World Water Development Report

Why in news?

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- The United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) was released ahead of World Water Day (March 22).
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Ensuring the sustainable use of the planet's resources is vital for ensuring long-term peace and prosperity.

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What is the report on?

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- The WWDR is an annual and thematic report that focuses on different strategic water issues each year.
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- It aims to provide decision-makers with the tools to implement sustainable use of our water resources.
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- The development of the WWDR is coordinated by the *World Water Assessment Programme* (WWAP).
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- The report is a joint effort of the UN agencies and entities which make up UN-Water.
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- The latest report was released at the 8th *World Water Forum* in Brasilia, hosted by Brazil.
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What are the highlights?

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- **Water** - Global demand for water has increased six-fold over the past 100 years and continues to grow at the rate of 1% each year.
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- Demand for water is projected to rise faster in developing countries.
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- The report highlights that more than 5 billion people could suffer water shortages by 2050.
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- This could be due to the effects of climate change, increased demand and polluted water supplies.
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- Climate change will put an added stress on supplies because it will make wet regions wetter and dry regions drier.
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- **Drought** - It is arguably the greatest single threat from climate change.
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- Drought and soil degradation, the biggest risks of natural disaster, are likely to worsen.
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- **Water quality** - Pollution has worsened the water bodies and water is expected to deteriorate further in the coming two decades.
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- This would be mainly due to agriculture runoffs of fertiliser and other agrochemicals.
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- They load freshwater supplies with nutrients that lead to the growth of pathogens and choking algae blooms.
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- Industry and cities are also a significant problem.
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- About 80% of industrial and municipal wastewater is discharged without treatment.
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- **Threat** - Water scarcity can lead to civil unrest, mass migration and even to conflict within and between countries.
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- The report thus warns of conflict and civilisational threats unless actions are taken.
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What is the concern with the present approach?

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- For too long, the world has turned first to human-built, or ‘grey’, infrastructure to improve water management.
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- In doing so, it has often brushed aside traditional and indigenous knowledge that embraces greener approaches.
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- But accelerated consumption, multi-faceted impacts of climate change and increasing environmental degradation is the reality now.
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- All these call for new ways of managing the competing demands on freshwater resources.
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What are the suggestions?

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- **Water** - Reducing the stress on rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands and reservoirs is important.
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- Water shortage cannot be offset by groundwater supplies, a third of which are already in distress.
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- Nor is the construction of more dams and reservoirs likely to be a solution.
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- The report emphasises a shift away from watershed management.
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- It calls for a wider geographic approach that takes in land use in distant areas, particularly forests.
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- Although farmers have long seen trees as a drain on water supplies, the vegetation helps to recycle and distribute water.
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- Evidently, the São Paulo (Brazil) drought of 2014-15 has been linked to Amazon deforestation.
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- The key for change, even for the water problem, will be agriculture.
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- **Agriculture** - This is the biggest source of both water consumption and pollution.
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- The report thus emphasises the importance of **nature-based solutions**.

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- Nature-based solutions can be personal – such as dry toilets – or broad landscape-level shifts in agricultural practices.
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- In agricultural practices, it is essentially an approach to rely more on soil and trees than steel and concrete.
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- It calls for shift to “conservation agriculture”.
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- This would make greater use of rainwater rather than irrigation, and regularise crop rotation to maintain soil cover.
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- This is crucial to reverse erosion and degradation, which currently affects a third of the planet’s land.
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- The suggestions imply that the potential savings of such practices exceed the projected increase in global demand for water.
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- This would ease the dangers of conflict and provide better livelihoods for family farmers and poverty reduction.
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Source: The Guardian

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Quick Fact

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World Water Assessment Programme

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- The WWAP focuses on assessing the developing situation of freshwater

throughout the world.
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- The primary output of the WWAP is the periodic World Water Development Report.
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- UNESCO hosts the WWAP Secretariat.
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World Water Forum

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- The World Water Forum is the world’s biggest water-related event and is organized by the World Water Council.
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- It is the biggest single gathering of policymakers, businesses and NGOs involved in water management.
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- Its mission is to promote awareness, build political commitment and trigger action on critical water issues.
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- It takes place every three years.
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World Water Council

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- The World Water Council is an international multistakeholder platform organization.
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- Its members include organizations from the UN and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, governments, academic institutions, civil society groups, etc.
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- Its mission is to mobilize action on critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level.
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- The Council focuses on the political dimensions of water security, adaptation and sustainability.s
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