

Embargoed: 25 April 2014

Water risks in the private sector

The unsustainable management of water resources, together with rising water demands and the impacts of climate change, poses significant risks to water companies and businesses reliant on agriculture (agribusinesses), as reported in a series of Commentary pieces and an Editorial in *Nature Climate Change*. The collection, which forms a Focus in the May issue, 'Water risks in the private sector', suggests that, in light of these pressures, companies need new water strategies to succeed in the market.

Water is essential to agribusinesses, such as retailers. A Commentary by Asda's External Affairs and Corporate Responsibility Director Paul Kelly highlights that the inefficient use of watersheds, combined with the impacts of extreme weather on water resources, affects agricultural production and the resilience of the food supply chain. He concludes by discussing how much retailers can gain by helping growers to improve irrigation practices. In another Commentary, SABMiller's Senior Vice President for Sustainable Development Andy Wales details the possibility of developing water-efficient local food supply chains that reduce other environmental impacts, including carbon emissions from electricity use, and boost the income of local farmers. This suggestion is inspired by current beer-manufacturing processes in India.

Arjen Y. Hoekstra, Chair of the Department of Water Engineering and Management at The University of Twente (The Netherlands) argues that the private sector's commitment alone will not be enough to achieve the management shift required to sustainably meet the needs of millions of water consumers around the world and calls for a strengthening of the role of governments in regulating water use. Finally, increasing populations and the demand for high living standards has led to the overuse of water resources, contends Peter Simpson, Anglian Water's Managing Director, suggesting that consumers have a role to play in addressing water scarcity.

The Editorial provides an overview of the issue and reflects on the extent to which sustainable development and climate adaptation are connected, proposing that initiatives bringing together academia, the private sector, government and civil society are necessary to move the sustainability debate from theory to action.

The commentaries in this Focus are the result of a water collaboration facilitated by the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL). CISL convenes business, government and academics to address the opportunities and challenges of natural capital management. CISL's Natural Capital Platform runs a number of projects, including a water sector collaboration, and puts forward business strategies for coping with limited natural resources and climate change impacts through improved collaboration and understanding.

/ Ends

The full collection can be accessed on Friday 25 April: <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/focus/water-risks/index.html>

Contact details

Gemma Cranston, Programme Manager, CISL.

Gemma.cranston@cisl.cam.ac.uk

01223 761711

www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/natcap