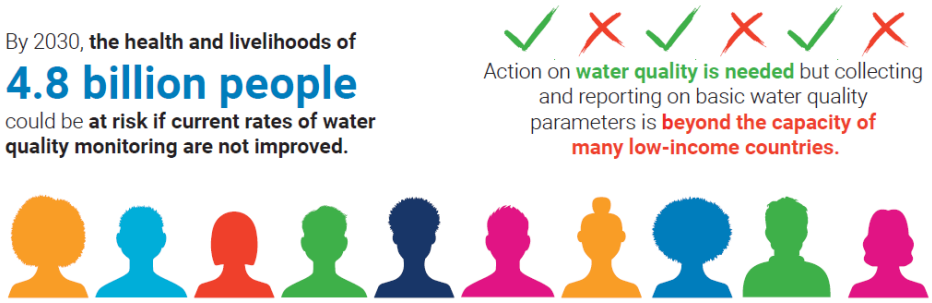


Good water quality in our rivers, lakes and aquifers is of course essential, yet despite global recognition of their vital importance, we have little idea which water bodies will be able to provide us with the services we depend on into the future.

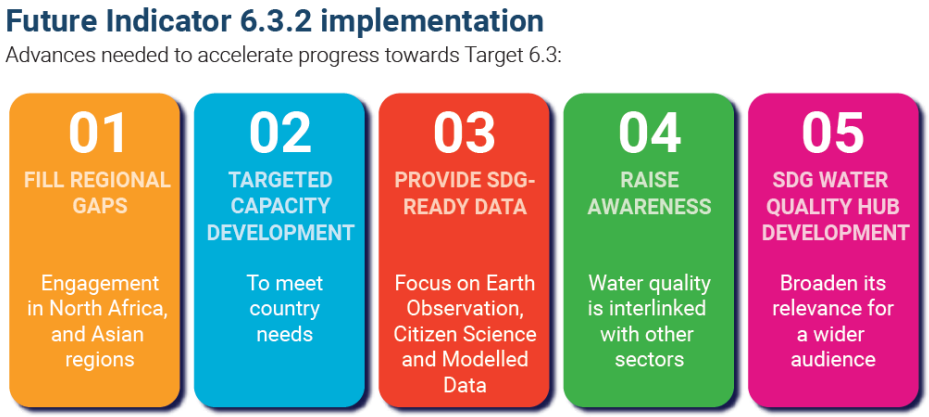
Through SDG Indicator 6.3.2, the scale and depth of this data gap is made clear, and worryingly, there is an overlap with those areas predicted to be most impacted by the climate crisis and population growth - both of which will exacerbate the crisis facing our freshwaters.

On a positive note, we can use this information to target efforts to fill it. UNEP and partners through the WWQA are working on multiple fronts including citizen science, Earth Observation and modelling approaches, but still, every country achieving SDG Target 6.3 (improve water quality) by 2030 remains unrealistic.

Along with the other SDG6 reports, the latest Progress Report on SDG Indicator 6.3.2 was launched at World Water Week 2024. This report goes into depth on the scale of the problem and proposes solutions.



Bringing this report together involved the input and hard work of many, but one group often overlooked are the National Focal Points in each of the 120 countries that reported on this SDG indicator. They are the ones tasked with this additional work to collate their national data and to bring these data together and to apply the Indicator methodology, which is in addition to their existing workload. Without their efforts, these insights and solutions would remain hidden.



You can access the full report as well as the visual summary and infographic from here: [Progress on Ambient Water Quality – 2024 Update | UN-Water (unwater.org)]

Dr. Erica Brown Gaddis (PhD) - Senior Water Resources Director, SWCA Environmental Consultants and Coordinating Lead Author of the Global Environment Outlook's (GEO-7) Chapter on Freshwater.

Your diverse educational and professional experiences with water resources have clearly shaped your perspective on water's role in society. How do these experiences influence your work in water quality?

During my career, I have worked in water resources through roles in academia, government, and consulting at scales ranging from local watershed planning to state and regional policy to global assessments. These experiences have taught me that there are many different ways to contribute to the invaluable work of managing freshwater systems and water resources for human use. People choose careers in the water sector because they see the importance of water to the health of our economies, environment, and society.

The community of water professionals has multiple banks of knowledge and contributions toward solving problems. When we connect these, we find success. Academics generate new knowledge and train the next generation of water professionals. Those working in government water agencies translate information into management decisions while navigating the constraints of resources and regulations. Consultants are the workhorses of the water community, delivering projects while serving as hubs for innovation and knowledge transfer. Those working in drinking water and wastewater industries worldwide are the unsung heroes of public health by delivering clean water and ensuring wastewater is safe before discharge. And those who work in advocacy shine a light on some of our biggest challenges, propose new solutions to old problems, and hold us accountable to one another. Our best success comes when we effectively harness the contributions of all these different societal roles.

1 - Image provided from https://www.swca.com/news/2023/01/erica-gaddis-rejoins-swca-as-water-resources-technical-director.

Building on those experiences, you have a long history with the Global Environment Outlook (GEO). How has GEO evolved over the years, particularly in addressing water-related challenges, and what role do you see it playing in the future of environmental policy?

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is the flagship report series for the UN Environment Programme, reporting on the state, trends, and global environment outlook. The consultative and participatory process also assesses the effectiveness of policy responses to address environmental challenges and offers a preview of various future paths. Since working on the GEO series as a graduate student in 2005, I've enjoyed learning and collaborating with new and old colleagues worldwide.

Seeing how the GEO process and scope have evolved over the past 20 years has been exciting. Each GEO takes on a particular theme or framing to approach reporting on the state, trends, and outlook of the global environment. GEO-4 was framed around sustainable development, focusing the assessment on interlinkages between human well-being and the environment. GEO-5 reported on progress towards meeting internationally agreed goals. GEO-6 took a structured approach to analyzing the effectiveness of policy solutions using case studies that may be broadly applicable to a range of geographies. GEO-7 is framed around the triple planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution – and aims to chart a path toward transformative solutions for some of the world's largest and most complex systems.

Regardless of GEO's framing and focus, the assessment series has always provided the most up-to-date synthesis of the data and scientific literature describing the state and trends of natural systems globally. I believe it is critical to maintain this component of GEO to ensure that policymakers can rely on the best available science and information to develop policies at all scales.

2 - Photo provided by Melchior Elsler (GEMS/Water).

Given your unique position working on both sides, policy and science, if you could redesign the relationship between scientists and policymakers from the ground up, what fundamental principles would you establish, particularly regarding water quality management?

Managing resilient watersheds and water resources, especially during rapid change and unprecedented challenges, requires strong partnerships between scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders. It also requires a commitment to using the best available science to navigate new policy solutions through effective governance structures. Scientific studies intended to influence natural resources management should be designed in collaboration with decision-makers to ensure that the results are policy-relevant. Successful partnerships must be built between scientists and policymakers **early,** and to be effective and adapt to new circumstances, those connections must be renewed **often**.

Too often, I see research scientists conduct studies and bring the results to decision-makers at the end of the process, only to be disappointed that their work can't be incorporated into a decision or new policy. We need to abandon the model of the scientist holding all the relevant knowledge and need to simplify the 'answers' to 'persuade' policymakers of the right action. Instead, we must recognize that the policy landscape can be as complex as the natural systems we study. And just as there are many kinds of scientists, there are many kinds of policymakers working at various levels of governance. Skilled policymakers bring their intellect and experience to solving problems. We must take the time to understand the human and natural systems' players, drivers, constraints, and uncertainties. Only then

can we design relevant scientific studies that support effective policy decisions that result in the best solutions.

Finally, as someone deeply committed to using sound science to shape environmental policy, what advice would you give to young professionals looking to make a difference in water resource management?

My first piece of advice is to be open to all learning opportunities. Seek out experiences that take you outside your comfort zone. If you come from a science background, try understanding the policy and regulatory environment. If you come from a policy or social sciences background, don't feel intimidated by the natural sciences—dive in and ask questions. Help each other.

My second advice is to recognize and find ways to maximize your impact while using the resources available and managing the constraints of the real world. There will never be enough resources (money, people, time) to do everything in your program or project. We MUST optimize our resources and use them strategically to provide meaningful and long-term benefits to water resources and the communities that depend on them.

My third piece of advice is to break out of your silos and avoid reinventing the wheel. Before starting down a new research path or program implementation effort, ensure you understand what has been done before so that you can build on rather than replicate the work.

Finally, be the synthesizer. We need people who can connect the dots between scientific disciplines, policy ideas, and community needs. Finding new connections within all the complexity is where innovation and action begin.

Workshop: Unlocking the Global Benefits of Water Quality Monitoring through Earth Observation

On August 28-30, 2024, the University of Stirling, in collaboration with the World Water Quality Alliance(WWQA) and GEO AquaWatch, organized a workshop titled " Unlocking the Global Benefits of Water Quality Monitoring through Earth Observation." The hackathon-style workshop convened over 40 participants from across the globe spanning academia, the private sector, and practitioners to explore how **Earth Observation (EO)** can enhance water quality monitoring. Through a series of tools presented by the HydroNation Chair, participants were encouraged to escape their daily "mental valleys" to arrive at innovative and actionable concepts that can unlock the benefits of this promising technology for more people, communities, and places. enabling intense collaboration and creativity among participants.

Key Highlights:

- **Diverse Participation:** The workshop attracted global experts who shared user stories, challenges, and solutions in water quality monitoring via Earth Observation. There was a keen interest and engagement in advancing EO technologies for water quality assessment and this was seen as a technology with high potential to contribute to water quality monitoring in countries and nations, especially to address the immense water quality data gap evidenced in the latest SDG indicator 6.3.2 progress report, which was released on the day the workshop started.

- **Innovation through Collaboration:** Participants engaged in various 'sprint' creative thinking sessions, focusing on creative solutions and concept development. The ideation process continues after the workshop through the full fledged development of ideas gathered by participants which can feed into further products advocating for the increased use of EO for Sustainable Development Goal 6.3.2.
- **Conclusions:** Participants agreed that while this is an immensely promising technology due to the existing satellite systems (for instance, the EU's Copernicus Sentinel 2-satellites) that are collecting data and imagery from outer space while we speak, much still needs to be done to unlock the full potential of Earth Observation. It is important to stress that Earth Observation will not replace the need for in-situ data on water quality – in-situ data is vital a data source that can only help necessary calibration and validation of Earth Observation data to make it more reliable. Furthermore, raising awareness of countries, especially low and middle-income countries about the potential of Earth Observation for water quality monitoring

The WWQA would like to thank the generous support of University of Stirling and GEO Aquawatch, who head the WWQA's Earth Observaton workstream, for the organization of this excellent event which promotes the WWQA's aim to use a community of practice approach to find the solutions for our most pressing water problems and support the development of methods to support monitoring the quality of our precious water resources, to further enable progress against SDG indicator 6.3.2.

The work doesn't stop there and participants voiced a desire for an ongoing community to sustain and expand the work initiated at Stirling. We aim for all the ideas generated at the workshop to be compiled and built upon as part of the next steps including raising awareness on the potential of Earth Observation and an exploration of priorities related to training and capacity building to facilitate uptake of EO data for water quality. Stay tuned, and if you are a professional working in the field of Earth Observation please get in touch with us to join the WWQA's Earth Observation workstream!

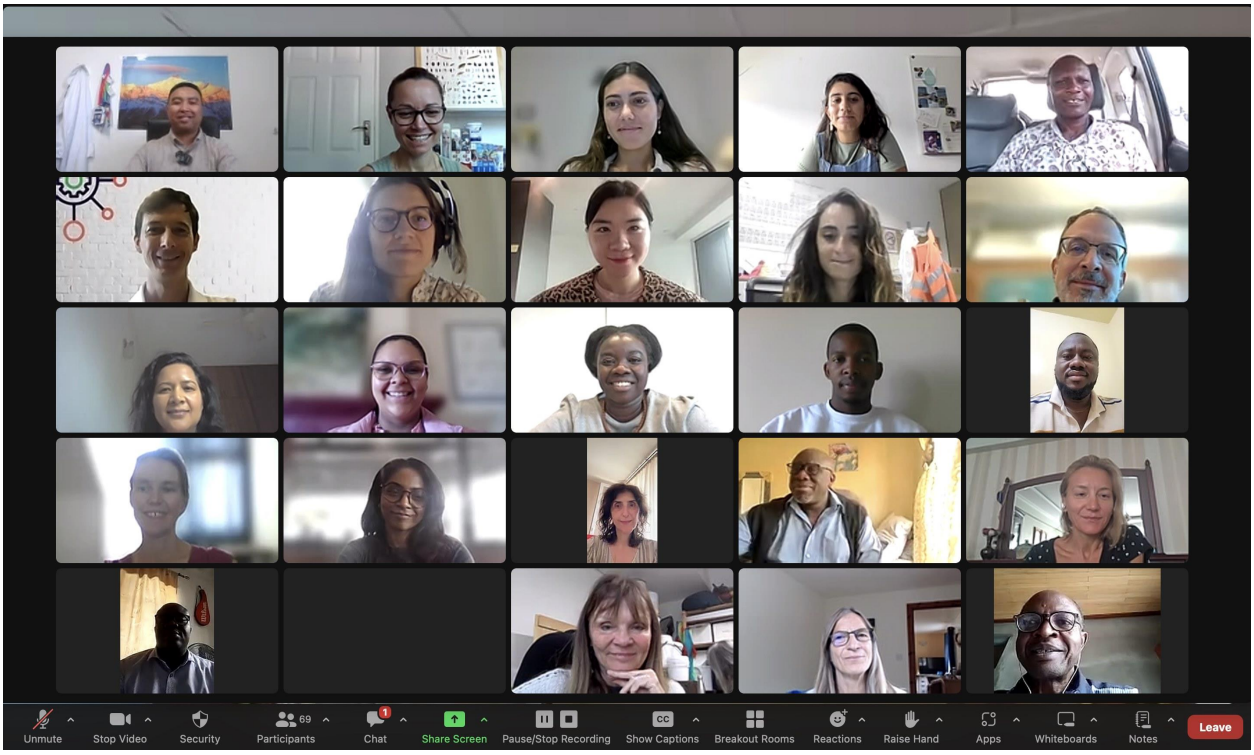
3 - Image provided by Nina Raasakka (WWQA Coordinator)

4 - Image provided by Nina Raasakka (WWQA Coordinator)

5 - Image provided by Nina Raasakka (WWQA Coordinator)

6 - Image provided by Nina Raasakka (WWQA Coordinator)

Collective Data Sharing for Good Ambient Water Quality - Workshop Overview



On September 3rd 2024, the World Water Quality Alliance Citizen Science Workstream, in collaboration with The Drinkable Rivers Foundation, organized a Collective Data Sharing for Good Ambient Water Quality workshop. The goal was to facilitate the integration of citizen science data with national monitoring systems to improve water quality reporting for SDG indicator 6.3.2. The workshop brought together experts and participants to discuss novel approaches leveraging varied data sources for global freshwater systems.

The workshop commenced with presentations from different presenters. Li Anh Phoa from Drinkable Rivers started the program by emphasizing the importance of local communities conducting water quality assessments to safeguard their environment. She also stresses the significance of working together to achieve drinkable rivers and a sustainable future.

Stuart Warner, UNEP's SDG Indicator 6.3.2 specialist from GEMS/Water described the World Water Quality Alliance's origins and the data issues that low-income nations (specially) are confronted with. He discussed how citizen science might cover some of the crucial data gaps and the significance of policy assistance in integrating these data with national systems.

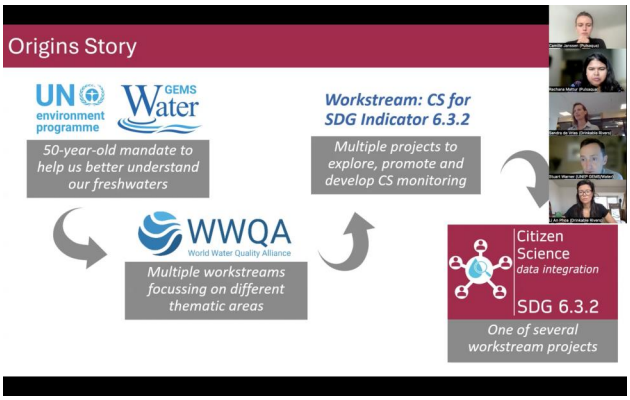
Kenyan and South African case studies were presented at the program. Nicholas Pattison from Ground Truth South Africa spoke about their effectiveness in coordinating data collection on nutrient enrichment and water clarity using citizen science apps and strategies such as MiniSASS. Enoch Kiminta from the Kenya National Water Resource Users Association presented how their water user organizations created

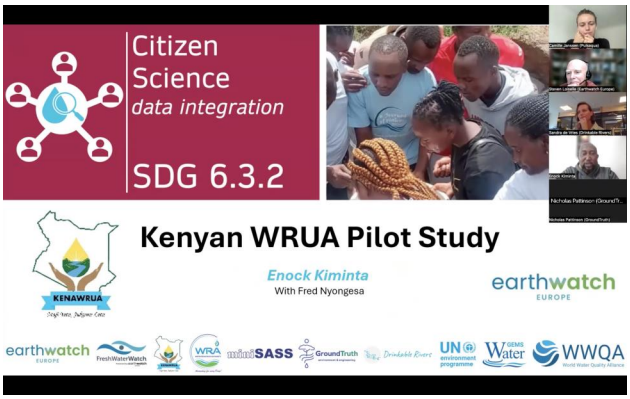
a centralized platform for data collection and policy lobbying, resulting in improved water conservation initiatives.

After the presentations, participants joined breakout rooms for in-depth discussions on critical themes. Four breakout rooms were organized as follows:

1. **Goals and Values of Integrating Data** – Moderated by Steven Loiselle and Anham Salyani, participants explored the foundational goals and values that should guide the integration of citizen science data with official monitoring systems.
2. **Building Trust in Data Sharing—**Moderated by Camille Janssen and Enock Kiminta, the discussion focused on how to foster trust between local communities, policymakers, and researchers in sharing and using data.
3. **Governance & Upscaling—**Moderated by Sandra de Vries and Fred Nyongesa, this group examined governance frameworks and strategies for scaling citizen science efforts to national and global levels.
4. **Requirements for Data Integration—**Moderated by Stuart Warner and Nicholas Pattison, this session identified the technical and operational requirements needed to integrate data effectively into national monitoring systems.

In conclusion, the discussions emphasized the necessity of teamwork, data interoperability, and sustainability in developing these initiatives. Participants noted the need for continued collaboration and the obstacles of data integration in improving global water quality evaluations. Ideas from the workshop will be developed into a paper by WWQA taking forward the work. The session closed with a request for more citizen science efforts to improve SDG 6.3.2 reporting and promote healthier freshwater ecosystems worldwide.





Importance of conserving wetland species for better Water Quality - South African Traditional Healers as our River's Keepers

The involvement of traditional healers in water resource management in South Africa is a promising and vital initiative. Traditional healers in the context of South Africa are individuals who practice traditional methods of healing through their ancestral gifts. Their healing methods are through the spirit realm using traditional medicine (medicinal trees and herbs) and going to natural resources for healing, rituals,

ceremonies and cleansing (rivers, lakes, dams, springs, mountains, caves and oceans). With over 200,000 traditional healers and an estimated over 50% of South Africa's population relying on their services, these healers are custodians of indigenous knowledge, passed down through generations, including a deep understanding of water's spiritual and physical importance. Their reliance on rivers for rituals such as cleansing, purging, and connecting with ancestors makes them significant stakeholders in water conservation efforts.

However, many of the river sites used by traditional healers are severely polluted, posing health risks not only to the healers but also to their patients who partake in rituals that often involve full immersion in water. The presence of harmful species, such as leeches, in these polluted waters highlights the urgency of addressing water quality issues.

To bridge the gap between indigenous knowledge and scientific methods, citizen science water quality monitoring tools like miniSASS (used for monitoring aquatic life), water clarity tests, stream velocity measurements, and the Riparian Health Audit are being deployed. These tools were designed to be used by citizens to assess their water resources. The clarity of the water and the stream flow rate indicates whether there needs to be any investigation upstream to remedy the environmental challenge. The Riparian Health Audit gives an assessment of the river stretch to advice and inform any rehabilitation and management options for the riparian area.

These tools also empower traditional healers, as affected and interested parties, to assess the state of rivers, identify pollution sources, and monitor improvements. The initiative leverages their frequent interaction with rivers by involving them in this process, as they often visit these sites with patients. Monitoring is collected at different locations where traditional healers perform their different activities. Upon analysis of the results information is shared with the wider community for action which include investigating possible pollution sources and also clean-up campaigns at illegal dumpsites. The tools are used to check on any change in the quality of water (health status). This outreach not only informs the healers but also extends knowledge to broader communities through their patients.

7 - Photo taken by Abulele Mbiza: Crocodile River near Brits Town, South Africa. A site used by traditional healers

Adopt-a-River/ Citizen Science Programme uses the catchment management approach and is a crucial method for achieving sustainable water resource management as it recognizes community members as a valuable stakeholder in water quality monitoring and overall water resources management. Involving traditional healers in this approach is strategic because they are part of the community and are respected individuals who directly influence their communities. They take an active role in linking catchment activities to the state of water resources as they are in these natural spaces to perform their rituals, which we call their offices. Ensuring clean and healthy water resources is essential for their practice and, by extension, for the well-being of the communities they serve since they serve as community leaders in their communities.

This initiative highlights the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge with scientific methods in water resource management. Traditional healers are ideally positioned to play a significant role in maintaining the health of rivers, which is vital for both ecological balance and cultural practices. The collaborative effort between traditional healers and scientists has the potential to bring about meaningful change in the conservation and restoration of South Africa's water resources.

8 - Photos taken by Noloyiso Xoliswa Mbiza at Pretoria Botanical Gardens. Traditional Healers are equipped with knowledge of identifying macroinvertebrates (Ecological Conditions). Each of the identified macroinvertebrates has a sensitivity score as part of the MiniSASS system to give the health status of the points monitored. The lower the species identified scores, the less sensitive it is to pollution, and the higher the species identified scores indicate that the species identified is susceptible to pollution.

Severe Microplastic Pollution Risks in Urban Freshwater Systems Post-Landfill Fire: A Case Study from Brahmapuram, India

Air pollution has direct and indirect impacts on water quality through acid rain, atmospheric deposition of pollutants, and climate change impacts. Pollutants from the air contaminate water bodies, harm aquatic ecosystems, and can degrade overall water quality. Addressing air pollution aligns with and can contribute to the prevention of further degradation of water quality and enhancing overall environmental health. The following study examines the rise in microplastic (MP) pollution in urban water bodies following the Brahmapuram landfill fire in Kochi.

Abstract:

This study examines the rise in microplastic (MP) pollution in urban water bodies following the Brahmapuram landfill fire in Kochi, India. Sampling before and after the fire showed a significant increase in microplastic(MP) concentrations in surface waters, from an average of 25,793.33 to 44,863.33 particles/m^3, with more prominent, predominantly black MPs becoming more prevalent. Sediment samples did not show a significant change in MP count but exhibited a notable increase in mass concentration. SEM/EDS analysis revealed surface morphology and elemental composition changes, indicating thermal degradation. Risk assessments using the Microplastic Pollution Index (MPI) and Risk Quotient (RQ) methods highlighted increased MP pollution risk post-fire. Hierarchical cluster analysis identified the landfill's proximity as a significant factor affecting MP characteristics in the aquatic system. This study underscores the growing challenge of MP pollution in urban water bodies following environmental disasters and emphasizes the need for improved policy and environmental management strategies.

Introduction:

Microplastic (MP) pollution is a global issue impacting oceans, rivers, and lakes, extending to even the most remote environments. Higher plastic consumption and inadequate waste management in urban areas contribute to MP accumulation in water bodies through runoff, wastewater discharge, and industrial effluents. MPs, tiny plastic fragments less than 5 mm, threaten aquatic ecosystems and human health. The Brahmapuram landfill fire in March 2023, which affected approximately 209 million kilograms of waste, has intensified concerns about MP pollution. Urban areas are particularly vulnerable to MP pollution due to stormwater runoff and other factors, with environmental disasters exacerbating the issue. This research aims to assess MP concentrations and distribution near the landfill and evaluate the associated risks to urban aquatic ecosystems, providing valuable insights for environmental scientists, policymakers, and urban planners.

For more information about the article, click on the link here

The WWQA BULLETIN BOARD

Seeking nominations: Reviewers for UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7) Second-Order Draft and for the Summary for Policymakers First-Order Draft

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is the flagship report of UNEP providing an integrated assessment of the drivers of environmental change, the current state of the environment, the effectiveness of policy response and the options for achieving different possible futures in the medium to long term. As requested by Member States in resolution 5/3 of the UN Environment Assembly, UNEP initiated the preparation of the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7) assessment and its accompanying Summary for Policymakers, to be launched at UNEA-7 in December 2025.

UNEP is seeking external reviewers to provide feedback including identifying any issues, data, or information that you believe should be included in the report. Your feedback is critical for the comprehensive review of the GEO-7 Second Order Draft (SOD) and the First-Order Draft (FOD) of the Summary for Policy Makers (SPM). The application can be done through the link Reviewer application portal by **30 September 2024.**

The GEO-7 SOD and FOD SPM peer review period is currently planned for **01 November 2024-15 January 2025.** Webinar sessions on how to conduct the review will be organized prior to the peer review period. For any questions, kindly get in touch with unep-ewad-geohead@un.org.

Upcoming webinar: How citizen science can play a pivotal role in elevating water quality and driving progress toward SDG Target 6.3.

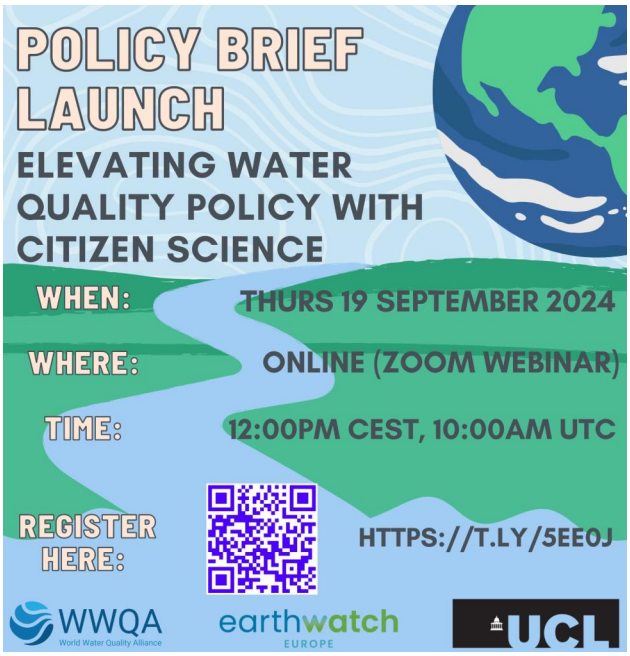
Join us as we explore how citizen science can play a pivotal role in elevating water quality, driving progress toward SDG Target 6.3, and improving water quality.

This webinar will launch a policy and technical brief that draws lessons across citizen science projects supported i.a. through WWQA seed funding and which calls for international policymakers and local communities to collaborate in monitoring and improving water quality through citizen science.

Date: 19 September 2024

Time: 11:00 am UTC; 12.00PM CEST

Register here: https://un-org-unep.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pkfID26JRjOhe53U8tsmXQ



Call for Projects 2024 of the Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems

Do you have a creative idea to help solve issues affecting freshwater ecosystems?

The Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE) has opened its yearly call for proposals dedicated to protecting and restoring the region's wetlands.

The call focuses on the following themes:

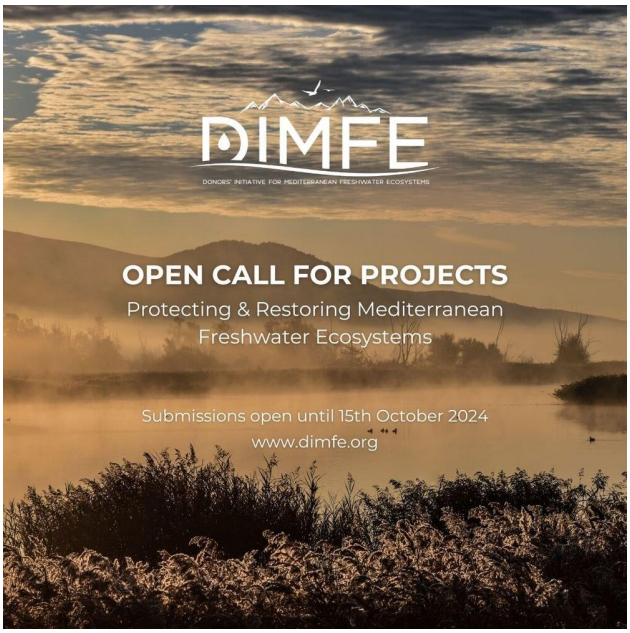
- Conservation and restoration of freshwater biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Sustainable use and management of water resources.
- Development and implementation of sustainable financing mechanisms for conserving freshwater ecosystems and using water resources.

DIMFE will fund projects adopting a holistic approach that considers community and cultural aspects, such as including socio-economic benefits for local populations, promoting environmentally beneficial cultural practices, and respecting ethnic and gender dimensions.

Available grants range between €100,000 and €500,000.

The deadline for submitting project proposals is 15 October 2024.

To review the submission guidelines and submit your application, please head to the following page: https://www.dimfe.org/en/submit-a-project



Job Openings

UNESCO: Project Officer responsible, Capacity Development Initiative (CDI)

UNESCO has opened a call for a **Project Officer** position in Paris responsible for leading the UN-Water **Capacity Development Initiative (CDI)**. This role will involve managing and coordinating key projects aligned with UNESCO's mandate, with a particular focus on enhancing capacity development for SDG 6 across multiple regions.

The selected candidate will oversee the CDI's strategic direction, ensuring effective collaboration between UN-Water members and various partners and leading efforts to advance capacity-building activities globally. This critical role will require strong leadership and experience in international cooperation and sustainable development.

You can review the full job description and apply through the following link:

UNESCO Project Officer Job Opening

IHE-Delft MENA Scholarship Programme (MSP)

Exciting opportunity for water professionals from MENA countries: the MENA Scholarship Programme (MSP) is now accepting applications! 📚Eligible countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and Syria (if living and working in one of the eligible countries)

Applicable to the courses:

Water Quality Assessment and Monitoring, 3 Feb - 21 Feb 2025

Remote Sensing for Agricultural Water Management, 3 Mar - 14 Mar 2025

Environmental and Social Impact Assessment at Project and Strategic Levels, 23 Jun - 4 Jul 2025

Application deadline: 15 October 2024

Learn more and apply: https://edu.nl/b96yv

IHE DELFT Institute for Water Education under the auspices of UNESCO

Chief of Section, UNESCO:

We are pleased to share the vacancy announcement for the position of Chief of Section for SC/HYD (P5 SC-100) with UNESCO.

Please see here for more information.

Internship position, IGRAC: Development of groundwater country profiles. Are you interested in this internship position? Please send your CV and motivation letter to careers@un-igrac.org before 26 September 2024. For more information: Internship position: Development of groundwater country profiles | IGRAC (un-igrac.org)

WWQA Membership Application Form

The WWQA coordination team has set up a WWQA Membership Application Form to keep our growing membership organized.

We kindly request all members to fill out the form :)

https://forms.office.com/e/BeF5iRuaP3

In the October Issue of YEMAYA

- *World Habitat Day*
- *International Day of Rural Women*

- *World Food Day*
- *World Cities Day*

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WWQA
World Water Quality Alliance

*Unless otherwise indicated, all contributions are by the WWQA coordination team.

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.