



ISSUE SHEET

Human rights and democracy – a cross-cutting issue

SIWI envisions a world where water is shared and allocated sustainably, equitably and efficiently, making it universally available to meet everyone's basic needs. This builds on the principles of a democratic society where every person is guaranteed his or her human rights, fundamental freedoms of opinion and the rights to vote.

It also encompasses equal access to civil and political rights, to resources, public services, and principles of good governance. In our vision of a water wise world, water and sanitation are universally recognised as a human right.

What are human rights and democracy?

In 2010 the United Nations explicitly recognised the human right to water and sanitation (HRWS). Many argue that the human right to sanitation should be addressed as a distinct and separate right.

As a result, States must incorporate the HRWS into national law, and progressively realise the right(s) through concrete steps. The UN General Assembly calls upon States and international organisations to, among other things, provide capacity building them to developing countries to help provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all. In practice this means that governments must, for instance, identify which groups have least access to water and ensure that systems of accountability and remedy are in place.

The HRWS is an individual entitlement limited to personal and domestic use. Water and sanitation services and facilities must be accessible continuously in the household or its vicinity, at a price that is affordable for all people and without discrimination of any group. The water must be of adequate quantity and sufficiently good quality not to threaten human health. States must also take measures to ensure that private actors fulfil a basic responsibility to respect the human rights.

How does SIWI work with human rights and democracy?

SIWI's activities build on democratic principles and often take place in countries where democracy is fragile or non-existent, and where the rights of groups and individuals are discriminated

against. SIWI subscribes to a human rights-based approach to development cooperation. This aims to further the realisation of human rights and strengthen the capacities of governments to meet their obligations and of citizens to claim their rights.

Through policy support, technical advice and capacity development programmes, SIWI can assist states to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

Examples of our work

SIWI contributes to knowledge on the human right to water and sanitation. Insights are disseminated through publications, reviewed methodologies, workshops, conferences, and seminars. SIWI strives to highlight the vital nexus between water, food and energy – other essential rights, to promote integrated approaches to their management.

SIWI enhances the capacity of states and local communities to realise the right to sanitation in countries such as Cambodia, Niger and Togo through the Goal WASH programme.

SIWI's mission is to generate and promote knowledge, solutions and tools leading to water wise decisions for sustainable development. Alongside our specialised water thematic areas, SIWI works with five cross cutting issues that underpin our work: Integrity, Poverty reduction, Human rights and democracy, Gender and Environmental sustainability.

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Focal point

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