

Food and Water Security Course Module 2: Water Security

What is Water Security? Video Transcript

On the 8th of May 2013 UN Water defined water security as:

“The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”

This is the definition proposed by UN-Water to serve as a starting point for dialogue in the UN system. Discover on this infographic the key elements of water security, and the centrality of water to achieving a larger sense of security, sustainability, development, and human well-being. UN-Water hence supports the inclusion of water security on the agenda of the UN Security Council and in the post-2015 development agenda as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To recap then: In its most simplest terms, water security has been defined as:

"the reliable availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water-related risks". ... "Sustainable development will not be achieved without a water secure world.

Water is the primary medium through which we will feel the effects of climate change. Water availability is becoming less predictable in many places, and increased incidences of flooding threaten to destroy water points and sanitation facilities and contaminate water sources.

In some regions, droughts are exacerbating water scarcity and thereby negatively impacting people's health and productivity. Ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable water services is a critical climate change mitigation strategy for the years ahead.

Higher temperatures and more extreme, less predictable, weather conditions are projected to affect availability and distribution of rainfall, snowmelt, river flows and groundwater, and further deteriorate water quality. Low-income communities, who are already the most vulnerable to any threats to water supply are likely to be worst affected.

More floods and severe droughts are predicted. Changes in water availability will also impact health and food security and have already proven to trigger refugee dynamics and political instability.

Water plays a pivotal role in how the world mitigates and adapts to the effects of climate change. An integrated view on water, the biosphere and environmental flows is required to devise sustainable agricultural and economic systems that will allow us to decelerate climate change, protect us from extremes and to adapt to the unavoidable at the same time.



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Water is a finite resource having to serve exponentially more people and usages, and so ensuring everyone has access to a reliable supply is crucial to human survival and sustainable progress.

As water resources become more stretched, the energy and food sectors' dependence on water, and the fact that all three underpin several of the Sustainable Development Goals, means that decision-makers in all three domains are now increasingly focusing on water resource management, ecosystem protection and water supply and sanitation as part of their policy and practice.

Agriculture looks set to remain the biggest user of water into the middle of this century. While the shift to biofuels is generally welcomed, their production could demand as much water as fossil fuels. In terms of food, the volume of demand is growing with population expansion, and we are seeing a significant global move away from a mainly starch-based diet to an increasing demand for more water-intensive meat and dairy as incomes grow in many countries.

Efficiency measures along the entire agri-food chain can help save water and energy, such as precision irrigation based on information supplied by water providers, which can motivate farmers to invest in their systems to ensure the best returns from their water investment.

Globally, there is sufficient water to produce food for everyone, but food and nutritional insecurity remains widespread. Furthermore, where people have limited or no access to safe water or sanitation, the prevalence of diarrhoeal diseases is a major factor in high child mortality rates, malnourishment, and loss of productivity.

In water scarce regions, there needs to be robust strategies to protect water availability to maintain agricultural production and avoid food price volatility. Advances in genetics and technologies that allow the sustainable intensification of crops, livestock and fish production can help meet demand as efficiently as possible.



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