

POSTER SUMMARY

**WATER FOOTPRINT:
ASSESSING WATER RISK AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS**

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Abstract

Water is fast becoming the next major global issue. It is an essential natural resource and is crucial to the economy. Most industry operations rely directly on water, some more than others. With water scarcity becoming increasingly prevalent, companies are being faced more frequently with physical shortages or declining quality of available water. This results in disruptions to continuity and volumes of production, consequently reduced revenues, and has the potential to cause reliability and reputational concerns. Even where such risks may not be obvious for direct operations, the supply chain may well hold substantial concerns, especially for businesses that rely on resources from agriculture or the extractives industry.

In many parts of Africa, water demand is expected to exceed reliable supply within the next five to ten years, with little possibility of supply augmentation within that time frame. As the demand and competition for scarce water resources grows, it is imperative for companies to better understand their water consumption and impacts (needs for water and the ways in which they use, dispose of and operate their water facilities). In addition, there is a growing demand from shareholders and investors that companies assess and disclose their business or product 'water footprint'. Businesses are therefore participating in numerous initiatives to help evaluate and effectively address water risks. The concept of the water footprint has gained significant traction over the past decade in both the private and public sectors, and is being explored as a strategic tool to identify, manage and mitigate water risks. Not only do water footprints quantify direct water use, but they illustrate the impact of water consumption on water quality and ultimately water resources. In addition, water footprints can provide an understanding of water dependencies and vulnerabilities throughout the supply chain of a product. This poster highlights the relevance of water footprints to industry, including the potential for turning risks into opportunities that proactively respond to the challenge of global fresh water scarcity.

Keywords: water scarcity, water footprint, water risks, industry, reputational concerns, shareholders and investors