



Human Rights Committee

Topic Guide: The question of the water scarcity

Introduction

From Flint, Michigan to Niger to Nepal, water scarcity has serious implications on the health and wellbeing of all citizens around the globe, even those who do not live in water-scarce nations. In 2019, around 2.2 billion people lacked access to safely managed drinking water services, whereas 2 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation services. Water is poorly managed, wasted and polluted, and the uneven distribution of this necessity has consistently proven to be a big problem in the international community. The Food and Agricultural Organization has estimated that by 2025, 1800 million people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world's population could be under stress conditions. In order to provide clean, fresh water, it is imperative that water resources are easily affordable and available. If water is not adequately purified and distributed, individuals will be more susceptible to diseases and illnesses.

General Information

Water Scarcity is defined as “The amount of water that can be physically accessed varies as supply and demand changes”, and UN Water is certain that “an integrated and inclusive approach must be taken to managing this finite resource.” As the global population increases, and resource-intensive economic development continues, many countries’ water resources and infrastructure are failing to meet accelerating demand. Many countries do not have well developed water monitoring systems, which prevents the necessary integrated water resource management that can balance the needs of communities and the wider economy.

The African region has experienced many difficulties in attaining the goal of water sanitation, due to poor coordination, lack of resources, and misappropriated funding, only 13 out of 54 African countries reached a modest level of water security according to a 2022 study conducted on behalf of United Nations University Institute for Water Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH).

Around the world, women and children collectively spend 200 million hours per day collecting water meaning that water scarcity takes a greater toll on women and children because they are often the ones responsible for collecting it. When water is far away, more time is needed to collect it, which often results in less time at school. Particularly for girls, a shortage of water in schools impacts student enrolment, attendance and performance. Carrying water long distances is also an enormous physical burden and can expose children to safety risks and exploitation. UNICEF’s work with schools and communities to promote an understanding of the value of water and the importance of its protection, highlights the importance of education in tackling this issue.

The impacts of a changing climate are making water more unpredictable. Terrestrial water storage – the water held in soil, snow and ice – is diminishing. This results in increased water scarcity, which disrupts societal activity. However, the focus has turned to exploring, protecting and sustainably using groundwater which is predicted to play a central role in the future in surviving and adapting to climate change and meeting the needs of a growing population.

UN Involvement

UN Water is a UN body that addresses water-related movements to contribute to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development goals. Its responsibilities include collecting information about water sanitation measures in various regions and compiling reports to inform others on measures that can be taken to preserve and purify water.

The UN Millennium Development Goal number seven calls for ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015 through a range of means including increasing sanitation. Millennium Development Goal 7 is in progress is underway by the UN and supporting organizations, which are working towards building wells, improving pipes and access to water, and funding technology to purify water.

The 'Water for Life' International Decade for Action 2005-2015 helped around 1.3 billion people in developing countries gain access to safe drinking water.

Further Reading

- WHO Unicef: Updated global estimates for WASH in health care facilities
(Provides water and sanitation-related data on UN member states)
 - <https://washdata.org/>
- UNESCO UN World Water Development Report 2022: Groundwater, making the invisible visible
 - <https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2022/en>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN: Land and Water, Water Scarcity
 - <https://www.fao.org/land-water/water/water%20scarcity/en/#:~:text=By%202025%2C%201800%20million%20people,m3%20per%20year%20per%20capita>
- Water.org: A Women's Crisis
 - <https://water.org/our-impact/water-crisis/womens-crisis/>