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A Snapshot of the World's Water Quality: Towards a global assessment

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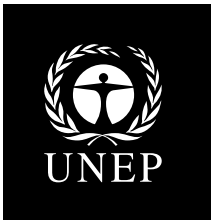

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For more information see: *www.wwqa-documentation.info*

Foreword: A Snapshot of the World's Water Quality "Towards a global assessment"

Flowing knowledge

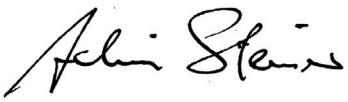
The quality of surface water in many parts of the developed world has noticeably improved in recent decades, but is being challenged as economic growth, demographics and climate change lead to widespread and severe degradation. The need to reverse this damage is reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both as a dedicated goal and as an integral element of many others. By providing a snapshot of the current situation, this report offers a baseline to measure progress, a framework for global assessment and a pathway towards sustainable solutions that will deliver on that agenda.

With many rivers still in good condition, there are opportunities to prevent pollution and begin restoration. However, severe organic pollution is already affecting around one in seven rivers across Latin America, Africa and Asia. This poses a growing risk to public health, food security and the economy, while cultivating inequality by predominantly affecting the poor, women and children.

Freshwater systems in both developed and developing nations face growing pressure from the discharge of harmful chemicals, such as hormone disrupters. Unfortunately, municipal water treatment has become increasingly costly and developing countries in particular have problems matching expanding public water supplies and sewerage, with adequate treatment of the new wastewater flows. As a result, there is a significant risk to vital activities like inland fishing, which accounts for some 60 million jobs and almost a third of fish harvested for human consumption.

Sound knowledge is critical to understanding the underlying causes and developing the evidence based policies to improve it, including source control, waste treatment, ecosystem management and new forms of local and global governance. Yet, until now, insufficient collection and evaluation of data has made it difficult to grasp the intensity and scope of deteriorating water quality. While an overview of the situation in the Southern Hemisphere already feeds into UNEP's Global Environment Outlook, this report clarifies methodology and priorities for data collection, gaps and scale. Focussing on key hot spots, it applies advanced modelling to existing information, which will assist countries looking to establish their own planning, monitoring and guidelines.

Thanks to support from UN Water and the many contributing authors, this report will help bridge the gap between water quality, the inclusive green economy and wider development issues. I hope that by combining such a global issue with local understanding, it will provide public and private sector decision makers a practical tool to deliver on all of the water related commitments for the 2030 Agenda.



Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director

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