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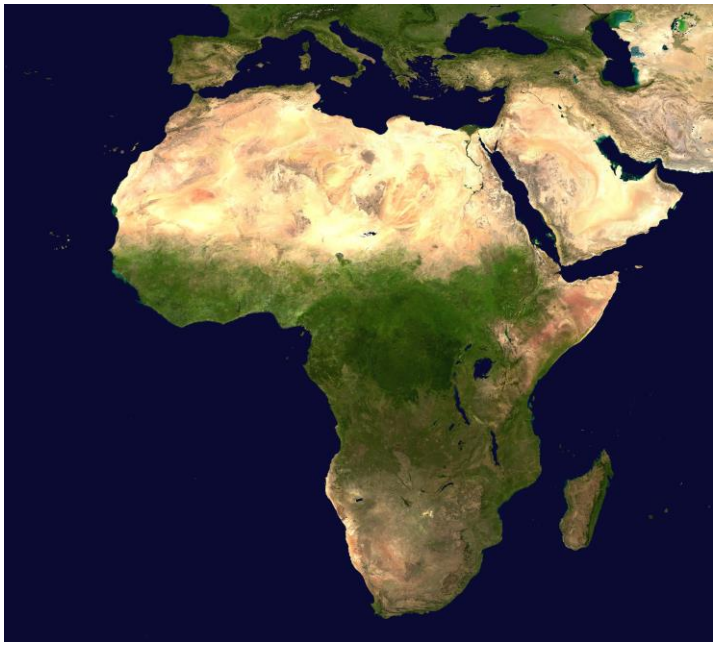
Water and Sanitation in the News

UN uses real-time satellite data to track water use in Africa

Water use in Africa and parts of the Middle East is now being tracked through satellite data. Information on the amount of water being used to irrigate crops is being tracked on an online database which makes use of satellite information and Google Earth images. Aside from water use for irrigation, the database also measures evapotranspiration – how water evaporates and returns to the atmosphere.

The database, which was created by the United Nations (UN) agricultural agency, has open-access. Known as WaPOR, the open-access database measures evapotranspiration – how water evaporates and returns to the atmosphere, according to FAO.



Maria Helena Semedo, deputy director-general of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), said: "Water use continues to surge at the same time that climate change – with increasing droughts and extreme weather – is altering and reducing water availability for agriculture. "That puts a premium on making every drop count, underscoring the importance of meeting growing food production needs from efficiency gains," she added.

Evapotranspiration

The UN presented these findings at a high-level meeting in Rome recently. The paper, entitled Coping with water scarcity in agriculture: a global framework for action in a changing climate, explained that evapotranspiration provides a direct measure of the water consumed by a crop during a growing season and, when related to the biomass and harvestable crop yield, allows for calculating the crop water productivity.

The UN said that the database also sifts through data to produce maps that how much food is produced for every cubic meter of water consumed. FAO, with support from the government of the Netherlands, is currently focusing on Africa and the Middle East, with detailed data expected in October for pilot areas in Ethiopia, Lebanon and Mali.

Current Water Situation in South Africa

The Department of Water and Sanitation has indicated that although dam levels have seen a slight increase in most parts of the country, South Africans must continue to use water sparingly. The ministry says average dam levels have increased slightly week-on-week and are up by 0.5% to 73.5%. Last year levels were at 54.9% over the same period.

Levels in Gauteng are up by 0.6% and currently sit at 92.5% collectively. It says there's been a slight increase in capacity in all provinces with the exceptions of the North West and Western Cape, where minor decreases were recorded. It says of the 211 dams being monitored on a weekly basis, 13 are currently below 10%, and 34 are below 40% and 54 are above 100%.

The City of Cape Town on Monday said the city's feeder dams only have enough water for another 88 days. The city asked residents to decrease city water usage to 600 million litres per day. Previously the target was to have consumption below 700 million litres per day.

Water consumption in the city increased to 745 million litres from 685 million litres the week before. In the statement, the city said its dam levels decreased to 23.3%. With the last 10% of our dam water mostly being unusable, dam levels are effectively at 13.3%.

Sources: EWN, 24 Apr 2017; News24, 24 Apr 2017; Infrastructurene.ws, 25 April 2017