

The Dutch WASH Alliance invites you to discuss the phenomenon of

Water Grabbing

Tuesday 28 August, 17:45 - 18:45 Room K21



Defining the problem

Accessible ground and surface waters are under severe stress around the globe. In many parts of the world, the goal to ensure sustainable water and food security is being put further at risk by large-scale acquisitions targeting productive lands and water resources for irrigation. In parts of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, powerful interests such as sovereign wealth funds, international investors and companies are acquiring lands either with associated water resources or with the promise of water supply from other areas, often without the free, prior, informed consent of local communities whose human right to water and sanitation and livelihoods are at stake - a process that is being framed by some academics and civil society organisations as 'water grabbing'.

Drivers and causes

Global population growth, shifting consumption patterns and climate change combined with economic growth are

causing exponential growth in the demand for fresh water to support energy and food production as well as human and wider environmental needs. The water, energy, and food sectors are interconnected in important ways. This 'nexus' - which was a key issue in the recent UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio + 20) - means that actions taken in one sector, in isolation, can have far-reaching impacts on other sectors. Too often the impacts from freshwater abstraction and pollution on ecosystems, drinking water supplies and livelihoods are not apparent or even considered in land acquisitions for energy, food and industrial purposes.

Without adequate water governance or public scrutiny, valuable water - sometimes at little or no additional cost and including priority rights - is being acquired in long-term leases and outright purchase. Little consideration is being given to current users locally or downstream who directly or indirectly depend on natural water resources such as wetlands for their water supply. This is affecting the health of people.

Contributing factors:

- Weak governance
- Limited consideration of environmental and social impacts (including inadequate environmental and social impact assessments)
- Lack of intersectoral planning
- Failure to engage local communities and other stakeholders
- Low levels of corporate responsibility

A threat to the human right to water and sanitation

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is essential for all life and is a recognised human right. This right applies to everyone, including vulnerable groups and marginalised people. Water grabbing infringes on the right to water and sanitation by violating fundamental human rights principles, including:

- Sufficient water: water supply including drinking, personal sanitation and hygiene;
- Safe water: water that is free from hazardous substances that could endanger human health;
- Accessible water and sanitation: water and sanitation services and facilities are accessible within, or in the immediate vicinity;
- Affordable water and sanitation: both the direct and indirect costs of securing water and sanitation do not reduce any person's capacity to acquire other essential goods and services.

Most affected are vulnerable people, including the poor, small-scale farmers, women, children, migrants and those who lack secure land titles. A human rights approach to water and sanitation requires that affected people, as right holders, participate in the planning, decision making and monitoring of land allocation as well as the management and use of water resources by governments and companies.

The challenge to water and food security

Land and water acquisitions threaten to undermine the goal of providing sustainable water and sanitation to a growing global population. Consider:

- Insufficient and unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation and poor hygiene are urgent and growing health problems. At the same time, water supplies around the world are under increasing pressure.
- Unsustainable water withdrawals from groundwater aquifers and wetlands such as rivers, lakes, deltas and swamps that support the delivery of water and sanitation services pose a threat to the food security and drinking water supply of millions of people.
- This is especially hurting the poorest who are often dependent on 'natural water infrastructure' supporting community livelihoods and economies, and generally lose in the often unfair competition for increasingly scarce water resources.

For more information:



BothEnds
www.bothends.org



RAIN
<http://www.rainfoundation.org/>

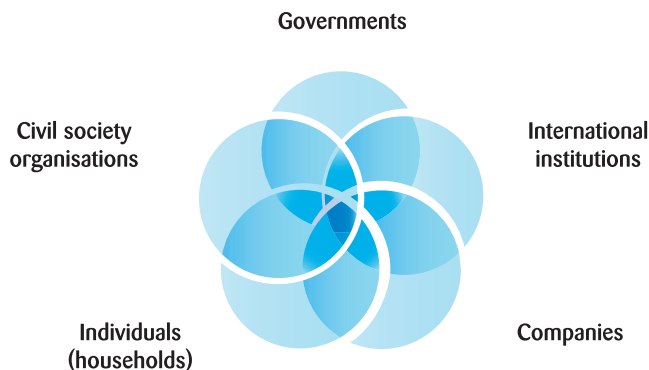
Rainwater Harvesting
Implementation Network



Simavi
<http://www.simavi.nl/>



Wetlands International
www.wetlands.org/watergrab



The Dutch WASH Alliance (DWA) aims for solutions

The Dutch Water Sanitation and Hygiene Alliance works towards a society in which everybody has access to sustainable water and sanitation. We aim to place the phenomenon of water grabbing on the political agenda and set in motion policy and programmatic efforts to counter it.

The DWA works with governments, private sector investors and communities to counter this trend. We believe all actors have a role to play in achieving efficient and fair water allocation. Join us as we search for solutions.

Practical solutions exist:

- Integrated Water Resources
- Management and Participatory Land Use Planning
- Improved awareness of community dependence on natural water resources in planning and management
- Intersectoral planning that recognises a 'nexus' approach
- Mandatory and adequate Environmental and Social Impact Assessments that include local community involvement and are used as a basis of decision-making
- Enhanced social and environmental responsibility standards
- 3R (Recharge, Retention and Re-Use)