

MEGAMUN 2019

Human Rights Council Study Guide

Water as a Human Right - the Future of Water

- measures to protect water as a public good
- the socio-economic impact of water privatisation
- improving water quality and access to sanitation



UNHRC

DEAR DELEGATES,

The MEGAMUN 2019 conference is approaching and we are very excited to see you in Luxembourg.

We are sending you this study guide for the Human Rights Council that will take place during the conference. This study guide should help you understand the principal notions and aspects of the topic as well as facilitate your first researches. Please note that this study guide is not a substitution for your own research that you need to do of your country in order to write a founded position paper and a fruitful draft resolution.

As you might already know, MEGA stands for “Make Environment Great Again”. The topic we are going to debate on is, of course, strongly related to this slogan. Nowadays more than ever before, politicians discuss about what our world will look like in the future if we do not act as fast as possible.

One resource that will probably be a point of conflict in the near future due to climate change and human behaviour is water! A basic and vital need for everyone on our blue planet...

Where the focus of our Committee lays and what we exactly expect from you as a delegate will be written in this study guide.

As your chairs, we are very pleased that you are going to participate in the debates of our council and of course, we are hoping for interesting discussions and a successful outcome on the future of water. When writing your policy statement (position paper), please stick very closely to the official policies of the country you represent!

We expect from you that you will be very active during the debates to make them as interesting and fruitful as possible. Do not be shy, you will regret it! 😊

*In order to prepare for the conference and to make sure that your policy statement and draft resolution head in the right direction, we would kindly ask you to send in both of these documents via email until the **4th November 2019**.*

Please send an email to borda902@school.lu and thiso147@school.lu. In this way, we can give you a small, helpful feedback on your work.

Looking forward to seeing you all in November!

Best Regards,

Daniel Borges & Sophie Thimmesch



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A video that you might want to enjoy... <https://www.right2water.eu>

...and other interesting links:

<https://www.northeastern.edu/law/pdfs/academics/phrge/right-to-water.pdf>

&

<https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights/>

Water as a human right – the future of water

1. Introduction - Water as a vital resource

Over 75% of our blue planet consists of water, but only 3% of it is freshwater. Freshwater is essential for life on earth and that is why it is important to take a look on the current situation of water resources and their worldwide distribution. Water is a basic need and vital resource to everyone.

Effective water management is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG6). The more and more, it becomes clear, that water as a resource must be consciously, efficiently and responsibly used. Unmanaged water scarcity might threaten ecosystems and communities in the near future and represent even represent a risk to human nature.

While the future is difficult to predict, available freshwater resources will certainly decrease in the coming years due to the increasing demand of a growing world population. Many areas of the world that are already experiencing a shortage of water resources will see their water issues worsen, causing hardships for millions. As for this reason, water shortage is considered as one of the biggest global risks. By 2050, the UN says more than 5 billion people could be facing water shortages across the globe.

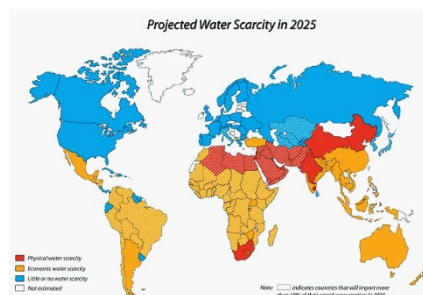
The UN recognises water as a “finite and vulnerable resource” and water is considered an economic good and a basic human right. Nowadays, 95% of the world’s population is living in a country that currently has less water than it did two decades ago. The more and more regions across the globe start to feel the pressure of dwindling access to clean drinking water and global changes are altering where and how we get fresh water, sparking the need for worldwide cooperation.

Over the last years, the debate over water privatization, water trading and water rights has become more and more important on the political and economic level. Governments worldwide increasingly impose water restrictions and rising temperatures worsen the ongoing water crisis.

Nowadays, according to UNICEF, at least 2.6 billion people lack adequate sanitation while 1.1 billion people live without clean drinking water.

The impact of water insecurity and shortage or scarcity is already being felt in both developing and developed countries. The global community and member states will have to prepare for the coming crisis in the face of growing populations, climate change, economic development and other pressures.

At this point, it is very important to remember that water is the key component in all our daily lives no matter where we live, not only for individual human use but also for energy, industry, agriculture and livestock.



2. Background Information

In 2010, the importance of the access to water was addressed by the General Assembly where water and sanitation were declared as human rights.

In 2015, due to water and sanitation's impact on health, the issue was listed among the 17 SDGs: "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all".

In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a full report of the water situation in the world. In this report the WHO states that 2.2 billion people do not have a safe water source. The biggest problem remains in the inequalities between rural and urban areas, but also between social classes in a city, the water access can be very different. The WHO estimates that by 2050 half of the world's population will be living in a water-stressed area.



3. Water, a Human Right



The resolution from July 2010 recommends member States and international organizations to allocate financial resources, technology and buildings to transfer help to other countries, especially developing countries where water scarcity is more severe, in order to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

As stated in a resolution of 2002 from the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee (CESCR), “The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights”.

Overall, the sufficient use of water includes the continuous use of drinking water, for personal hygiene and sanitation, washing of dishes and clothes and food preparation. With the aim of ensuring the latter, 50-100 litres of water/person/day are required.

For the UN, 5 points are extremely important to ensure safe drinking water as a Human Right.

- **Sufficient:** continuous and sufficient supply for personal and domestic uses (drinking, personal sanitation, washing clothes, food preparation and overall hygiene)
- **Safe:** the water supply must be safe, no micro-organisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards
- **Acceptable:** acceptable colour, odour and taste
- **Physically accessible:** water and sanitation should be physically accessible in the immediate vicinity of the household or near public and health institutions
- **Affordable:** water and water services must be affordable for all

4. Privatisation of water resources

First of all, water privatization is the participation of the private sector in the management of the water resources within a country.

Rivers and basins are often shared by more than one country or state. However, most of these rivers are without defined legal or institutional arrangements.

Whilst some argue that the privatization of water resources and private investment are the best ways to improve existing water infrastructures, opponents of water privatisation object to framing a basic need (such as water) as an economic commodity. Also, critics fear that the privatization of water disrespects the ecological limits of water and might affect the lives of the most vulnerable.

In general, water privatisation might often lead to more individual than shared consumption, but that doesn't have to be the case worldwide.

The main argument for the privatisation of water resources is that by this means, water harvesting is more regulated.

A number of big cities worldwide have privatised water systems such as Buenos Aires, Puerto Rico, Indonesia and Chile. However, it is estimated that only 3 to 5 percent of the world's water supply is currently provided through the private sector.

In 1999, discrepancies over water and its privatisation lead to a "Water War" ("La Guerra del Agua") in Bolivia where privatisation began in the mid 1980's.

By this time, the former president tried to spread the idea of water privatisation and appealed big international financial organisations in the face of a massive economic downturn.

Most of the citizens and politicians agreed that a municipal water company was inadequate and highly unsafe. Once Bolivia's water system was fully privatised by 1999, water prices rose by over 400%. The private company blamed this rise by the people, which as a response took to the streets and fought for the end of water privatization by protesting until the government finally ended the contract with the private company. The water resources of Bolivia were now back in the hands of the municipal water supplier.

Most of the affected countries of water privatisation sign a concession or lease contract with private enterprises. The duration of such contracts is variable and can reach up to 30 years.

There now might be a grey area between full privatization of water and full state control as strengthening water infrastructure programs becomes more important. The motives for a concession or lease are in every country similar. Mostly it is to increase the efficiency and to save public money, but as mentioned before opponents to privatization strongly question the efficiency of privatization.

However, as the focus on water shortages continues, a number of governments and private companies have turned to creating new water resources, through programs such as desalination.

5. Access to clean Sanitation and health

Still approximately 2.5 billion people worldwide lack access to more or less hygienic sanitation facilities. 884 million people do not even have access to potable drinking-water sources. The accessible use of water includes that it is physically accessible within or in immediate vicinity of the household, educational institutions, work places and hospitals or other care homes.

The WHO suggests that water worldwide should be accessible within 1000 m of home and the time for collection should not extend 30 minutes.

Both water and sanitation facilities should be affordable and not exceed 3% of the monthly household income.

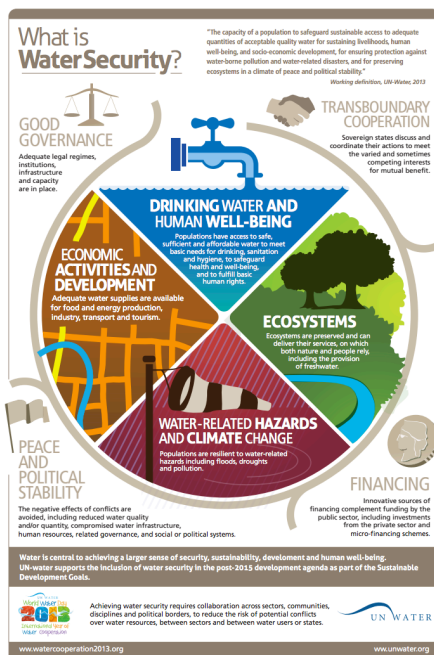
Improved sanitation carries a lot of health benefits and improves hydration. An established WASH-Programmes's (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) goal is to make sanitation facilities affordable and sustainable. Trough better sanitation and health, also life expectancy, employment rate, learning, equalities and other important development steps are improved.

In addition to this, hygienic sanitation facilities can safely separate human waste from human contact (≠open defecation or inadequate communal latrines). The use of unsafe sanitation facilities pose health risks because of the faecal matter can be retransferred to food and

drinking water which encourages (fatal) diseases to spread. Unhygienic conditions and practices are linked to immediate health risks (diarrhea, cholera, intestinal worms, malnutrition, anaemia, retarded growth and immune diseases), especially for children. At this point, one can point out that water is also essential for good health.



6. Water security



Prosperity and economic stability are the reasons why rivalry among states, especially states who share transboundary water bodies (aquifers, lakes, rivers, basins), take place.

These waters are essential to the livelihoods of the world's population and therefore provide a basis for social unrest and conflicts within or between countries.

Disputes about water are increasing and therefore, managing this necessary resource in peaceful cooperation and in a sustainable way becomes the more and more important.

Establishing an international integrated approach towards the issue of transboundary water resource management and costs reveals to be an important key measure in the water issue.

In the last 50 years, about 150 treaties have been signed compared to ±40 disputes during this time

frame. Cooperation is the only feasible and pacifist way to tackle water problems that surpass national borders. However, the latter is not easy to achieve as history shows.

Geography, different population densities, economic power, military might, size and development levels are possible challenges and form a ground for disputes.

The most significant challenge however lays in signing a cooperative agreement because of the complexity of water issues and the given circumstances.

Overall, most of the world's conflicts throughout history have been over resources such as gold or oil. If we do not change our use of water, it may become as conflictual as gold or oil. The obvious needs of clean water in agriculture, industry and sanitation stress how important water is in everyday life.



7. Sustainable development and the role of water

As we all might be aware of, water and climate change are closely connected. Disasters like droughts, floods or storms can damage fresh water supplies, sanitation facilities and vital resources. Unfortunately, due to climate change, people who already have limited water supply and poor water quality are even more at risk.

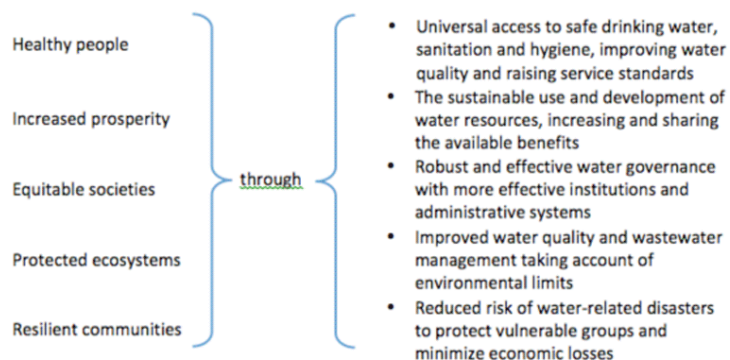
Water's impact on agriculture and food is in contrast to increasing population rates. Therefore, the demand for more agriculture and greater use of water sources for irrigation, rise.

Despite the newest technological achievements, some countries still are unable to save water or prevent water pollution.

The increased melting of glaciers and environmental changes highlight the need for a new way to store freshwater.

Usually, sustainable development incorporates three pillars: economic, socio-political and environmental conditions. However, since water is an issue that concerns us all, it should be included in actions for sustainable development and solutions to create a livable world for future generations.

Water goals are linked to the development aims of societies, promote human dignity and ensure the sustainability of all achievements in favor of good water quality and fair water distribution:



The Water and Sanitation SDG touches on most of the other SDGs like climate change (SDG 13), food security (SDG 2), urban development (SDGs 9 & 11), disaster risk management (SDGs 11 & 13), environment (SDGs 14 & 15), gender equality (SDG 5), Health (SDG 3) and Energy (SDG 7).

The water and sanitation SDG has five priorities.

- Sustainability: which means to ensure sustainable management of water resources and water infrastructure
- Inclusion: it should ensure that all benefits of water are shared with everyone including women, the poor and other disadvantaged groups
- Strengthening institutions: to deliver better water services
- Financing: the improvement of financial viability and leverage of private and other non-state sources of finance should be ensured
- Resilience: should help countries to survive, adapt and thrive in the face of water shocks and stress

8. Water quality

A qualitative use of water in everyday life means that it needs to be free of microorganisms, chemical substances, radiological hazards and everything else that could possibly threaten a human's health.

The WHO Guidelines and principles on the drinking-water quality provide a basis for the development of standards to ensure the safety and quality of drinking water.

The current situation

In most of the western regions, water has always been taken for granted. Unfortunately, this perception is about to rapidly change because due to massive pollution, corruption, inefficiency and unfair water distribution, the world is heading for a water shortage or future water crisis.

Even nowadays, there are some areas of the world (North Africa, the Middle East & Central Asia) where the water issue has been tackled on a political level since decades.

In fact, water is becoming the more and more scarce that disputes and wars over water are not uncommon anymore, especially over transboundary water resources (rivers,...).

The current diminution of water resources and the deterioration of water quality have had a destabilising effect over time, most often resulting in violence.

These conflicts may arise from several issues such as water pollution, water allocation, excessive water withdrawals and water distribution.

According to experts, there are four kinds of conflict that might occur, depending on low, moderate, high or very high levels of water scarcity: non-politicised, politicised, securitised or violent conflicts. The availability and accessibility of water sources faces numerous challenges than can be handled at a local, regional and global level.

The excessive use of water for irrigation and other economic activities, the mismanagement and unequal sharing of water between states and water shortage caused by natural phenomena (reduction of rainfall-water & climate change) are some of these pre-mentioned challenges.

Aside from challenges that exist or surpass a single country's capacity to tackle them, water sharing is first and foremost subject to the will of the states involved and to the political decisions that may lead to either conflict or cooperation.



9. UN involvement in water issues

- 1954: In the UN Security Council, a resolution on securing Israel's water supply from the Jordan River Basin, passes. Interestingly, the vote on this resolution is the root for numerous tensions over water between Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. (Six-day war over water)
- 1977: In order to address future water issues, the UN creates a special body; the UN Group for Water resources.
- 1992: The UN formally declares the World Water day on the 22th of March.
- 2003: The UN-Water body is now in charge of coordinating awareness campaigns for World Water Day and of developing water-related policies and agreements. Also, their job consists in ensuring accountability for water initiatives and governments worldwide by monitoring and reporting progress of the water issue.
- March 2008 Human Rights Council Resolution on Human Rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- On 28 March 2008, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 7/22, related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- 2009 Report of the Independent Expert on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Related to Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council recognized clean drinking water and safe sanitation to be a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights.
- 2015: The SDG 6 calls for access to clean water and sanitation for all. Its specific focus lays on the preservation of quality water resources and a socially equitable water distribution that ensures the needs of everyone

10. Major Organizations involved

- World Health Organisation (WHO)

WHO plays a role in combating diseases linked to improper water or sanitation and in ensuring access to water through their numerous programs and policies.

- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

One main goal of the FAO is to ensure access to water in order to eradicate hunger and agricultural insecurities.

- The Plan International

Its goal is to ensure the access to potable drinking water

- Water and sanitation for the urban poor (WSUP)

Access to clean drinking water in developing countries and providing sanitation services

- Water and sanitation program WSP

11. Conclusion

According to the UN, by 2030, our blue planet will have to deal with a 40% shortfall in water supply and serious water scarcity.

If the water issue, as a vital resource, is not managed more sustainable and equitable, impacts like climate change will be felt even more intensely.

Water is an important resource that needs to be harvested intelligently in order to balance out natural disasters and to guaranty life and health.

In the future, water will probably pose other problems that will need to be solved such as unequal sharing of water between states or countries, water privatisation and simply the lack of clean water. By using and harvesting water in a sustainable way, health and living standards overall and worldwide can improve drastically and the impacts of nature catastrophes can be mitigated. Most importantly, action is needed to come to an international level and worldwide awareness needs to be risen. In the future, it will be more necessary than ever to understand planetary limits which need to be respected in order to protect the blue planet and the life on it. This needs to be the basis for future sustainable development.

“This is the moment to chart a new course-to change practices and actions that favor development at a significant environmental and social cost” – UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

12. Discussion topics & key issues

Water security and water distribution are wide-reaching topics. Below, you'll find a few considerations that might help you. However, this list is not complete and we suggest that you explore further topics and ideas.

- Access to clean drinking water
- Consequences of natural disasters (droughts and water shortages)
- Future environmental impacts
- Ownership/Privatisation of water resources
- Water as a public good
- Water as a human right

13. Open questions to debate on in the committee

- What specific challenges does your country face in respect to water issues and water management?
- What are the major water resources in your country?
- Is your country facing any major environmental issues related to its ability to provide safe and clean drinking water? (e.g : pollution, droughts,...)
- How is water distributed in your country and how are the population's needs covered? Are these sustainable means?
- Does your country have specific water resources that might want to protect or share?
- Within the broad issue of water, what are the elements that your country prioritizes?
- What would be an appropriate balance for countries between preserving and exploiting water for economic reasons or human development?
- In what way could the member states reduce the risks of a conflict over water?
- How could different countries collaborate in order to share water benefits and the responsibilities over water resources? Why do nations struggle to share their common water resources? Is there a way how these restraining obstacles can be overcome?
- What solutions to prevent water scarcity can be envisaged at the short and longer terms?
- Has your country privatized any of its national or municipal water systems? Does it support the idea of "water as human right"?
- Should privatisation be more restricted or promoted?

(Please note: The questions above should only summarise the main aspects of the topic but are not necessarily aimed to be answered)

14. Important Resolutions

- <https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/gmainec.aspx>
- <https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/gmainec.aspx>

15. A further word from your chairs

Now it's your turn! Try to find good arguments to impose your country's idea and make the other delegates trust in you. Maybe also read through the positions of other countries to find allies and delegates to work with to write a coherent and proper resolution. The water is very complex and has had a lot of backlashes and new revelations every day, so stay informed until the last day because you could be surprised by another delegate that is better informed than you. The future of water is one of the most recent discussion topics nowadays with so many important aspects to respect and consider. During the debate, we must define a solution for this important issue. So far, there are already programs in action in place, but they currently can't guaranty water supply for everyone and forever.

You should now come up with new or improved ideas for the draft resolution and research about your country's policies on access to water, water as a human right, water security, sanitation and water quality.

16. Sources

<https://unchronicle.un.org/article/role-un-water-inter-agency-coordination-mechanismwater-and-sanitation>
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<https://www.coats.com/en/Coats-in-Action/Water---a-vital-resource>

For more information about the WHO report:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs391/en/>