

PRESS RELEASE

Water Footprint: Key to Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Hague, 7th November 2016: Water Footprint Network has published Water Footprint Profiles of seven Sub-Saharan African countries: Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique and Rwanda. (1) This is the first series of assessments of this kind in the region.

Commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the profiles use the science of water footprint to provide a new and valuable perspective into the pressure the agricultural sector is putting on available water resources in these countries. Analysis of this kind is vital because agriculture is the largest consumer of water in Sub-Saharan Africa and a rapidly rising population will put even more pressure on water and land resources.

The Water Footprint Profiles reveal that staple food and export crops are often produced inefficiently in all seven countries - they use more water and land resources than the global benchmark for these crops.

“Our study highlights the opportunities available for improving water and land productivity in Sub-Saharan Africa. By increasing the amount of crop per drop of water used for staple food and export crops, the region could take great strides towards realising our shared ambition to end hunger and improve livelihoods whilst sustaining river basins, healthy ecosystems and economic growth,” said Ruth Mathews, Executive Director, Water Footprint Network.

The profiles highlight that:

- A more productive use of rainfall is a critical step in strengthening food security and climate resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa. (2)
- Producing crops and using cropping systems that excel in water productivity would enhance livelihoods while reducing pressure on water resources. (3)
- Securing environmental flows and regulating the use of groundwater resources before expanding irrigation would be advisable to help avert negative consequences of overuse.
- Integrating policy for a holistic approach to development will help prevent conflicting aims across sectors slowing sustainable development.

“The insights provided by the water footprint can be used to help formulate integrated policies that better balance the water related needs of society and business with the needs of nature. They provide a compass for advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and their related targets in Sub-Saharan Africa,” concluded Mathews.

Notes to editors:

(1) Click on each country to download the Water Footprint Profile: [Benin](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Ghana](#), [Kenya](#), [Mali](#), [Mozambique](#) and [Rwanda](#).

For an overview of the reports' findings read our [briefing paper](#).

(2) Supporting farmers by improving access to better seeds, improving soil nutrition and moisture retention and reducing non-productive evaporation are some of many tangible and realistic solutions can maximize productivity i.e., the amount of 'crop per drop' of water.

(3) If key export crops are produced with higher levels of water and land productivity, it would provide greater levels of export value for the same amount of water and land area used. For example, sugar cane produced in Kenya is more efficient than the global water footprint benchmark while in Mozambique, sugar cane consumes six times as much water per tonne of production compared to the global benchmark. If sugar cane production in Mozambique met the global water footprint benchmark, the same amount of water could produce four times as much sugar cane as is produced now.

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