



WaterAid Inputs to the Thematic Report to the 79th session of the UN General Assembly “Water and food nexus: a human rights approach to water management in food systems”

Can you explain your personal or community experience fulfilling your human right to safe drinking water, sanitation, and the human right to food? Do you think they are linked? Explain what the main sources of food and water are, as well as the quality of food and water.

In agrarian and pastoral communities where [WaterAid operates](#) we observe a strong linkage between the lack or fulfilment of the human rights to both water and food. Although WaterAid focuses on water access for human and domestic uses primarily, we are aware of increasing water demands for agriculture, livestock, value-adding industries, and other food-related uses. One major concern is the equitable use of water. In our [new strategy](#) we aim at partnering with high water use sectors to improve water security and climate resilience. We plan to collaborate with various stakeholders in sustainable livelihoods, environment, agriculture, water, climate, energy, and industries to advocate that vital freshwater resources required for primary human development are adequately protected and recovered (in quantity & quality).

As an organisation, WaterAid has been on a journey to understanding the key determinants that will deliver universal, climate resilient WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene). During the last strategic period WaterAid made decisive steps to shift from a service-delivery focused approach to strengthening the systems to guarantee delivery of services equitably and sustainably. This move has included the best ways to influence, strengthen and support [all catalytic actors and factors in each context, fully aligned with the principles of the human rights to water and sanitation](#).

In addition, WaterAid builds on its considerable experience of working with local organizations in empowering communities or groups to demand their rights and to hold governments and service providers to account. At this community level, WaterAid has collaborated with the media, youth, women, and human rights groups in putting the rights to water and sanitation on the political agenda and to engage with leaders and institutions to fully own their responsibilities in delivering these rights. WaterAid endeavours to particularly connect its work on the human rights to water and sanitation with rights to health, education, gender equality, and climate justice.

WaterAid acknowledges that food security and agricultural production have a strong relationship with basic social services and infrastructure like water supply schemes and sanitation facilities. Access to safe drinking water lessens risks related to a variety of infections that contaminate the intake and utilisation of food, as well as resultant health



costs. In addition, easier access to safe water. By increasing safe water availability for household use, WaterAid helps in addressing food-related uses of water, including preparation and ingestion hygiene, cooking, gardening, and increasing productivity of women by saving their time spent in hauling water, most of which is spent improving basic food security and nutrition conditions at household and community levels.

What are the main challenges to fulfilling your human rights to water and food? Are they linked to intensive agriculture, overdraft of wells, pollution, land, or water grabbing, deforestation, climate change, or others?

Key challenges across WaterAid focus countries can be categorized in relation to the human rights principles:

- **Discrimination and inequality:** people face different barriers and have diverse needs, and therefore require differentiated support or treatment. Notably, urban, and rural water service providers lack the capacity, skill and understanding to ensure that women, people with disability, people living in slums, and other marginalized communities are accessing services and addressing the differential barriers and needs. These include remote communities whose small-scale food production and animal husbandry livelihoods are closely intertwined with point drinking water sources like wells, boreholes, pans and dams.
- **Lack of access to information and transparency:** to fully realise human rights, local and national governments as well as other WASH stakeholders (likewise in food sector) must be transparent and open. Individuals must both be aware of their rights and know how to claim them. However, there are challenges in generating and disseminating information relating to adherence to basic constitutional rights, applicable service standards, as well as tracking progress towards meeting those rights and standards. Ensuring access to adequate safe water, sanitation and hygiene not only ensures families have lower environmental and food infection risks, better are able to use water for food and animal care, and spend more time in household level economic activities, that are mostly related to food production.
- **Weak Participation** The human rights to water and sanitation can only be realised effectively through full, free, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes by people affected by the decisions. A key challenge is in the lack of capacity for local governments and service providers to ensure meaningful participation of communities in key decision-making processes, such the choice of technology, site of construction, management model, leadership of facilities etc. Lack of adequate participation limits local planning capacity by people and government for integrated water uses and choice of technologies. This passivity



leads to lack of key considerations and adoption of inappropriate technologies that fail to promote rainwater harvesting and conservation for increased local food/livestock production.

- **Lack of Accountability:** weak accountability is a critical challenge. WASH stakeholders need to establish abstraction and service monitoring, regulation, and other mechanisms to provide user feedback and improve service accordingly. Further, a positive relationship exists between strong local water management structures and food security, hence weak and unaccountable water management practices and maintenance capacity in any community is likely to undermine its food security.
- **Lack of Sustainability:** sustainability of ecosystem and services needs to be prioritized as a fundamental human rights principle. There is an increased threat to sustainability due to climate change, weak local governments, and institutions. This weakness in turn, undermines sustainability of WASH services and added benefits like food security.,

Communities are usually heterogeneous; are any groups in your community facing more challenges in fulfilling their human right to food and/or water? Can you explain who and why?

Progress on WASH services is unequal within countries, districts, settlements, and even households.

People who are marginalised, such as women living in remote villages without networked water services, informal urban settlements, children/adults living with disabilities or sanitation workers working in unsafe and discriminated professions, continue to face multiple barriers to even basic WASH.

Women and girls, especially those living with disabilities face increased vulnerability due to lack of water and private sanitation facilities. Those with disabilities can face additional challenges with regards to accessibility and affordability. Women and girls also carry the burden of household WASH responsibilities, often having to carry water over long distances to collect water for essential daily activities like bathing and cleaning. See [WaterAid Cambodia](#) effort to address this gap. In the same breadth, similar vulnerabilities exist in situations where WASH services are closely intertwined with food security.



Can you list good practices on the intersection of the water-food nexus? Please explain; these can include food-related practices in areas facing droughts and water management practices in areas prone to extreme climatic events such as droughts or flooding. These practices can also involve collective action to ensure everyone can access food and water; please explain.

The poorest countries in the world are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. **Providing clean and safe drinking water and sanitation** is a first line defence, for both human consumption and food production. The most climate-vulnerable and food insecure countries have some of the lowest levels of clean water access in the world.

Climate change is not equally felt across populations with the most vulnerable being disproportionately affected. The most vulnerable people and communities must have their voices heard in both **locally led decision making** and **global climate finance dialogues** to ensure inclusion and build resilience to extreme weather events and slow onset changes in water resources impacting daily life.

The water and food nexus are an everyday reality at household level as water impact food production, and a **balanced and equitable use of water for domestic and agricultural use** is critical. Moreover, **ensuring good water quality** significantly contributes to reducing nutrition risks.

[WaterAid's assessment](#) in Madagascar, Cambodia and Ethiopia reveal opportunities for **integrating water, sanitation and hygiene services and nutrition**. The assessment highlighted that **increased domestic and international funding** is needed to **support stronger government systems for food and WASH** and ensure WASH interventions can be aligned with nutrition objectives.