

20. Carbon and Water Footprints: Concept

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Abstract:

In this chapter, we delve into the concepts of water footprint and carbon footprint, two critical measures used to assess the environmental impact of human activities. In the growing concerns of environment, more steps are taken by the researcher, environmentalist and governments to protect our natural ecosystems from air pollution, land pollution, water pollution, climate change and deforestations. The population is increasing day by day at an enormous amount and the sources are getting scarce. Both footprints provide valuable insights into resource consumption and environmental sustainability, offering a framework for individuals, businesses, and policymakers to make informed decisions regarding resource management and mitigation strategies. To prevent the scarcity of resources, we should learn to conserve and understand the concept of water footprint in 21st Century. This chapter deals the concepts of water footprint and carbon footprint.

Keywords:

Scarcity of resources, Water footprint, Carbon footprint, Environmental sustainability.

20.1 Introduction:

In our modern world, environmental consciousness is becoming increasingly important. Among the various metrics used to measure our impact on the planet, two prominent ones are water footprint and carbon footprint. Understanding these footprints is essential for individuals, businesses, and policymakers alike as we strive towards sustainability and environmental stewardship. The concept of ecological footprint, which laid the foundation for footprint concepts, was first introduced by Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees. A footprint, in the context of environmental science, refers to the total impact of a particular activity or entity on the environment. It quantifies the consumption of resources or emission of pollutants associated with that activity or entity.

20.2 Water Footprint:

The concept of water footprint, introduced by Professor Arjen Hoekstra in 2002, quantifies the total volume of freshwater used directly and indirectly by a product, process, or individual throughout its lifecycle. Direct use is the usage of water by means of direct consumption. Water we use for gardening, cleaning vessels, bathing and washing clothes. Indirect use is the virtual water use, you may not drink, feel or see this water but it makes up the majority of your water footprint.

For eg: 1 cup of coffee needs 140 litres of water which means, a cup of coffee needs 140 litres of water to grow, produce, package and ship the beans. It takes a lot of water to produce gasoline. On average, 1 mile driven = about 3/4 of a gallon of water (Johnny Wood,2019). Understanding water footprint is crucial for addressing water scarcity issues, promoting water efficiency, and ensuring sustainable water management practices (Hoekstra, 2008).

20.2.1 Components of Water Footprint:

According to Chapagain & Hoekstra, 2011, the water footprint consists of three main components:

- Green Water Footprint: This refers to the volume of rainwater consumed during the growth of agricultural products.
- Blue Water Footprint: This includes the volume of surface and groundwater consumed in the production process.
- Grey Water Footprint: This represents the volume of water needed to dilute pollutants generated during the production of goods and services.

20.2.2 Importance of Water Footprint:

- Conservation of freshwater resources: With increasing water scarcity in many regions, managing our water footprint helps ensure sustainable water usage.
- Minimizing pollution: By reducing our grey water footprint, we can mitigate the pollution of water bodies.
- Assessing product sustainability: Consumers and businesses can make informed choices by considering the water footprint of products they use or produce.

20.3 Carbon Footprint:

The concept of carbon footprint gained prominence in the early 21st century as concerns about climate change and carbon emissions intensified. Carbon footprint measures the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, expressed in terms of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e), associated with a product, organization, or activity. It encompasses emissions from burning fossil fuels, deforestation, industrial processes, and other human activities contributing to climate change. Assessing carbon footprint is essential for mitigating climate change impacts, transitioning to low-carbon economies, and fostering sustainable development (Wiedmann et al., 2020).

20.3.1 Components of Carbon Footprint:

The carbon footprint comprises various sources of emissions, including:

- Direct emissions: These are emissions from sources that are owned or controlled by the entity, such as fossil fuel combustion in vehicles or heating systems.
- Indirect emissions: Known as Scope 2 emissions, these result from the consumption of purchased electricity, heat, or steam generated elsewhere.

- Other indirect emissions: Known as Scope 3 emissions, these include all other indirect emissions associated with activities such as procurement, transportation, waste, and employee commuting.

20.3.2 Importance of Carbon Footprint:

Understanding our carbon footprint is critical due to several reasons:

- Mitigating climate change: By reducing carbon emissions, we can contribute to slowing down the pace of global warming and its associated impacts.
- Energy efficiency: Calculating and managing our carbon footprint encourages the adoption of energy-efficient practices and technologies.
- Corporate responsibility: Businesses are increasingly expected to measure, disclose, and reduce their carbon footprint as part of their sustainability initiatives.

20.4 Integrating Water and Carbon Footprints:

While water footprint and carbon footprint are distinct metrics, they are interconnected in many ways.

For example, the production of goods often requires both water and energy, leading to simultaneous water and carbon emissions. Integrating these footprints allows for a more comprehensive assessment of environmental impact and informs holistic sustainability strategies (Russi et al., 2019).

20.5 Tools for Assessing Footprints:

Numerous tools and methodologies exist for measuring and managing water and carbon footprints, ranging from simple calculators to comprehensive life cycle assessment (LCA) frameworks. These tools enable individuals, businesses, and policymakers to track their environmental impact, identify hotspots, and implement targeted mitigation measures (IPCC, 2019).

20.6 Applications and Implications:

The applications and implications of water and carbon footprinting in various contexts, including business, policy, and consumer behavior.

20.6.1 Business Sustainability and Supply Chain Management:

Understanding and managing water and carbon footprints are essential for businesses seeking to enhance their sustainability performance and reduce environmental risks in their supply chains.

Footprinting can help identify hotspots of water and carbon usage, optimize resource efficiency, and improve overall environmental stewardship.

20.6.2 Policy Development and Climate Action:

Governments and policymakers utilize water and carbon foot printing data to inform the development of regulations, standards, and incentives aimed at promoting resource conservation and mitigating climate change. Foot printing can support the implementation of policies such as carbon pricing, water allocation schemes, and eco-labeling initiatives.

20.6.3 Consumer Awareness and Behavior Change:

Increased awareness of water and carbon footprints empowers consumers to make more informed choices and adopt sustainable lifestyles. Labels and certifications indicating the environmental footprint of products enable consumers to prioritize eco-friendly options and support companies committed to reducing their environmental impact.

20.7 Conclusion:

As we navigate the challenges of climate change and resource scarcity, understanding and reducing our water and carbon footprints are imperative. By quantifying water and carbon usage, stakeholders can identify opportunities for efficiency gains, risk mitigation, and sustainable development. Moving forward, integrating water footprint and carbon footprint considerations into decision-making processes can help advance global efforts towards water security, climate resilience, and environmental sustainability.

20.8 References:

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