WATER RESOURCES

Water Resources are sources of water that are useful or potentially useful to humans. Uses of water include agricultural, industrial, household, recreational and environmental activities. Virtually all of these human uses require fresh water. 97.5% of water on the Earth is salt water, leaving only 2.5% as fresh water of which over two thirds is frozen in glaciers and polar ice caps. The remaining unfrozen freshwater is mainly found as groundwater, with only a small fraction present above ground or in the air. Fresh water is a renewable resource, yet the world’s supply of clean, fresh water is steadily decreasing. Water demand already exceeds supply in many parts of the world, and as world population continues to rise at an unprecedented rate, many more areas are expected to experience this imbalance in the near future.²

When water scarcity causes political tensions to arise, this is referred to as water stress. About one third of the world’s population lives in countries with moderate to high water stress with disproportionately high impacts on the poor.³ Water stress has led most often to conflicts at local and regional levels, despite the lack of evidence of international wars being fought over water alone. Water stress can also exacerbate conflicts and political tensions which are not directly caused by water. Gradual reductions over time in the quality and/or quantity of fresh water can add to the instability of a region by depleting the health of a population, obstructing economic development, and exacerbating larger conflicts.⁴

Equitable and sustainable management of water resources is a major global challenge.⁵ The framework for allocating water resources to water users (where such a framework exists) is known as water rights.⁶

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