



**Secretariat of the
Ecumenical Water Network
(EWN)**

World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Phone: +41 (0) 22 791 6205
Fax: +41 (0) 22 788 0067
E-mail: water@wcc-coe.org
<http://water.oikoumene.org>

03.11.2014

Comment of EWN to HLPE Study on Water and Food Security (Zero-Draft), Nov 4, 2014

The [Ecumenical Water Network](#) (EWN) is a program of the [World Council of Churches](#) - a fellowship of 345 churches in 110 countries and represents around 550 million Christians around the world. The EWN has a network of churches and Christian organizations promoting people's access to water and sanitation around the world. The EWN advocates for realization of human right to water and sanitation for all with a justice perspective. Enclosed please find a [statement of EWN on water justice](#).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Zero draft of the HLPE study on Water and Food Security (Zero-Draft). The Ecumenical Water Network applauds the authors for extensively covering the broad range of water issues related to food security and nutrition. The study is timely initiative as not only water scarcity and conflicts are rising in many regions of the world but are affecting food security severely.

Right to adequate standard of living (recommendation Nr. 12)

We welcome the human rights' approach in the study. As the access to water is vital for food security and nutrition we think it is of utmost importance to secure the legitimate user rights of local communities. We would like to therefore propose some additional points to the recommendations:

- States should recognize the legitimate rights to water under the gamut of right to food, as they are essential for the livelihood of peasants, herders, fishers and others and it needs formal recognition.
- States should put policies and targets in place of its progressive realization. States should respect the water uses of local communities, should protect them against dispossession and take measures to fulfill their water rights. (This goes beyond merely individual rights).
- There is the need for national strategies for both ecologically and socially viable water use. States should ensure that their water policies are transparent and accountable. Water allocation should be fair, taking the food and water needs of the most vulnerable



groups into account. Water management should be decentralized and take into account the participation of the water using communities as an important stakeholder.

- States should analyze the coherence of their FSN policy, their water policy with their investment policies. I.e. the investment agreements often undermine human rights.
- States should control the large scale water use by powerful private or public users. All investments (in agriculture, energy, infrastructure, industry and mining, bottling of water, etc) need to have a thorough water right impact assessment concerning future access to water (blue and green water) and quality of waste water, concerning the impact on local communities and ecosystems.
- By no way states should sell out the rights to private actors (e.g., privatizations of rivers and lakes). Home states shall control corporates also operating in other countries (extra-territorial obligation) and make them accountable on their water use/abuse. Private actors have to follow a “do no harm” approach.
- We consider it very important that States build up grievance redressal mechanism, to address violation of human right to water and that of food!
- States should enhance the participation of the local population and their representations in the governance of water. The principle of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) need to be applied (please add the consent to page 81, line 12).

Gender (Recommendation Nr. 9)

- Women’s empowerment and participation in policy developments and decision making is key to overcome the discrimination and marginalization in their access to water.
- The right to water and the rights to food and nutrition need to be seen interlinked with women’s rights. Without overcoming the existing gender discrimination practices in our society, the water and food goals cannot be achieved.

Stigma and Discrimination : (missing)

Often Stigma and Discrimination existing in the society, particularly in a multicultural context, can be seen as an impediment to realization of human right to water as well as to right to food. For example Gender, Caste, race, religion, ethnicity, diseases, physical condition can deter a particular individual or community from accessing water or food in a dignified manner, even if there are provisions for . The Special Rapporteur to Human Right to Water and Sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque has dealt with this issue extensively in her [report to the 21st session of Human Rights Council in 2012](#). This aspect is completely missing from the Study draft !

Water management and Agroecology (chapter 2.4.4)

- This chapter still stays rather general. We would welcome, that it would become clearer that the production systems impact differently on the natural resources.



- To our understanding the long-term and sustainable water availability should be a key criterion for the selection of crops and production method. They need to be site-specific and appropriate to the available natural resources.
- Agroecology is an alternative to the business as usual model of production, which is responsible of many problems, you are describing. Therefore the study should be more specific in order to make clear that agroecology is a system of production, which serves to keep the water where it is needed. Organic agriculture can lead to better infiltration, reduced evaporation through soil coverage, the build up of soil organic matter and enlarged root growth and all together to an increased soil moisture holding capacity. Integrated animal husbandry and low input of chemical fertilizers/ phytosanitary measures uphold the quality of waste water. Physical methods (terracing, hedges, ditches and walls) help additionally in water harvesting and prevent erosion. Research needs to build up on traditional knowledge system .

Water and Food in occupied territories and protracted crisis: (Missing)

The water and food situation is most at risk in protracted crisis (Palestine, Dafur and others). This is not mentioned in the zero draft, but certainly needs particular attention. We have a clear position on this issue, expressed in a [statement on water crisis in Palestine](#).

To be further explored: Transboundary conflicts

In many regions water is a highly sensitive issue. The use of upstream users of water resources (for purposes of agriculture and electricity production) has a direct impact on the downstream users. Israel's use of water from river Jordan, Ethiopia and Sudan's use of water from the Nile are examples where food security is directly affected. As water is a common good, and the physical nature of water is not limited to a certain territory water government goes beyond boundaries (be it states or regions) and exceed the human rights obligation of states (the same as air pollution or carbon emissions, in the context of climate change). Although it is mentioned under recommendation 7, we believe that the issue is far more complex. This should either be treated in a separate chapter or in a separate following study.

Water foot print (recommendation Nr. 5)

- Water consumption is not only related to growing food demands and changing diets. The water footprint of biomass production for energy requirements, e.g. bio fuel , or new demands from the bio economy need be discussed as well, as this has an impact of water usage on food production when industries consume water for increased biomass production.
- The nexus between energy- water- food in the old and the new "bio"- economy needs to be further analysed.



- States should investigate on how to make the water foot print (i.e. the blue and grey water) transparent (water usage for cotton, sugar, meat can be very different depending on production methods and places of origin).
- The water footprint shall not be burdened on consumers only. States should define goals and ways of reducing the national water footprints.
- Reducing the water footprint should be part of the environmental strategy of a business, as part of their corporate social responsibility. States do have the obligation to control them under their Human Right obligation and extraterritorial obligation.

Recommendation No. 11 (pg 81)

Under the heading “Improved efficiency along food chains and in food systems (2.5)” , “virtual water” has been explained that it makes sense that by using virtual water calculations, water intensive crops/meats can be imported, from countries where there are plenty of water and water starved country make the most of their available fresh water by less water intensive crops. Further in Recommendation No. 11, this argument is put forward that through trade, which is open and fair. However, as we all know, that “fair-trade” is far from reality in today cut-throat competitive market economy. In water starved countries smallholders and peasants live from farming and husbandry. This approach could drive them out of business by imports (meat from Europe, not from the Sahel - from what do herders live then?) Food imports need to be very carefully thought out keeping these vulnerable groups’ interest in mind and not to threaten the right to food of smallholders. Furthermore, the bottom line in virtual water/trade should be t “affordable” for all ! Otherwise, the human right to access water and food will be diluted !

On behalf of the International Reference Group of EWN



Sd/-

Dinesh Suna
Coordinator,
Ecumenical Water Network
World Council of Churches

Carolin Callenius
IRG Member, EWN,
(Focal Point, Right to Food)

