



# COMMUN IV

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## **WHO: Availability of Clean Water**

**BACKGROUND  
GUIDE**

**Elise Requadt '19,  
Chair**

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Co-chair**

Dear Delegates,

Hello. My name is Elise Requadt, and I'm a senior at Commonwealth. This is my second year chairing COMMUN's World Health Organization (WHO). My co-chair is Nicholas Fomin, who's a junior here at Commonwealth. We've put a lot of thought into this committee, and am looking forward to discussing your ideas! Access to clean water is a fundamental human need but as a result of both environmental and artificial factors, it's not a reality for millions of people worldwide. As many areas, including both developed and developing countries, begin to run out of clean water in our modern world, this issue is quickly rising to the forefront of the world's largest health concerns. It's your job as part of the World Health Organization to come up with innovative ideas to help improve upon the actions the global community is currently taking. If you find yourself lost, looking for directions on where to begin your research, or just want to learn more about what to expect on conference day, please don't hesitate to contact me at [erequadt@commschool.org](mailto:erequadt@commschool.org).

Best of luck in your preparations. I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Yours truly,

Elise Requadt, World Health Organization Chair

# Clean Water

## *How can the international community achieve clean water for all?*

"The children who have no clean water to drink, the women who fear for their safety, the young people who have no chance to receive a decent education have a right to better, and we have a responsibility to do better. All people have the right to safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter and basic services."

-Ban Ki-moon, **UN Secretary General, March 2010**

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## ***Problem Statement***

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**Clean water** is a necessity for human health, agriculture and economic growth. Clean water access is achieved when freshwater is free of contaminants.

While clean water is a necessity for life, access is limited and challenging for many places in the world. In some developing countries, gaining access to clean water can be the difference between life or death. The role clean water plays within a country depends on many factors, including natural resources, natural disasters, pollution, politics, and gender. According to the United Nations World Water Development Report, by 2050 at least one in every four people is likely to reside in a country affected by recurring freshwater shortages.<sup>1</sup>

Not only is it considered a human right to have access to clean water and sanitation, but it is also imperative for survival. Every human needs safe and affordable access to clean water. To achieve this goal, delegates to the UN will need to implement plans to improve and enable adequate access to a safe water supply, sanitation, and hygiene for all.

**Hygiene:** Practices of cleanliness in regards to health

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## ***History***

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Natural resources are depleting, populations are growing, and water scarcity levels are increasing. Countries that have never had to worry about access to clean water in the past are now facing major water issues. How did we get here?

The ever-growing world population, in conjunction with limited natural resources, has created water shortages and crises all over the world. In certain parts of the world, communities have no

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unric.org/en/water/27360-making-water-a-human-right>

access to clean water. In 1977, water was recognized for the first time as a human right at the UN Water Conference in Mar del Plata.

On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential fundamental human rights.<sup>2</sup> People have the right to physically, sufficiently and safely access water in an affordable way.

Currently, around 1.1 billion people around the world lack access to clean water. Although the planet is covered in about 70% water, only 3% of that water is freshwater. Freshwater is the water we use to drink, clean ourselves, and irrigate our farm fields. Two-thirds of our planet's freshwater is in glaciers which makes it essentially unavailable for our use. This leaves us with only one-third of that 3% of freshwater to use. It is projected that at the rate in which we are currently using our freshwater, by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population could potentially be facing water shortages.<sup>3</sup>

**Water Shortage:** Occurs when we need more water than we have at a specific place and specific time

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## *Issue Analysis: Causes*

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Trash pollutes a coast in the United States.

**Natural Disasters:** Floods play a huge role when it comes to clean water. Countries prone to flooding are also more likely to lack access to clean water. If a country lacks a strong and dependable water supply and sanitation system, floods are an enormous health threat. After a major flood, water sources can be polluted with both human and industrial waste. Floodwaters are an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, increasing the risk of disease. Although floods provide large amounts of water, most of it becomes too polluted and contaminated, leaving it far too dangerous to drink.

Droughts are another natural disaster that affect people's access to clean water. A drought is a period when weather conditions are drier than normal, leading to water scarcity. As climate change takes its toll on our planet, droughts are increasing in frequency and becoming more severe.<sup>4</sup> Some countries are facing droughts due to poor water management, however, others have lost their natural resources due to the changing climate. Many countries find themselves at a loss with warmer temperatures and unseasonal rainfall.

**Water Pollution:** When water is polluted, it becomes unsafe to drink. Causes of water pollution can include sewage and wastewater, industrial waste, oil pollution, dumping, and defecation.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human\\_right\\_to\\_water.shtml](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml)

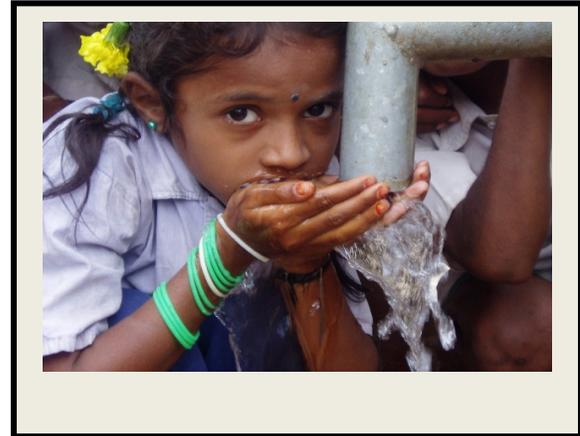
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>

<sup>4</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists, Inc. <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/impacts/causes-of-drought-climate-change-connection.html>

Many people in developing countries lack access to sanitary conditions and clean water, which makes sewage disposal a problem. Untreated sewage water can contaminate the little amount of clean water they do have, which can lead to disease and diarrhea.

Many industrial facilities use freshwater to carry away waste from their facility to rivers, lakes and even the ocean. They are a huge contributor to water pollution, and their pollutants can be extremely dangerous for both humans and the environment alike. Oceans are polluted daily by oil from run offs (e.g. leaks from vehicles, spills from fuel stations and improperly discarded oil), oil dumping, and oil spills. Oil can't dissolve in water (meaning it has to be physically removed/cleaned up), but generally stays localized.

Dumping of litter into rivers, lakes and oceans is an ongoing battle. Once water is contaminated, it takes a lot of resources to make it safe to drink again. With pollution - it's not always as easy as picking trash out of the water. Once water is polluted with feces (defecation), there is no return. In countries with poor sanitation and sewage systems, feces are often a common water pollutant.



**Poor Water Management:** For some countries, water scarcity has not always been a major concern. Certain countries that were once “rich” with water are now facing potential droughts and water crises due to poor planning. Poor water management doesn't solely affect access to clean drinking water, it also tends to affect agriculture. Whether countries lack the resources to collect and store water or they have poor water distribution and usage, many countries lack the ability to successfully manage their water supply and resources.

**Location:** In certain developing countries, collecting clean water is a task that takes all day. Some people have to walk many miles to and from water wells, which are often polluted, to collect water for their household. This task heavily falls on women, which prevents them from other daily activities such as going to school or working.

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## ***Issue Analysis: Effects***

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**Human Health:** Drinking unsafe or contaminated water has dangerous effects and can be extremely deadly. Globally, at least 2 billion people use a drinking water source contaminated with feces. Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and polio. Contaminated drinking water is estimated to cause 502,000 diarrhoeal deaths

each year.<sup>5</sup> Even when the diarrhoeal diseases aren't fatal, chronic diarrhea during early childhood opens up the risk of long lasting health effects including immune system issues.

In addition to diseases, hygiene is also at risk when clean water access is restricted or unavailable. If people don't have access to clean water to wash their hands or bathe themselves, new health issues arise. For example, females without proper sanitation services often miss school or work during menstruation. A key component to clean and safe birthing practices is handwashing with soap - something that seems so basic to some, while proving fatal to those who lack resources.

During a water crisis, dehydration is a leading cause of death. Human beings can survive significantly longer without food than they can without water. Put quite simply: the human body needs water to survive. When communities are going through droughts or don't have access to safe water to drink, the number of deaths due to dehydration skyrockets.

**Privatized Water:** Water is privatized when a private corporation purchases or operates public water utilities. Historically, privatized water is utilized as a solution to budget problems. It often has opposite effects and tends to backfire. Although the intent may (or may not) be good, water privatization often leads to higher rates, job loss, and poor service. When water is supposed to be a human right, it is hard for citizens of countries with privatized water to accept paying higher rates for something that should be sufficiently provided at a reasonable and attainable price.

When access to water is a matter of money, it leaves the poor to fend for themselves - which often leads to the consumption of unsanitary and unsafe water.



**Water Rationing:** Water rationing generally comes into effect when resources are low and in severe danger of running out. It is usually enforced by the government when the country is on the brink of a natural drought or if their water sources have been poorly managed. When water rationing occurs, people are limited to the amount of water they are allowed so that the government has more time to implement a plan of action before the water sources have completely run dry.

**Women and Water:** Across low-income communities, water scarcity seems to have a disproportionate effect on women. Women are most often the ones who are enduring long, unsafe travels to collect the water for their household. Even after the treacherous walks to their water source, they frequently find the water contaminated. The amount of time spent by women and children to collect their water prohibits them from being able to reach their full potential. It can limit their time to play, limit their access to a quality education, and disrupt their other daily duties. It is common for girls to drop out of school once they hit puberty if their school does not have proper toilets.

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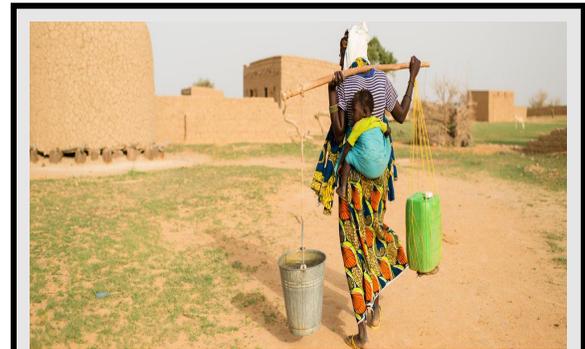
## *International Actions*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs391/en/>

Clean water access is a global challenge that has no permanent solution. With rising temperatures and dwindling natural resources, it is up to the international community to work together to ensure access to safe water and sanitation for all. Improving the supply of water and management of water sources can lead to economic growth, as well as help alleviate poverty.

Water-related issues are too diverse to be tackled by a “one size fits all” or blanket policy. Although access to clean water and sanitation is a recognized human right by the United Nations, there is not one universally coordinated policy on water. It is up to local and national governments and authorities to provide a better infrastructure for clean water. For those countries and regions that lack the economic resources and technology to provide safe, accessible and affordable drinking water, global collaboration is vital.



Women often have to carry their infants

**UN-Water:** In 2003, UN-Water was created. UN-Water is a platform that addresses all freshwater related matters, including current issues and action plans. Members of UN-Water are comprised of UN agencies, programs and other UN entities that deal with water-related issues that include (but are not limited to) sanitation and natural disasters. UN-Water also has Partners, which are international organizations, professional unions, associations or other groups that are actively involved in water.<sup>6</sup> This organization prides itself on being able to quickly and efficiently identify new water and sanitation issues while being able to develop productive, collaborative solutions. The ultimate goal is to ensure everyone has access to clean water and sanitation, and that no one is left behind.

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO):** Social media has had an impressive impact on the growth, knowledge of, and participation in non-governmental organizations. With the help of social media as well as other platforms, people are able to come together globally to aid countries in crises.

In regards to the global clean water crisis, there are many proactive NGO’s that have huge impacts on communities that are struggling. These NGO’s offer aid in the form of providing wells and water infiltration systems. The most important component of building wells and water infiltration systems is to make sure they are sustainable and that the local communities can continue to maintain them themselves.

**Sustainable:** Using but not destroying natural resources to produce

*Charity:Water* and *Water.org* are two examples of NGO’s that provide aid in the form of water wells and filtration systems. *Charity:Water* builds wells and water infiltration systems in 20 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. *Water.org* also builds wells, however they provide additional intensive training seminars to the communities on the importance of good hygiene practices. These seminars are helpful because once communities have access to clean water they need to know how to utilize it as well as properly maintain it.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unwater.org/about-unwater/governance/>



WASH recognizes the importance of which means there is still plenty of work to be done.

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):** WASH is an internationally recognized program that is designed to provide knowledge of and access to water, sanitation and hygiene. One of the most integral parts of this program is the educational component. WASH programs provide education on hygiene and sanitation basics such as how to properly wash your hands, which can ultimately result in maintaining a healthier lifestyle.

Many NGO's and global communities have successfully implemented the WASH model. However, not all efforts have reached children in poor and rural communities. There is still a massive disparity between those who have access to clean water and those who don't,

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## ***Bloc Positions***

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**North America:** The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the leading U.S. Government agency that works to end global poverty and lift global communities up to reach their full potential. USAID currently has a Water and Development Strategy with two key focuses: water for health (sanitation) and water for food. USAID helps to implement WASH programs globally. Through their work, as of 2015 more than 7.6 billion people have had access to improved drinking water supplies and more than 4.3 million people have improved access to sanitation.<sup>7</sup>

Although the United States provides international aid, there are still local water issues to be addressed. In spring of 2015, former President Barack Obama's Clean Water Rule was issued under the 1972 Clean Water Act. This gave the federal government the authority to monitor and limit pollution in major U.S. bodies of water (e.g. Mississippi River). In February of 2017, President Donald Trump signed an executive order with the aim of rolling back Obama's Clean Water Rule, which had major environmental regulations that protected American waterways.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/water-and-sanitation>

**Desalination:** Removal of salt and minerals from a target substance, including water

In February of 2017, President Donald Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau released a joint statement covering many topics, including reinforcing the importance of their commitment to a healthy and collaborative relationship to ensure the mutual prosperity and security of North America.

Through Global Affairs Canada's 2017-18 International Development program, they aim to implement a new international assistance policy that has a feminist approach to international assistance and a strong focus in Sub-Saharan Africa. The main theme of their goals are to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality. However, they are also focused on contributing to the global battle against climate change as well as promoting responsible water management.

Global Affairs Canada also has an International Humanitarian Assistance program, which aims to aid those facing crisis situations such as armed conflicts, food insecurity and natural disasters. This program provides relief through funding of food, water, shelter and protection. Global Affairs Canada works in conjunction with many other humanitarian partners such as the International Red Cross, the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, and the World Food Programme to provide global humanitarian aid.

**Latin America:** The Latin America Clean Water Initiative has three core goals: to provide access to clean water and sanitation systems, improve sustainable water supplies and train individuals to manage water systems and resources efficiently, and to provide educational workshops on water conservation, sanitation and hygiene. Although this initiative has strong goals and good intent, Latin America continues to be plagued with water woes. Latin America holds 31% of the world's freshwater resources, but poor water management plus the added pressures of climate change are leading to an increasing number of droughts.<sup>8</sup> Latin America is enduring poorly implemented privatization plans which are resulting in frustrated and angry citizens who have taken to protests. Governments are also enforcing water rationing and desalination efforts, both which help with water efficiency, but people's daily usage isn't their only problem with water management.

Agriculture takes a huge portion of Latin America's water sources, so as populations increase, water management on the agricultural side needs to improve. Leading the way in improved water management is Brazil. Over the past 15 years Brazil has taken a participatory approach to managing water supplies. Everyone is involved in their decision-making process - including water supply companies, irrigators, energy providers and representatives from both the state and federal governments - so that everyone with different water needs and usages are considered in the decision-making.

**Europe:** In 2010, the Millennium Development Goal was reached, which ensured that 88% of the world's population had access to a reliable supply of safe water. The EU focused heavily on contributing to this goal, and it is estimated that they funded projects that aided more than 70

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/22/world-water-day-latin-america-achievements-challenges>

million people in gaining access to improved water sources and over 24 million people to sanitation facilities.<sup>9</sup>

**Africa:** Africa as a continent faces extreme poverty, underdevelopment and food insecurity. However, within Africa, the water crisis is split into two regions: Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is because each region has reached different levels of development and improvement in regards to clean water access and sanitation. UN-Water is working with Africa to improve the quality of life for African communities by implementing many different initiatives and programs focused on water-related issues. As of 2014, North Africa had 92% of its population with access to clean water compared to merely 40% of the 783 million people without access to improved water sources in the Sub-Saharan region. As for access to safe sanitation, Northern Africa had 90% coverage whereas Sub-Saharan Africa had only 30% coverage.<sup>10</sup>

In March of 2017, the World Bank Group announced \$57 billion in financing for Sub-Saharan African countries over the next three fiscal years. This record in financing has the expected outcome of essential health and nutrition services for up to 400 million people and improved access to clean water sources for 45 million people.<sup>11</sup>

**Asia and Pacific:** Around 1.7 billion people in the Asia and Pacific region lack access to clean water and sanitation. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development sector of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region. For the 2015 World Water Development Report, ESCAP worked in conjunction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as 30 other UN-Water Members and 37 partners to discuss data and information aimed at policy and decision-makers, both inside and outside of the water sector. Reports showed that in the Asia-Pacific region, the percentage of people without access to clean water supplies fell from 27% in 1990 to only 8% by 2012.<sup>12</sup> Although there has been improvement, there is an ongoing struggle to have these efforts reach more rural areas. The Asia-Pacific continues to feel water stress in terms of agriculture. Groundwater management is a constant balancing act, with populations quickly growing and countries in this region (Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan) making up nearly half of the world's total groundwater use. ESCAP aims to support governments in achieving global access to safe and affordable water and sanitation in hopes of building a healthier and sustainable future for all.

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## Questions to Consider

1. Why is access to clean water so important?
2. Who is affected by unclean water?

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<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/infrastructure/water-and-sanitation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/infrastructure/water-and-sanitation_en)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/africa.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/03/19/world-bank-group-announces-record-57-billion-for-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unescap.org/media-centre/feature-story/access-water-asia-pacific%E2%80%99s-silent-crisis>

3. What has been done to address this issue in the past?
4. What actions should the global community take to reduce the risk of future water shortages?

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