

»» Water not only quenches thirst, it also creates jobs.

No. 11, 22 March 2016

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According to UN-Water, close to half of the world's working population - around 1.5 billion people - is employed in the water sector itself or in sectors dependent on the water industry. Agriculture without water, for example, would be unthinkable: 2,000 litres of water are needed to produce one kilo of rice, while for a kilo of beef it is 15,000 litres. Other sectors paint a similar picture: making a pair of jeans requires 8,000 litres of water, and manufacturing a car takes on average 380,000 litres. It is therefore assumed that 100% of jobs in agriculture, 90% in industry and 40% in the services sector are heavily dependent on water.

World Water Day 2016: Water and Jobs

The theme of this year's World Water Day is "Water and Jobs", thus creating a connection between water (sectors) and its significance for labour markets. Both are much more closely linked than is commonly assumed. Water is not just a decisive factor for the productivity of a sector, but also for the living conditions of the labour force.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is the patron of this year's World Water Day. Befitting the theme of "Water and Jobs" it has been fighting for humane working conditions for more than 100 years. ILO's core labour standards play a fundamental role because for the first time they determine the basic requirements for decent working conditions.

Access to water creates jobs and equal opportunities

One factor playing a key role for decent working conditions, and which is often overlooked, is the water sector.

In regions where homes are not connected to water supply, women and children are responsible for collecting water in 62% and 15% of the cases respectively, according to the UN child welfare organisation UNICEF. This heavy, physical work is

neither paid, nor acknowledged, nor protected by basic labour rights. A better water supply can therefore increase equal opportunities between men and women as well as improve opportunities in life and education for many children, who, for example, could go to school instead of having to carry out the heavy work.

Indirect employment opportunities in the water sector: gender equality and health

For women, better access to water, for example via house connections, means they can carry out productive activities generating income in the "time saved". Especially in countries where water resources are scarce, this is a decisive factor for women in taking a step towards equal opportunities in the working world.

Alongside access, the quality of water in the workplace is crucial too: a good and sufficient water supply and sanitation at work has a direct impact on the life and health of the labour force. Every year there are more than two million fatal work accidents, of which almost 350,000 are directly related to water. Contaminated water, sometimes poisoned with chemicals, plays as much of a role here as a lack of sanitary facilities and poor hygiene conditions. A good, basic supply of water and sanitary facilities not only help individual workers and their families, but also provide an opportunity to make whole economic sectors more resilient, more robust and therefore more productive.

Direct employment opportunities in the water sector

Projects and investments in the water sector can help to safeguard jobs and create new ones, both directly and indirectly. Development cooperation plays an important role in this context.

Constructing sewage treatment plants or waterworks for example has a direct impact on employment. Furthermore it strengthens local partners by training them

in the construction of the facilities and in their maintenance, which creates jobs not just during the building phase but also in their subsequent operation. However, the direct impacts on employment in the water sector are weaker on the whole for women than for men, because heavy, physical work is mostly carried out by men.

Water is crucially important for economies and for sustainable development policy

Organised water supply and disposal is vitally important for all national economies. According to expert estimates, nearly half of all employment in a national economy depends directly or indirectly on this. Given the noticeable shortage of freshwater resources in a growing number of countries, there is a corresponding need to protect water catchment areas and use water economically for the purposes of promoting a development policy geared towards sustainability. ■