



## **Water Footprint Assessment: optimizing water use for social, environmental and economic benefits**

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The water footprint of an individual, community or business is defined as the total volume of freshwater that is used to produce the goods and services consumed by the individual or community or produced by the business. People use water for drinking, cooking and washing, but even more for producing goods such as food, paper, cotton clothes, etc. The water footprint is an indicator of water use that looks at both direct and indirect water use of a consumer or producer. The interest in the water footprint is rooted in the recognition that human impacts on freshwater systems can ultimately be linked to human consumption, and that issues like water shortages and pollution can be better understood and addressed by considering production and supply chains as a whole.

In most river basins in the world, the available water resources are partly used to produce goods that are exported from the basin for consumption elsewhere. It is increasingly acknowledged that local water depletion and pollution are often closely tied to the structure of the global economy. Many countries have significantly externalised their water footprint, importing water-intensive goods from elsewhere. This puts pressure on the water resources in the exporting regions, where too often mechanisms for wise water governance and conservation are lacking. Not only governments have a role in achieving a better management of water resources, but also businesses and public-service organisations must recognize their role in improving the sustainability of water use and management.