Forum: **The Special Commission on the African Union**

Question of: **"Finding measures for equal water distribution in Central Africa"**

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I. Description of the Issue

Access to clean water and proper sanitation is a given for some, while for others, it is a daily struggle to have access to proper drinking water. Central Africa is among the poorest regions in the world, and a region where access to water varies greatly between rural and urban areas. As of today, a large share of the region's population lacks access to basic water services, making this one of the most severe issues in the region.

The inadequate access to clean water disproportionately affects the population of more impoverished regions and communities, with especially women being subjected to harassment and violence when travelling long distances to collect water. Children are often subjected to waterborne diseases like cholera, dysentery, and typhoid, and other potentially life-threatening bacteria as a result of unsanitary water and living conditions.

Central Africa has seen a disproportionate inequality in the distribution of water, with many rural communities facing shortages compared to urban areas, as states generally invest more resources into improving the condition in the more developed cities as opposed to more rural parts of the countries. These communities usually face significant challenges in addressing these issues, as inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and political instability reduce their ability to address the issues effectively. International cooperation, including the involvement of foreign states and NGOs, plays a crucial role in supporting stability and improving access in less developed regions.

Yet coordinated action remains challenging. Communication between charitable organizations and local authorities is limited, hindering progress. In some cases, access to clean water is deliberately manipulated, sometimes being used as a tool of oppression by states or regional actors to suppress and control ethnic and religious groups within some of the most severely affected regions.

The unequal access to secure water deposits significantly hinders the otherwise increasing levels of socio-economic prosperity in Central Africa and limits their ability to develop and compete on a global scale. Despite the region's vast freshwater resources, factors such as large-scale conflicts between state authorities and local militias, as well as inadequate infrastructure, have made it one of the most severely affected regions in the world.

II. Definition of Key Terms

Central Africa:

Central Africa is a region comprising 11 sovereign states, as defined by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS): Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe. It is one of the world's poorest regions and one of the regions most severely affected by climate change, with large floods often destroying infrastructure, followed by extensive drought, where water scarcity places some of the poorest communities in appalling conditions.

Equitable water allocation:

Equitable water allocation is the principle of distributing water resources fairly and impartially. It does not necessarily imply an equal division between urban and rural areas; rather, it calls for a just allocation based on a multitude of factors, such as population size, existing infrastructure, resource availability, governance capacity, and the specific needs of different communities.

III. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The Democratic Republic of the Congo:

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the most populous country in Central Africa, with more than 109 million people and with vast freshwater resources. However, there is considerable heterogeneity in access to water, with 79 percent of the urban population having access, against 29 percent in rural areas.

Central African Republic (CAR):

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a water-rich nation split between the Chari and Congo River basins. However, systemic infrastructure deficits, armed conflict, and pollution mean only 36% of the population has access to basic water, making clean drinking water a severe luxury across the country, especially in the more underdeveloped parts of the country.

Chad:

Chad remains one of the countries most harshly impacted by water inequality. Much of the country's northern half is covered in desert, with more lush regions in the south. Being a landlocked country, Chad is heavily dependent on the various freshwater lakes in the region, with Lake Chad being a critical freshwater reserve. Lake Chad has, however, been shrinking significantly over the last couple of decades, posing a critical issue for the nation's freshwater access. Due to widespread desertification, brought on by climate change, and the limited access to crucial infrastructure, the situation has worsened significantly over time. As a result, water scarcity continues to hinder agricultural production for many rural communities dependent on agricultural output, increasing food insecurity and contributing to greater regional instability.

African Union:

The African Union has historically, and still does to this day, remained one of the largest advocates for expanded access to clean water resources and lessening the inequality that rural communities usually face.

IV. Previous attempts to solve the issue

Many international organizations, like UNICEF and the World Bank, have run aid programmes to help fund the building of wells, sanitation systems, and hygiene programs in particularly vulnerable regions and communities across Central Africa.

Regional cooperation among the countries bordering Lake Chad has resulted in the creation of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), with a mandate to manage the equitable use of the transboundary water resources of Lake Chad and other transboundary water resources in the basin. The Commission was founded in 1964 by Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria; the Central African Republic joined in 1996, and Libya joined in 2008.

In addition, several governments in the region have attempted to implement national water strategies aimed at improving infrastructure and expanding access to clean water, although these have often been limited by insufficient funding, corruption, and lack of technical capacity. NGOs have also introduced small-scale community-based water systems, such as boreholes and solar-powered pumps, which have shown localized success but have been difficult to scale up to a national level.

V. Possible solutions

Focusing greater government and international investment on rural communities is essential to addressing the inequality of water distribution in Central Africa. Prioritizing the construction of more sustainable water infrastructure in these communities could significantly improve access to clean water. The investment into wells, boreholes, and water pumps, as well as local rainwater harvesting and purification systems, would enable more effective use of existing freshwater resources.

These measures have the potential to expand water access to millions of people, helping to reduce the disparity between rural and urban populations and improve the conditions of entire communities. In addition, improved access to clean water and proper sanitation would have a significant impact on public health outcomes by reducing the prevalence of waterborne diseases and improving overall living conditions.

Strengthening governance systems and increasing transparency in infrastructure projects could help ensure that funding is used effectively and reaches the communities most in need. Regional cooperation between states sharing water resources should also be enhanced to prevent conflict and promote sustainable usage. Integrating climate adaptation strategies, such as drought-resistant infrastructure and improved water storage systems, will be crucial in ensuring long-term water security in the face of climate change.

VI. Questions delegates should consider during research

- How can governments balance investments into rural and urban communities to ensure more equal standards?
- What role does climate change play in the issue, and how should it be addressed?
- How can we more effectively minimize corruption and inefficiency in water projects?

VII. Relevant Treaties and Events

UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 (2015):

The Sixth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal calls for the establishment, management, and easy availability of clean water and sanitation for all people. It is a driving principle when addressing the issue and sets forward goals for member states to achieve to ensure a fair and equal distribution of water.

Lake Chad Basin Commission Agreement (1964):

The Convention and Statutes Relating to the Development of the Chad Basin, signed in Fort-Lamy (now N'Djamena) in 1964, is one of the most important agreements addressing the issue, establishing the Lake Chad Basin Commission among the countries bordering the lake.

VIII. Useful links and sources

Links:

https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-scarcity

https://www.climate-refugees.org/reports/case-study-loss-and-damage

Sources:

https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1511tn.pdf

https://www.icrc.org/en/article/central-african-republic-clean-drinking-water-remains-luxury

https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/shallow-dive--the-data-behind-the-impacts-of-lake-chad-s-shrinka

https://vajournalia.org/opeds-1/2025/9/30/climate-change-is-fueling-the-food-crisis-in-chad

https://www.fao.org/fishery/organization/lcbc/en

https://connect4impact.worldbank.org/topic/democratic-republic-congo-water-sector-taking-stock-challenges-leads-new-solutions

https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/unicef-water-pumps-source-life-health-and-resilience

https://cblt.org/member-countries/ (for verified Lake Chad Basin Commission membership)