



Call for Contributions

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

Thematic Report to the UN General Assembly 79th session:

“Water and food nexus: a human rights approach to water management in food systems”.

Inputs by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

To facilitate the reception of inputs, the Special Rapporteur prepared a list of key information that he considered essential for the report. The list could be answered **entirely or partially** according to the expertise and experience of those actors willing to contribute to the Report.

Questions addressed in the inputs:

1. If you are a donor or philanthropist organisation or research organisation:
 - 1.1. How do you set your organisation's priorities to tackle water and food security or support the right to food and water, especially for those living in poverty and vulnerability?
 - 1.2. How do you choose priority regions and which actors to support?
 - 1.3. Can you describe broadly how your research, project implementation, or intervention process works, how it links to the right to water and food, and how you engage with other actors?

FAO’s work on water and land resources, as well as land and water tenure

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) works on various strategies and approaches to tackle water and food security and support the right to food and water for the most vulnerable populations. Water is fully mainstreamed into FAO with water as the theme for World Food Day 2023 and the FAO governing bodies’ biennium 2024-2025, and the conceptual framework on integrated land and water resources management as a corporate strategy. It is in addition realized in multiple workstreams:

Water resources assessment and data: FAO conducts assessments on water balances, water uses, particularly in the agricultural sector, and water governance frameworks and to generate data to understand the challenges of water and food security globally and within specific regions. This includes (i) statistical data like in AQUASTAT, FAO’s Global Information System on Water and Agriculture, including assessment of SDG indicators 6.4.1 and 6.4.2; ii)

remote sensing data on agricultural water use and productivity through the WaPOR portal, providing insights of the state of the water resources in the basin to decision-makers or iii) rapid water accounting calculating water balance to inform local governance. For water tenure the efforts include analysis of the legal and institutional frameworks, the analyses of implementation gaps, overlapping mandates and field research on local and customary in relation to water access, use and allocation.

Awareness raising and capacity building: FAO provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to countries to improve knowledge on availability, consumption and formal and customary rules and institutions that influence the access, the use and transferability of water. This includes training to use alternative irrigation systems, improving irrigation infrastructure and water productivity in irrigated and rainfed production systems, organizing dissemination and information workshops on water tenure.

Advocacy: FAO advocates for inclusive policies at national and international levels that promote sustainable agriculture, equitable access to water resources, and the right to food. The work with governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders are aimed at developing more inclusive legal and policy frameworks to address the root causes of food and water insecurity and consider all legitimate tenure holders. FAO proposed National Water Roadmaps towards 2030 as a Water Action Agenda during the UN 2023 Water Conference to support countries in order to develop innovative solutions and actions for sustainability, water and food security through national water dialogues.

In 2023 FAO launched the Global Dialogue on Water Tenure as a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss principles for responsible governance of water tenure, with a view of strengthening secure and equitable access to water resources of all legitimate water users, including women and marginalized groups, in support of wider goals of health, food security, social inclusion, and climate resilience. The Global Dialogue was launched at the UN Water Conference in 2023 as a commitment of FAO to the Water Action Agenda, in line with recommendations of the FAO Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) recommendations on Water for Food Security and Nutrition.

FAO's work on water tenure through the project Knowing Water Better (2019-2022, <https://www.fao.org/in-action/nowat/>) in Rwanda, Senegal and Sri Lanka illustrated that customary and formal tenure arrangements frequently co-exists and are not always aligned. Understanding these arrangements from the bottom up is a prerequisite to develop governance frameworks to safeguard access to water, particularly of vulnerable and poor populations in rural areas, and in consequence, the realization of the human rights to water of these populations.

Empowerment of vulnerable communities: FAO works to empower vulnerable communities, including smallholder farmers, women, indigenous peoples, pastoral communities and rural populations, by enhancing their access to land, water and knowledge, in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, adopted by the Committee on World Food Security in 2012. This empowerment helps to improve their food and water security and reduce their vulnerability to external shocks.

Partnerships and collaboration: FAO collaborates with a wide range of partners, including other UN agencies, governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to leverage resources and expertise in addressing food and water security. These partnerships help to mobilize support for FAO's initiatives and extend and scale-up their impact on the ground. The

Global Framework for Action to cope with Water Scarcity in Agriculture in the context of climate change (WASAG) is hosted by FAO and consist of these various stakeholders with the same objective of enhancing field capacity for the adaptation of agriculture to water scarcity.

FAO's work on the Right to Food:

As a UN Specialized Agency, the FAO promotes rural development and strengthen food security, improve efficiency in land and water use, and achieve optimum utilization of forestry and fisheries resources. It plays a central role in the realization of human rights, most notably the right to adequate food. Not only has the FAO significantly influenced the evolution of the human rights framework around the right to food, but the Organization has also made substantial contributions to its worldwide advancement.

As One UN, FAO is committed to adopting a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to its programs and policies. This includes a new Strategic Framework 2022-2031 focusing on four aspirational 'betters' - better production, better nutrition, better environment, and better life, to achieve inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems. FAO's commitment to the HRBA is particularly apparent in the cross-cutting themes of including, youth and gender, which reflect key human rights principles such as equality and empowerment. Human rights also lie at the core of the 2030 Agenda and its transformative promise to "leave no one behind".

2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (RTFG). They provide practical guidance for States on how to realize the right to adequate food through the development of strategies, programmes, policies and legislation.

The RTFG recognize that the human right to water is a precondition for the full realization of the right to adequate food. Its Guideline 8C stresses that States should improve access to water resources and promote its sustainable use and allocation. The equitable distribution of water must satisfy basic human needs and preserve or restore "the functioning of ecosystems with domestic, industrial and agricultural needs, including safeguarding drinking-water quality" (8.11)

Publication: In 2020, FAO published *The Right to Water for Food and Agriculture*, a study that examines the linkages between the right to water, the right to food and sustainable agriculture. It explores how the human right to water is critical for food production and agricultural practices advocating for a human rights-based approach to water governance. Recognizing a human right to water, for drinking and household needs as well as for growing food, has implications for water allocation and sets limits to the extent that water can be allocated for other uses such as agricultural production which is necessary to prevent starvation, for the livelihoods and cultural survival of Indigenous Peoples and for subsistence agriculture that supports disadvantaged and marginalized farmers and rural women.

FAO's work on Equitable Livelihoods in Fisheries and Aquaculture

Inland waters provide a wealth of vital ecosystem services that are essential to human well-being, encompassing consumptive and non-consumptive uses such as the delivery of potable water, sanitation, food and nutrition, water purification, carbon sequestration, and more, rendering them among the most economically valuable ecosystems. Within these, fisheries represent a non-consumptive use of water while providing a nutrient-rich dietary staple that is particularly important in regions where diets are predominantly reliant on starches, and often deficient in animal protein, minerals, and vitamins.

Small waterbodies, including headwater streams, small lakes and ponds, canals and ditches provide a good illustration of this. Being widespread, these waterbodies can be important sources of water for households, crops and livestock as well as for fisheries and wildlife. In managed landscapes, these waterbodies are often less polluted and support plant and animal species, including fish, including through their roles as dry season refuges. Fish from these waterbodies can also play important roles as a ‘bank in the water’, with fish sold to meet household and community needs.

Changes in land use and construction and management of water control structures affect both water and fisheries and in many instances the design and operation of these structures has failed to consider issues of access, food and nutrition and the roles and values associated with these waterbodies and their fisheries, risking both environmental degradation and impoverishment. These changes in water flow and quality, due to upstream developments, are usually noticed by fishing communities.

As with many aquatic environments, environmental services and uses can be recovered if the relevant ecological processes can be restored. Essential functions can often be recreated through simple means to enhance livelihoods. For example, ponds providing clean water and fisheries can be created relatively cheaply and easily and water control structures can be managed to ensure connectivity that benefits fish and other aquatic plants and animals. Where fisheries play important roles in livelihoods, they can be an important entry point for management and restoration of waterbodies that addresses food security, access to clean water and landscape-scale contributions to the conservation of plant and animal populations. Realising these opportunities for effective solutions for managing water and fish requires participation of those dependent upon these services and benefits from their knowledge and capabilities. Local people will usually be able to pin-point both the problems, their causes and what needs to be addressed to circumvent the situation.

Guatemala: Practical example of the link between fish and water quality : In 2015 150 km of the Pasión River in Guatemala was polluted due to the overflow of oxidation ponds owned by an oil palm company inter alia resulting in the contamination of the river with the chemical malathion which absorbs all oxygen in the water but may also cause a range of physical symptoms in people and even death. The incident, which affected 16 communities and 30,000 people, was first reported by riparian communities noticing thousands of asphyxiated fish floating in the river. (see also <https://cmiguate.org/la-pasion-desastre-ecologico-y-social/>; https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%ADo_La_Pasi%C3%B3n)

Instructions

Please send your contributions in English, French or Spanish in Word or PDF format to hrc-sr-watsan@un.org AND to maria.acostalazo@un.org. Please indicate “**Input Water and Food Nexus**” in the email subject line; limit your contributions to a maximum of **2,500 words** and if necessary, provide links to relevant documents or attach annexes.

Your contribution should be sent by **no later than 15 March 2024**.

Treatment of inputs/comments received:

All submissions will be published on the website of the mandate. Non-state actors could request the confidentiality of the submission.

