



RESOURCE

Water neutrality: A first quantitative framework for investing in water in South Africa

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Description / Abstract

The concept of water neutrality, based on its carbon equivalent, was first coined during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Since then the term has been loosely used, with little quantitative validation. Here we present a first quantitative framework for a water-neutral scheme that allows a private water user to balance its water account through both demand- and supply-side interventions. Such innovative voluntary mechanisms can provide benefits in a chronically water stressed and developing country, such as South Africa. This scheme seeks to harness private sector investment in water security, by allowing investors to balance quantitatively their water account based on sound scientific rationale. Investors are required to engage in a three-step process of: reviewing their water usage, implementing a reduction strategy, and replenishment of water to hydrological systems through the investment in watershed services, equivalent to their water usage. Initially, the scheme allows participants to replenish quantitatively their water usage through investment in the clearing of water-intensive invasive alien plants. The project, however, encourages the innovation and development of further quantitative mechanisms for investing in watershed services, and proposes an operational model for the promotion of a water-neutral market in South Africa.

Publication year

2009

Country

South Africa

Region

Africa

Publisher

Conservation Letters

Keywords

Water Neutrality Private Sector Investments

Language English
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Source URL: <https://iwrmaactionhub.org/resource/water-neutrality-first-quantitative-framework-investing-water-south-africa>