Comments on the HLPE Draft Report on Water and Food Security

1. The scope of the topic of water and food security is very broad. Do you think that the V0 draft has adequately charted the diversity of the linkages between water and food security and nutrition? Is there important evidence or aspects that the present draft has failed to cover?

The draft needs to consider seed issues or issues related to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, relating to water and food security. Only Line 53 in page 44 of the draft report under the discussion 2.4.4 “Investing in Agroecology” was the protection of seed varieties mentioned in passing. The importance of PGRFA in relation to water and food rights need to be emphasized. PGRFA depends greatly on water and is the basic unit of all food. On the other hand, food security is greatly dependent on PGRFA. The interlinkages between PGRFA, water, and food security needs to be emphasized in the report due to the interdependencies of these three.

One of the seed issues related to water and food rights is the increasing production of patented seeds that often use up huge amounts of water, as compared to traditional varieties. The draft comprehensively emphasized the scenario of dwindling water supply. In the face of this reality, there should be a moratorium of the production by giant agrochemical companies of patented seeds that uselessly and needlessly require voluminous amounts of water. This is only proper in the light of the unarguable fact that GMOs and other patented seeds, since their introduction in the 1990s have not been successful in combatting world hunger.

The “water footprint” of patented seeds vis-à-vis traditional and farm-saved seeds need to be part of the analysis.

1. Has the report adequately covered the diversity of approaches and methodological issues, in particular concerning metrics and data for water and food security? Which metrics do you find particularly useful and which not?

It is humbly suggested that there should be additional quantitative data on how smallholder farmers minimize water use when practicing agroecological farming as compared to industrial farming. A recommendation to adopt the practices and methods of smallholder farmers towards the end of minimizing water use, such as the practice of System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in rice cultivation will be appropriate.

1. Food security involves trade of agricultural produce, and a virtual trade of water. Agricultural trade interacts with water and food security in various ways, and differently for food importing countries, food exporting countries, water scarce versus water rich countries. Do you think the V0 draft has appropriately covered the matter?

No, there is need to furthermore discuss water and food trade between countries, and the impact of regional or international bilateral trade agreements such as the GATT, on water and food rights.

1. In this report, we considered the potential for an expansion of the right to water to also encompass productive uses. What kind of practical and policy challenges would this bring?

The expansion of the right to water to also include productive uses will highlight the interconnectedness of the various human rights such as the right to food, right to livelihood, and right to environmental hygiene. It will not limit the right to water to its priority and limitation, which is for personal and domestic purposes only, and hence within the sphere of health. It encompasses a broader context and embraces the multiple uses of water, beyond the personal and private sphere and more into water as a common resource that is vital in realizing the very basic right to food, subsistence and thus to life.

Considering the expansion of the definition of the right to water, to include the use of water for productive use,

1. The quantity and quality of water for food production can be properly factored in. Considering that food is one of the most basic human needs for existence, the interlinkages between water and food security can be highlighted.
2. WHO and other health organizations will need to reconsider and rethink the analyses of water needs on a per capita basis only. The quantification of water and food production and use on a collective scale will be challenging.
3. Emphasis will be made to formulate and implement policies that acknowledge and prioritize water for productive uses.
4. Which systemic actions/solutions/approaches would be the most effective to enhance water governance, management and use for food security?

Using the human rights approach in addressing water, land and food rights is believed to be an ideal step forward. The interconnectedness of these rights and other human rights show the complexity and at the same time the importance in addressing these rights.

In relation to the draft recommendations, there is need to recommend resort to the practices and methods of smallholder farmers in optimizing water use. There should be sufficient discussion on smallholder farmers and water and food security, since smallholder farmers are at the core of water and food rights. The draft provided discussion on the rights of women and girls to water and food security, it should likewise present a similar or more than extensive discussion on the rights of smallholder farmers to water and food security. The draft’s discussion on agroecology generally pertain to approaches but not specifically to the role of smallholder farmers in advancing and promoting water and food rights.