

# Water Security: Time to Talk Across Sectors



Water security is a key element of human security, together with food security, energy security, health security, economic security, and freedom from fear. But water is threatened in many places around the world from growing demand, scarcity, mismanagement and increasing climate variability. Yet society's new and growing awareness of water insecurity is spurring many opportunities for change and development, for increasing cooperation among various stakeholders at the local, national, regional and international level, and for highlighting water as a key strategic area for investment.

## Securing communities and individuals

The 2003 Commission on Human Security defines human security as a demand-driven process that focuses on individuals and communities and seeks to promote a comprehensive view of how to improve overall well-being. In the same way, water security emphasises the health and well-being of individuals and of communities. It places the focus on the protection of the most vulnerable groups in society, which are often women and children. Women usually take on the responsibility of providing water for their families, and thus it is vital for more women to be involved and included in decision-making processes regarding water. Where water is degraded and dangerous to health, where it is becoming ever more inac-

cessible, or where it is priced out of reach, poor people's suffering increases. Rising temperatures related to climate change add to the hardship. The poor need protection, especially in times of economic turmoil, and concern for the well-being of the vulnerable is an important indicator of equity and social justice in society. The poor need to have their voices heard.

A comprehensive view of water security involves taking into account the water needs of all the sectors that consume or harness water, including industry, agriculture, and energy, and domestic water use in both urban and rural settings.

Ensuring water security both now and in the future must also entail taking an in-depth look at the environmental sustainability of systems and solutions, through preserving and maintaining aquatic ecosystems. Building resilience within communities and within ecosystems both to the destructive forces of water and to water scarcity is needed to face climate change. Water security is a technical issue, an environmental issue, and primarily a social issue involving different concerned stakeholders.

## Opening up intersectoral dialogue

Water security can provide a starting point for innovative discussions and more

integrated and inclusive decision-making. Multistakeholder processes are critical elements in tackling water problems and ensuring water security, precisely because more than technical options are involved. Many of the people who need to be present in the vital debate over water security are not primarily water experts but represent diverse interests ranging from geopolitical, business, and community considerations.

Participation, public involvement and transparency are essential for the ongoing success of such processes and negotiations. To promote and support open and inter-

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sectoral processes, broader multistakeholder platforms focusing on water security need to

draw in business and industry at regional and national levels, smaller companies and even small and medium enterprises, by partnering with Chambers of Commerce and other such organisations.

## Water security and economic development are interlinked

There are huge opportunities to increase dialogue with the private sector. Industry leaders are, in many cases, already highly aware of water security issues. Investment in treatment technologies is growing rapidly. Water recycling and reuse practices are be-

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Photo: WSSCC

coming more widespread and water quality concerns also rank highly, especially in the food and beverage industries.

Within the agricultural sector, which uses the lion's share of water in almost every country, huge gains can be made for development, security and economic growth through more efficient use of water, or by growing "more crop per drop".

Nevertheless, gaining effective buy-in on water security issues can be difficult. The variety of stakeholders involved in this sector, from ministries of agriculture to farmers' unions, irrigation councils, and key actors on the ground such as agricultural extension officers, seed and equipment suppliers, and many others must be engaged and aware of the issue.

### **Bridging water and energy**

In our newly carbon-constrained world it is essential for water-sector organisations to engage with energy stakeholders, to ensure that mitigation policies and measures

taken against climate change within the energy sector will not have an adverse impact on water security. This includes those working with maintaining water supplies for energy generation (e.g. hydropower – both large dams and micro-hydro; cooling water for other types of power stations). It also involves "energy for water" issues, such as the energy requirements of providing, transporting and treating water for irrigation; groundwater pumping; desalination, water and wastewater treatment plants, etc.

### **Shared concerns, secure solutions**

The knowledge base to tackle water insecurity is strong but scattered among many different players and sectors. Concerted action on the ground by a wide range of partners is needed. The converse of the com-

mon threat to water security is that it also provides many opportunities for greater collaboration and strategic investment to safeguard the future.

Recent financial crisis has changed our perspectives on global governance and regulatory issues. It has sharpened the on-going discussions over the water crisis, the energy crisis, and climate change.

Rather than retreating in the face of all these challenges to human security, it is essential that nations, organisations, business and civil society seek new ways to tackle their shared concerns. Opening up intersectoral dialogue and debate around water security will contribute to finding the solutions.

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### **Further Reading**

Global Water Partnership, Strategy 2009-2013, [http://www.gwpforum.org/gwp/library/GWP\\_Strategy\\_2009-2013\\_final.pdf](http://www.gwpforum.org/gwp/library/GWP_Strategy_2009-2013_final.pdf)

Commission on Human Security. Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People. New York: United Nations, 2003.

WEF report 2009 : The Bubble Is Close to Bursting: A Forecast of the Main Economic and Geopolitical Water Issues Likely to Arise in the World during the Next Two Decades

"Developing and Managing River Basins : The Need for Adaptive, Multilevel, Collaborative Institutional Arrangements" Issue Brief 12 in The Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture is available at <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/>.