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HCL Group, UpLink launch Aquapreneur Innovation Challenge to boost water resilience

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By **Sanjiv Das** | June 27, 2025



water

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Global conglomerate HCL Group and UpLink, an early-stage innovation initiative of the World Economic Forum, have announced the fourth challenge of the Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative, the Water Resilience Challenge.

The announcement was made at the Annual Meeting of the New Champions in Tianjin, China. Applications are open until August 4, 2025, with winners to be announced in January 2026. The top 10 winners will receive a total financial award of CHF1.75 million divided amongst the innovators.

The Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative is a five-year, 15 million CHF collaboration between UpLink, HCL Group and the World Economic Forum's Food and Water team, to create a first-of-its-kind innovation ecosystem for freshwater. The Innovation Challenge aims to empower global change-makers who are pioneering groundbreaking technologies, strategies, and approaches to conserve, manage, and protect water resources.

The Water Resilience Challenge seeks scalable, pioneering solutions that enhance the resilience of water systems facing mounting pressures from climate change, pollution and increasing demand.

Submissions are invited across three critical sectors:

1. Strengthening Infrastructure Resilience – Solutions to enhance urban and rural water systems, including drainage, to improve their ability to withstand extreme weather conditions (such as extreme heat, droughts, floods, and stormwater), address infrastructure gaps and vulnerabilities, and meet growing demand.

2. Rethinking Agri-food Water Use – Solutions to transform agricultural surface water and groundwater use through regenerative and nature-based approaches, improved irrigation practices, and innovations to conserve, reuse, and replenish water resources across food

systems.

3. Optimising Water in the Tech Sector and Energy Systems – Technologies to improve water efficiency and reduce water-related risks in industries such as AI data centres, and semiconductor manufacturing, along with solutions that improve water efficiency in energy generation and recover energy from wastewater.

Sundar Mahalingam, President of Strategy, HCL Group, said, “Through HCL’s collaboration with the World Economic Forum and UpLink, we are helping build a global ecosystem for water innovation — one changemaker at a time. We focus on strategic support — enabling promising innovators to access global platforms, visibility, investors, policymakers, and peer networks. In just three years, 30 innovators supported through this initiative have raised over $90 million and saved over 12 billion litres of water. Our goal is to empower at least 50 such changemakers — and many more in the years ahead.”

John Dutton, Head of UpLink, World Economic Forum, added, “UpLink and HCL Group’s Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative recognizes that solving the water crisis demands a dynamic ecosystem to scale effective solutions. Together with the World Economic Forum's Food and Water Initiative, we are proud to launch the Water Resilience Challenge, calling on bold early-stage start-ups addressing the most urgent water needs of our time, from rising demands in the tech and agritech sectors to climate-driven infrastructure vulnerabilities. By supporting breakthrough innovators and fostering cross-sector collaboration, we’re working together to build the water resilience every industry needs to thrive in a water-stressed world.”

“Being part of the Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative has been transformative. For a company at our stage, the credibility from HCL, UpLink, and the World Economic Forum has opened doors to high-level partners and investors we couldn't have reached otherwise, including HCL itself. The financial award and global recognition have positioned us for our next stage of growth, and we've joined a powerful community of innovators tackling the world’s biggest water challenges,” said Mansi Jain, Co-founder and CEO, DigitalPaani, a grantee from the previous cohort.

An official announcement regarding the launch of the Water Resilience Challenge will also be made on June 26 at the Chief Sustainability Officers (CSO) Meeting at the ongoing London

Climate Action Week organised by the World Economic Forum.

Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/news/34/22509/hcl-group-uplink-launch-aquapreneur-innovation-challenge-to-boost-water-resilience.html

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