

vulnerable to a poor knowledge of local culture and language, a lack of infrastructure and necessary equipment to perform their tasks, and violent attacks such as kidnapping and rape. In this way, vulnerability combines both humanitarian violence and care.

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## Water

Access to water, human welfare, and economic development are indisputably and fundamentally linked. Access to fresh clean water is critical to human life; it preserves health, enables food production and security, and ensures equality, education, and economic development. It is also crucially related to gender roles and human dignity (UN Water 2015). There is an intensifying competition for water supplies between water “uses” and water “users” (UN Water 2015), with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups usually being those who lose out and cannot claim or ensure a safe and sustainable access to water. Thus, there is a close relation between access to water and social inequality. People around the world suffer from floods, droughts, and contamination from pollution caused by industries, mining, and urban sewers, the privatization of water and sanitation services, and displacement by dam projects (Perreault, Boelens, and Vos 2018). The ongoing impact of climate change has intensified droughts and other natural phenomena, reducing the availability of fresh

water. Therefore, water has become a central catalyst for some of the bloodiest conflicts around the world, to the extent that it is common to refer to “water conflicts” (Kliot 1994; Selby and Hoffmann 2014).

Conflicts over water have triggered the development of legal frames at both international and national levels. In 2003, the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued General Comment 15: this outlined that the human right to water “entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.” In 2010, the UN General Assembly approved the adoption of Resolution 64/292, which recognizes access to clean water and sanitation as an independent human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. In 2015, the UN included the improvement of access to water and sanitation among the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In times of crisis, war, and natural disasters, the issue of water access creates different and major challenges. Humanitarian activities and politics (De Lauri 2016) have developed towards comprehensive interventions that include providing access to clean water and sanitation, as well as purification of water sources, temporary irrigation projects, and livestock watering. These water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) priorities increasingly include research as a key step to help improve interventions (D’Mello-Guyett et al. 2018). Interventions in contexts such as refugee camps have shown the need to understand access to water beyond physical access or provision, and to include social dimensions such as sex, age, ethnicity, class, and religion that could be affected by limiting or changing the traditional use of and access to water.

The lack of understanding of and the value placed on the social aspects around water in the design of WASH interventions has caused conflict between donors, humanitarian organizations, and local communities. One example of this is the top-down prioritization of water and sanitation over other uses of water; for example, the use of water for livestock. This is a very typical conflict between nomadic pastoralists living in arid and semi-arid environments and humanitarian agencies (Harvey and Reed 2006; Betti 2018).

Humanitarian actors have been collaborating with existing state and international institutions to safeguard the right to access to water for vulnerable groups and to adopt policies, plans, and legislation that can protect such rights. The development of legal frames, diplomatic collaborations, and targets (e.g. coverage targets) can be placed under the umbrella of “water governance.” This has moved from exclusively monitoring household access to also prioritizing the monitoring of institutional settings, such as schools, health care facilities, and workplaces (WHO and UNCF 2017b).

Despite these developments, hundreds of millions of people still lack access to safely managed drinking water services and continue to live without access to safely managed sanitation services (WHO and UNCF 2017a).

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