

WORLD WATER DAY 2021 TOOLKIT



2021 Valuing water



Here we explain World Water Day and outline the theme of valuing water. Please share and adapt this content when talking about the campaign.

THE BASICS

When is World Water Day?

World Water Day is 22 March. The first one was in 1993.

What is World Water Day?

World Water Day is an annual United Nations Observance focusing on the importance of freshwater, coordinated by UN-Water and led by one or more UN-Water [Members](#) and [Partners](#) with a related mandate.

What is the aim of World Water Day?

World Water Day celebrates water and raises awareness of the 2.2 billion people living without access to safe water. It is about taking action

to tackle the global water crisis. A core focus of World Water Day is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030.

What is the theme of World Water Day 2021?

UN-Water sets the annual theme. In 2021, the theme is valuing water. In 2022, it will be groundwater. Previous themes can be found here:

www.worldwaterday.org/archives

What happens on World Water Day?

In the lead-up to 22 March, people and organizations host World Water Day events and participate in the global public campaign, launched in the preceding months by UN-Water on www.worldwaterday.org and social media.

On the day itself, the [UN World Water Development Report](#) is released, focusing on the same topic as the campaign and recommending policy direction to decision makers.

THE CAMPAIGN

Under the theme of valuing water, the 2021 campaign is generating a global, public conversation on social media about how people value water for all its uses.

The aim is to create a more comprehensive understanding of how water is valued by different people in different contexts so we can safeguard this precious resource for everyone.

The central narrative of the campaign is designed to encourage people to contribute their stories, thoughts and experiences on the value of water:

“Water means different things to different people.

This conversation is about what water means to you.

How is water important to your home and family life, your livelihood, your cultural practices, your wellbeing, your local environment?

In households, schools and workplaces, water can mean health, hygiene, dignity and productivity.

In cultural, religious and spiritual places, water can mean a connection with creation, community and oneself.

In natural spaces, water can mean peace, harmony and preservation.

Today, water is under extreme threat from a growing population, increasing demands of agriculture and industry, and the worsening impacts of climate change.

Tell us your stories, thoughts and feelings about water.

By recording – and celebrating – all the different ways water benefits our lives, we can value water properly and safeguard it effectively for everyone.”

Collated from the #Water2Me conversations on social media, a representative selection of comments and opinions will be compiled in a document on what water means to people around the world. The document will be available on www.worldwaterday.org from 22 March 2021.



THE THEME

The theme of World Water Day 2021 is valuing water.

Economic development and a growing global population means agriculture and industry are getting thirstier and water-intensive energy generation is rising to meet demand. Climate change is making water more erratic and contributing to pollution.

As societies balance the demands on water resources, many people’s interests are not being taken into account.

How we value water determines how water is managed and shared. The value of water is about much more than its price – water has enormous and complex value for our households, culture, health, education, economics and the integrity of our natural environment.

If we overlook any of these values, we risk mismanaging this finite, irreplaceable resource.

SDG 6 is to ensure water and sanitation for all. Without a comprehensive understanding of water's true, multidimensional value, we will be unable to safeguard this critical resource for the benefit of everyone.

VALUING WATER: FIVE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

1. Valuing **water sources** – natural water resources and ecosystems.

All water is generated by ecosystems. And all the water we abstract for human use eventually returns to the environment, along with any contaminants we have added.

The water cycle is our most important 'ecosystem service'. Higher value must be given to protecting the environment to ensure a good quality water supply and build resilience to shocks such as flood and drought.



2. Valuing **water infrastructure** – storage, treatment and supply.

Water infrastructure stores and moves water to where it is most needed, and helps clean and return it to nature after human use. Where this infrastructure is inadequate, socio-economic development is undermined and ecosystems endangered.

Typical valuations of water infrastructure tend to underestimate or not include costs, particularly social and environmental costs. It is difficult to recover all costs from tariffs (known as full cost recovery). In many countries, only part or all of the operational costs are recovered, and capital investments are covered by public funds.

3. Valuing **water services** – drinking water, sanitation and health services.

The role of water in households, schools, workplaces and health care facilities is critical. Furthermore, WASH – water, sanitation and hygiene – services also adds value in the form of greater health, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WASH services are often subsidized, even in high-income countries. However, untargeted subsidies can benefit people with existing water connections, rather than improving the situation for poor and underserved communities.

4. Valuing **water as an input to production and socio-economic activity** – food and agriculture, energy and industry, business and employment.

Agriculture places the biggest demand on global freshwater resources and is a major contributor to environmental degradation.

Despite being fundamental to food security, water in food production is generally given a low value when assessed purely through the economic lens of value produced in relation to water used. Many of the wider benefits – improving nutrition, generating income,

adapting to climate change and reducing migration – are often not reflected in the cost of water.

For the energy, industry and business (EIB) sector, water-related threats such as water scarcity, flooding and climate change can push up costs and disrupt supply chains. Corporate mismanagement of water can damage ecosystems and harm reputations and affect sales.

Traditionally, the EIB sector has valued water by the volume used, plus the costs of wastewater treatment and disposal. More organizations are adopting integrated water resource management (IWRM) planning approaches as they improve their sustainability (see box below).

5. Valuing **socio-cultural aspects of water** – recreational, cultural and spiritual attributes.

Water can connect us with notions of creation, religion and community. And water in natural spaces can help us feel at peace. Water is an intrinsic part of every culture but the values we attribute to these functions are difficult to quantify or articulate.

Economics often considers water to be a resource for practical human usage and pays little or no attention to its socio-cultural, or environmental, value.

There is a need to fully understand cultural values around water by involving a more diverse group of stakeholders in water resources management.

Integrated water resource management (IWRM)

IWRM is the name given to approaches that attempt to reflect and balance a diverse range of interests, including households, agriculture, industry, business and the natural environment. Existing IWRM frameworks can provide decision-makers with a platform to involve more diverse stakeholder groups and transition to multi-value water governance.

FIND OUT MORE

• World Water Day 2021 website:

www.worldwaterday.org

• UN World Water Development Report 2021:

www.unwater.org/publication_categories/world-water-development-report

• UN-Water SDG 6 Data Portal: www.sdg6data.org