Sectoral Vulnerability to Drought: Exploring the Role of Blue and Green Water Dependency in Mid and High-Latitudes

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12 **Abstract.**

13 The European continent has experienced several large-scale drought events in recent years, and climate
14 projections suggest an increasing drought risk in many parts of the world. As droughts can have large impacts on
15 socio-hydrological systems, analysing drought risk is an important part for proactive drought risk management
16 and disaster risk reduction. Drought risk can be expressed as a product of hazard, exposure and vulnerability,
17 where vulnerability is highly contextual and complex. As droughts can affect all parts of the hydrological system,
18 from precipitation and soil moisture to groundwater and surface water reservoirs, drought vulnerability differs
19 depending on what part of the system is studied. Building on previous results from a survey analysing drought
20 vulnerability across seven water-dependent sectors, this paper explores how vulnerability factors vary based on
21 sectors' dependency on blue water (surface and subsurface freshwater) or green water (soil moisture) in mid and
22 high latitude regions. The findings reveal that drought vulnerability differs based on water type dependency,
23 especially concerning water supply and species characteristics. Perceptions of vulnerability factors vary in
24 number, category, and overall ranking, highlighting the importance of considering water dependency when
25 choosing vulnerability factors for drought risk assessments and to clearly define the drought hazard types
26 involved.

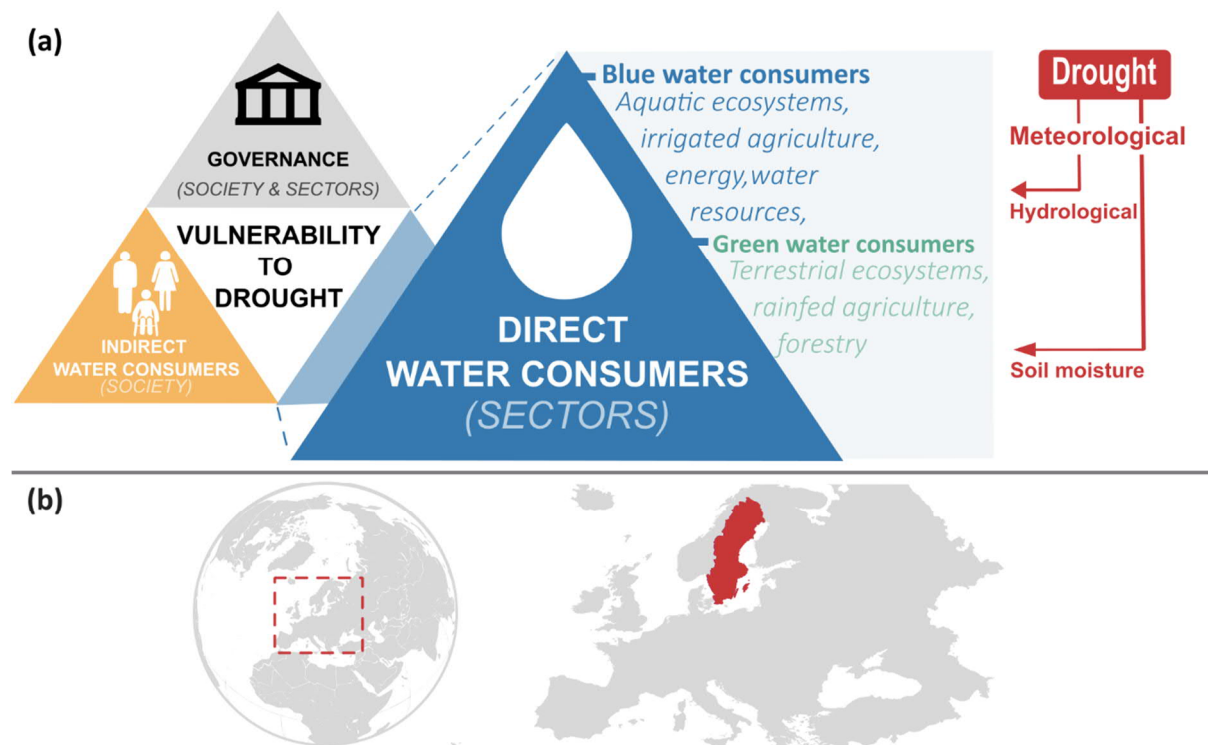
1 Introduction

Climate projections suggest that drought risk is increasing, with some regions likely to experience more frequent and severe drought events in future climates (UNDRR, 2021). Some areas are already seeing more intense drought events, especially West Africa and southern Europe (UNDRR, 2021). The European continent has experienced several large-scale drought events in recent years, with the most recent extraordinary drought conditions in 2022 (Faranda et al., 2023). Droughts can have severe and far-reaching impacts on societies, where impacts can be both direct and indirect (Blauhut et al., 2016), and develop slowly over time, affecting many parts of society (Mishra and Singh, 2010). Among natural hazards, drought events can cause some of the highest economic losses (Kim et al., 2015), while their (often substantial) impacts on human health and the environment are more difficult to assess (UNDRR, 2019).

Modern approaches to drought risk management follow the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030). The Sendai framework emphasizes the need for disaster risk management, and aims at furthering the understanding of complex disaster risk. The framework divides risk into three dimensions – hazard, exposure and vulnerability (UNDRR, 2015). A disaster occurs when a hazardous event takes place in a vulnerable area with exposed entities creating a serious disruption of the functions of a community or society (UNDRR, 2019). Hence, in order to understand and manage drought risk, an understanding of all three dimensions is needed.

As a *hazard*, droughts are referred to as creeping phenomena, with a slow onset and where impacts can appear after the drought event itself has ended. As a result, determining its onset and termination can be difficult. Droughts are generally distinguished as four different types - metrological droughts that represent a lack of precipitation, sometimes combined with an increase in evapotranspiration compared to normal conditions (Van Loon, 2015), agricultural drought depicting a soil moisture deficit that affects soil vegetation and crops (Van Loon, 2015), hydrological drought that is characterized by deficits in surface- and/or subsurface water resources (Mishra and Singh, 2010), and socioeconomic drought that represents an impact-oriented deficit of water as a good in the supply and demand network of the human-water nexus (Mishra and Singh, 2010). The different drought types have different propagation times, where meteorological and soil moisture drought typically develop faster than hydrological or socioeconomic droughts, as reservoirs can off-set and smooth out effects of a drought over time (Mishra and Singh, 2010; Van Loon, 2015).

The second risk dimension, drought *exposure*, encompasses the entities exposed during a drought event, such as buildings, inhabitants, or crops (Ciurean et al., 2013). The exposure component is often expressed as a sub-dimension of vulnerability, as the term was originally included in the definition of vulnerability in the older IPCC Assessment Report (AR) 4 (IPCC, 2007). However, the exposure term has since then been omitted from the vulnerability definitions used in AR5 and AR6 (IPCC, 2022; IPCC et al., 2014) and is now considered a standalone dimension of drought risk. Instead, the third risk dimension, drought *vulnerability*, can generally be expressed as the predisposition of a system to be negatively affected by a drought (Füssel, 2007) Yet, vulnerability is a complex concept, which can be described, defined and conceptualized in a number of ways (Adger, 2006; Ciurean et al., 2013; Sebesvari et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2003). In IPCC AR6 vulnerability is defined as encompassing *"a variety of concepts and elements including sensitivity or susceptibility to harm and lack of capacity to cope and adapt"* (IPCC, 2022). Adaptive capacity can be seen as the ability to anticipate and learn from droughts in the long term, whereas coping capacity refers to the ability to react and cope in the short term. Susceptibility on the other hand relates to the predisposition to be negatively impacted by a drought event. Using the definition proposed by IPCC AR 6 (IPCC, 2022), Stenfors et al. (2024) conceptualized drought vulnerability of a socio-

68 hydrological system as comprising three dimensions: (1) governance processes and the available policies and
69 plans (i.e., governance), (2) the indirect water consumers of the system (i.e., society), and (3) its direct water
70 consumers (i.e., particular sectors) (Figure 1a). Factors of vulnerability connected to governance processes,
71 policies and plans, can affect both drought vulnerability in individual sectors, as well as society as a whole. They
72 relate to aspects such as drought awareness of authorities, presence of drought plans and risk assessments, or the
73 financial capacity of the government to offer support during a drought event. Meanwhile, vulnerability factors
74 connected to indirect water consumers relate to the population consuming water indirectly, through goods such as
75 food, energy or public water supply. For indirect water consumers, vulnerability can be expressed through
76 demographic aspects that may affect drought vulnerability, such as different aspects of socio-economic
77 susceptibility (e.g., level of income or integration). Lastly, direct water consumers refer to socio-hydrological
78 sectors that consume water directly for production of goods or for sustaining ecosystem services.

79
80 **Figure 1. (a) The conceptual framework developed by Stenfors et al (2024a). In the framework drought vulnerability**
81 **is represented by factors relating to governance, indirect water consumers and direct water consumers. The latter is**
82 **further divided into factors relating to sectors dependent on blue or green water respectively. The framework has**
83 **been modified from Stenfors et al. (2024) to visualize how different drought types (i.e., hydrological and soil moisture**
84 **droughts) are linked to different direct water consumers. (b) Geographic extent of survey participants representing**
85 **water-dependent sectors in Sweden.**

86 These direct water consumers can be further categorized based on their dependency on different types of water
87 resources, i.e., whether they depend predominantly on *green* or *blue* sources of water. Falkenmark and Rockström
88 (2006) described green water as water stored in the unsaturated zone as soil moisture, whereas blue water is stored
89 as sub-surface water in the saturated zone or as surface water. Examples of direct water consumers relying on
90 surface or subsurface water (i.e., *blue water resources*) include energy producers, drinking water suppliers,
91 irrigated agriculture and aquatic ecosystems. In contrast, sectors like forestry, rainfed agriculture and terrestrial
92 ecosystems, primarily depend on water stored in the unsaturated zone as soil moisture (i.e. *green water*).

93   The distinction between ~~green and~~ blue and green water resources is crucial as they are affected differently by

94   various types of drought. Agricultural drought represents deficits in green water supplies, whereas hydrological

95   drought refers to water deficits in blue water. Hence, the conceptual framework of Stenfors et al (2024) suggests

96   that different drought types could affect various consumers/sectors differently, each with their own specific

97   vulnerabilities to that drought type. To explore these consumer/sector-specific vulnerabilities, Stenfors et al.

98   (2025) conducted an online survey targeting stakeholders from seven water-dependent sectors in Sweden, northern

99   Europe (Figure 1b). Stretching from 55°2'N to 69°3'N, Sweden comprises three climate zones according to the

100   Köppen-Geiger classification, namely warm-summer hemi boreal (Dfb) in the south, subarctic boreal (Dfc) in

101   central and northern Sweden, and tundra (ET) in the north-west, where many areas currently classified as Dfb and

102   Dfc are projected to transition to Cfb (temperate oceanic climate) and Dfb by the end of the century (Beck et al.,

103   2018). Sweden has historically been considered water-abundant, however the 2018 drought affected large parts

104   of the country (Teutschbein et al., 2022).

105   The survey results enabled the identification of stakeholder-informed ~~user validated~~ drought vulnerability factors

106   that are particularly relevant to water-dependent sectors and societies in mid and high-latitude regions (located

107   above 50°N). The diverse perceptions of drought vulnerability found across different consumers/sectors further

108   indicate that variations in the relevance of vulnerability factors may stem from the specific type of water

109   dependency (~~green versus~~ blue versus green) of each consumer/sector.

110   Building on the notion of an inherent relation between sectoral drought vulnerability and the type of water

111   dependency in mid and high latitude regions (Stenfors et al., 2025), this paper provides a comprehensive analysis

112   of how sectoral drought vulnerability differs according to water-type dependency, and discusses the implication

113   for drought risk assessments, as well as policy design. Utilizing the conceptual framework described by Stenfors

114   et al (2024a) and the survey data presented by Stenfors et al. (Stenfors et al., 2025) in this issue, we aim to address

115   the following research questions for drought vulnerability in mid and high latitude regions:

      1. What are the relevant vulnerability factors for blue water-dependent sectors compared to green water-dependent sectors?

      2. How do the vulnerability factors for blue and green water-dependent sectors rank in terms of impact scores?

      3. Which vulnerability factors are rated the highest for each type of water dependency?

      4. Do the impact ratings of vulnerability factors vary among respondents based on the type of water dependency?

2   Methods and Data

2.1   Data collection

125   The starting point for the analysis was a list of 74 vulnerability factors connected to direct water consumers

126   compiled from existing literature by Stenfors et al (2024) for forested cold climate regions. These factors related

127   broadly to nine categories of vulnerability (Figure 2) and referred to adaptive capacity, coping capacity or

128   susceptibility - following the IPCC AR6 definition of vulnerability.

Figure 2. Overview of the number of vulnerability factors for direct water consumers compiled by (Stenfors at al. 2024). The factors are divided into nine subcategories (short names in bold) relating to the general attributes of the factors. Information as to whether each category includes factors connected to adaptive capacity (A), coping capacity (C) and/or susceptibility (S) is also displayed.

To ~~validate~~ investigate and refine the assembled vulnerability factors, an online survey was developed, targeting seven water-dependent sectors in Sweden (Figure 1b) – energy production including for example hydropower or nuclear production (i.e., energy), agricultural crop production or livestock (agriculture), aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems (environment), drinking water production and distribution (water supply), water resource management (water resources), forest conservation and production (forestry), and water intensive industries such as paper and pulp, chemical production, or steel and metal works (water intensive industry). The survey included three sections:

I. **Background Information:** This section collected data about the respondents, including their primary sector, years of experience, type of organization and Swedish region in which they work.

II. **Sector-Specific Vulnerability Factors:** Respondents were asked to rate the importance of various vulnerability factors for drought risk in their primary sector, using a 5-point scale (0 = no impact to 4 = high impact)

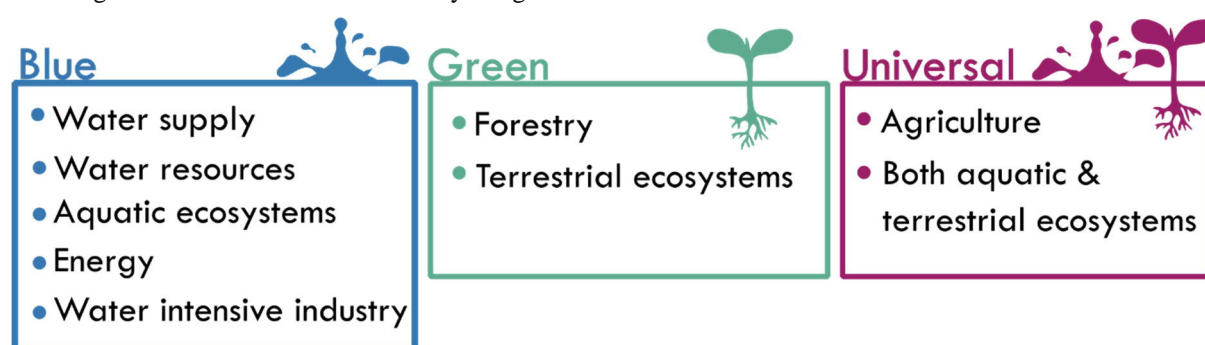
III. **Societal Vulnerability Factors:** Respondents rated the importance of vulnerability factors for drought risk across Swedish society, again using the 5-point rating scale.

For a more detailed description of the survey, we refer the reader to Stenfors et al. (2025) and the supplementary information (S1, section S1.1)

The survey was sent to 561 recipients in spring 2023, including governmental/local authorities (354 recipients), private/municipal/state-owned enterprises (81), academia or research institutes (46), national/regional trade associations (45), and NGOs (35). Receiving 108 responses in total, the response rate was 19.3%. Initial data cleaning identified six respondents answering exclusively "I don't know", and their responses were excluded from all subsequent analysis. Furthermore, one respondent did not specify a sectoral focus and could therefore not be included in the analysis. A more detailed description of the recipient selection process can be found in the supplementary materials (S1, section S1.2).

2.2 Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed in Microsoft Excel and RStudio using a four-step approach involving data preparation, relevant factor identification, vulnerability factor ranking and hypothesis testing.

159 As a first step, survey responses were categorized based on the primary sector into three groups: blue water-
160 dependent, green water-dependent, or universal water consumers (i.e. relying on both blue and green water)
161 (Figure 3). Respondents from the energy, drinking water and water resource sector were categorized as primarily
162 blue water-dependent. The respondent working in a water-intensive industry was also classified as primarily blue
163 water-dependent. Those in the forestry sector were categorized as mainly green water-dependent. Within the
164 environmental sector, respondents were further divided into three groups: those working with aquatic ecosystems
165 were classified as blue water-dependent, while those focused on terrestrial ecosystems were considered green
166 water-dependent. The third group, referred to as universal water consumers, included respondents working with
167 both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and respondents from the agricultural sector, as their reliance on either
168 blue or green water could not be distinctly categorized.

170 **Figure 3. The sector or primary focus of respondents included in the three groups depending on water dependency on**
171 **blue water sources (blue), green water sources (green), and respondents whose primary focus can be dependent on both**
172 **blue and green water sources (universal, purple).**

173 Second, relevant vulnerability factors for the three~~two~~ groups respectively were identified following Meza et al.
174 (2019) and Stenfors et al. (2025). A vulnerability factor was considered relevant for the water dependent groups
175 if 50% or more of survey respondents rated it as having a medium high or high impact (i.e., a median score of
176 three or higher) on drought risk in their sector. Hence, drought vulnerability factors relevant for blue, green and
177 universal water consumers were identified by calculating the median rating, grouped by water type consumption
178 (blue, green or universal water consumption).

179 After identifying relevant factors, factor impact scores were calculated in a third step. This allowed for analysis
180 of the relative importance of vulnerability factors depending on water type dependency. The respondent ratings,
181 originally ranging from 0 to 4, were rescaled into a scale of 0-1, with 0.25-step increments. The impact score was
182 then attained by calculating the mean rescaled rating for each factor, grouped by water consumption type. Highly
183 impactful vulnerability factors have impact scores closer to 1, whereas less impactful factors have impact scores
184 close to 0. The calculated impact score is not an indication on whether the factor has a positive or negative impact
185 on drought risk, only that the factor is perceived as impactful.

186 Lastly, pairwise-Wilcoxon rank sum tests with corrections for multiple testing were used for analyzing significant
187 differences in ratings between the three water consumer groups, using pairwise comparisons between the three
188 water consumptions groups (i.e. blue, green and universal water consumption).

189 **3   Synthesis of Results**

190 **3.1   Respondent characteristics**

191 Grouping the respondents based on sectoral water type dependency resulted in three groups, where blue water
192 consumers had the largest number of respondents (48 respondents), followed by universal water consumers (29),

193 and green water consumers (24 respondents) (Table 1). In all three groups, a majority of the respondents were
194 working in authorities (60% across all three groups), followed by respondents working in research (19% in total)
195 and private/municipal/authority owned enterprises (12%). The blue water consumers, as well as universal
196 consumers both had respondents working for an NGO and trade associations, where the universal water consumers
197 had five respondents working for agricultural trade associations. Most respondents were located in southern
198 Sweden (84%) and indicated to have a significant experience of working with drought in their primary sector
199 (56%). More information on respondents' characteristics is presented in the supplementary materials (S2).
200

Table 1. Overview of respondent characteristics, divided by water consumption type (blue, green, universal), place of employment, geographical location in Sweden, their reported experience with drought, as well as their primary sectoral focus.

Organization	Blue	Green	Universal	Grand total
Authority	31	14	16	61
Enterprise	7	4	1	12
NGO	1		1	2
Research	7	6	6	19
Trade association	2		5	7
Location				
North	6	4	6	16
South	42	20	23	85
Drought experience				
Limited	8	1	7	16
Moderate	13	8	7	28
Significant	27	15	15	57
Sector				
Agricultural			13	13
Energy	7			7
Environmental	9	10	16	35
Forestry		14		14
Water intensive industry	1			1
Water resources	15			15
Water supply	16			16
Respondents (number)	**48**	**24**	**29**	**101**

3.2 Relevance of vulnerability factors for blue, green and universal water consumers

In total 63 vulnerability factors were considered relevant by at least one of the three water consuming groups (Figure 4a). Universal water consumers, reliant on both blue and green water, found the largest number of factors as relevant (60 factors), followed by blue water consumers (43), and green water consumers (18). Universal water consumers found vulnerability factors relating to all nine categories relevant for their sectors. This can be compared to green water consumers, who only found factors relating to five categories as relevant. The factors relevant for green water consumers were mainly related to species characteristics, conditions of the surrounding settings and available tools & resources. The respondents in this group also found one factor related to policies and one related to anthropogenic stress as relevant. On the other hand, blue water consumers found at least one factor as relevant in all factor categories except one. No factors related to species characteristics were considered relevant for blue water consumers. In contrast, blue water consumers found all factors related to policies and plans relevant, as well a majority of the factors relating to the conditions of surrounding setting, available water supply, and available tools and resources.

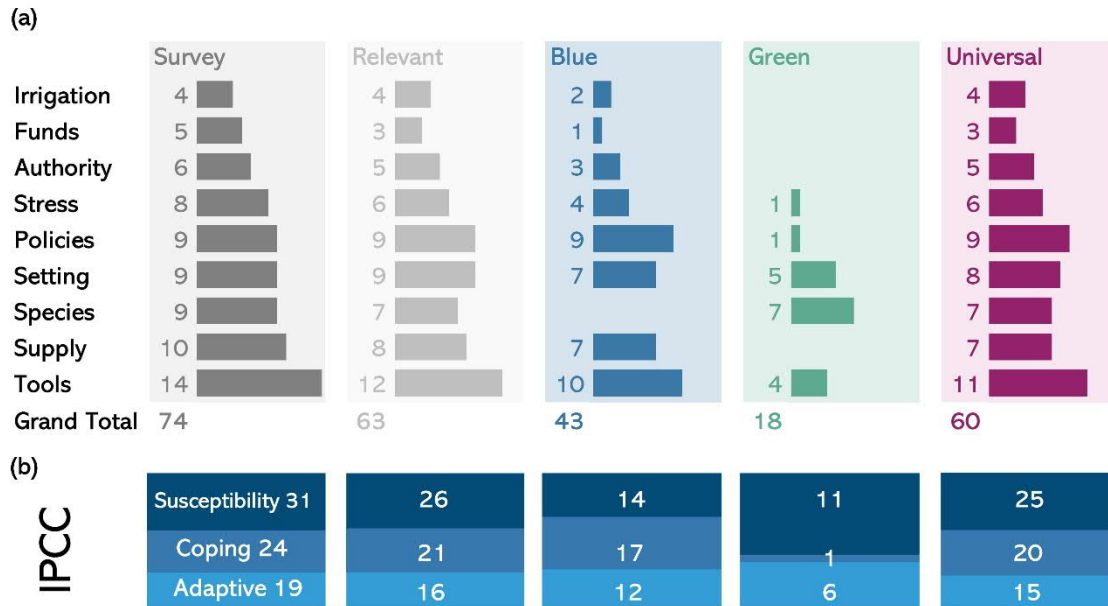



Figure 4. (a) Number of vulnerability factors included in the survey for direct water consumers (Survey), the number of factors relevant by at least one water consumption group (Relevant), as well as the number factors identified as relevant for each water consumptions group. Each factor is categorized as belonging to one out of nine categories. (b) ratio and number of factors belonging to adaptive capacity (dark blue), coping capacity (blue), or susceptibility (light blue), out of the total number of factors relevant for all respondents, as well as for blue, green and universal water consumers respectively.

Universal water consumers found factors related to all three dimensions of vulnerability as relevant (Figure 4b), where the ratio of factors belonging to adaptive capacity, coping capacity or susceptibility was approximately the same as what was included in the survey. Blue water consumers, whilst also finding factors connected to all three dimensions, found a large share of factors relating to coping capacity as relevant for the group. This can be compared to green water consumers, who only found one factor relating to coping capacity as relevant, as most relevant factors for green water consumers related to either susceptibility or adaptive capacity.

3.3 Impact scores for vulnerability factors for blue, green and universal water consumers

The highest impact scores for several factors were given by universal water consumers (Figure 5Figure 4). This group gave high impact scores for factors relating to adaptive capacity, coping capacity and susceptibility, however the highest impact scores were given to factors connected to susceptibility. Blue and green water consumers also gave factors relating to susceptibility the highest impact scores. Green water consumers, primarily finding factors relating to susceptibility and adaptive capacity relevant, seemed to find factors relating to susceptibility slightly more impactful than factors concerning adaptive capacity, especially the ones relating to species characteristics or the conditions of the surrounding settings. Conditions of the surrounding settings, policies and available tools and resources, were the three categories of factors that included factors found relevant for all three water consuming groups. Examples of factors found relevant for all three consumer groups were the soil water holding capacity, presence of wetlands, lakes, and ponds, and the availability of drought risk assessments. In general, blue water consumers gave high impact scores to factors relating to water supply, policies and plans, or conditions of the surrounding settings. Similarly, universal water consumers gave many of their high impact scores to factors relating to water supply and the conditions of the surrounding settings, followed by anthropogenic stress. Whilst also giving high impact scores to factors concerning the conditions of the surrounding

245   settings, green water consumers also gave factors relating to species characteristics and available tools and

246   resources some of their highest impact scores. Relevant vulnerability factors and their corresponding impact

247   scores for the three consumers groups are available in the supplementary materials (S3).

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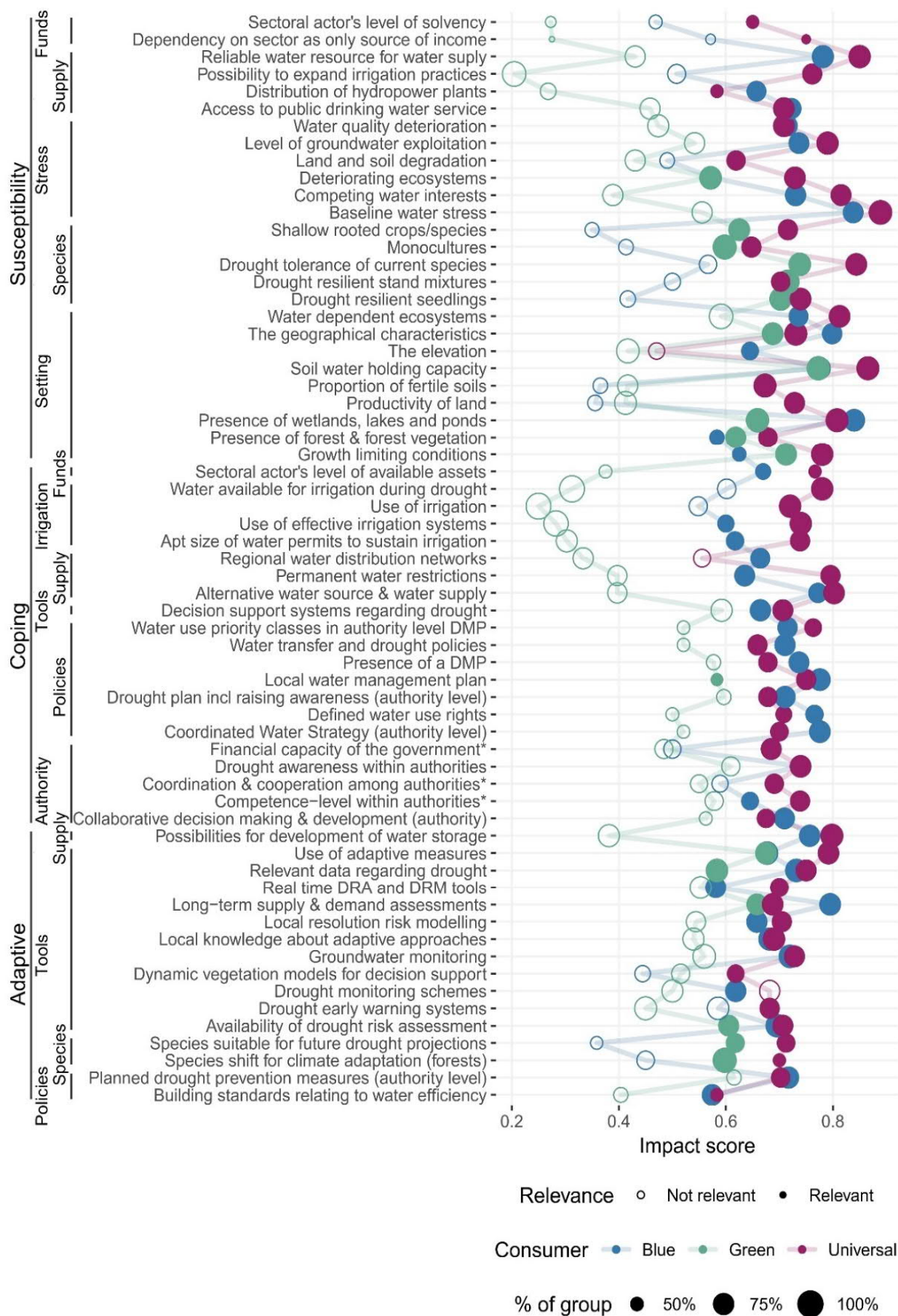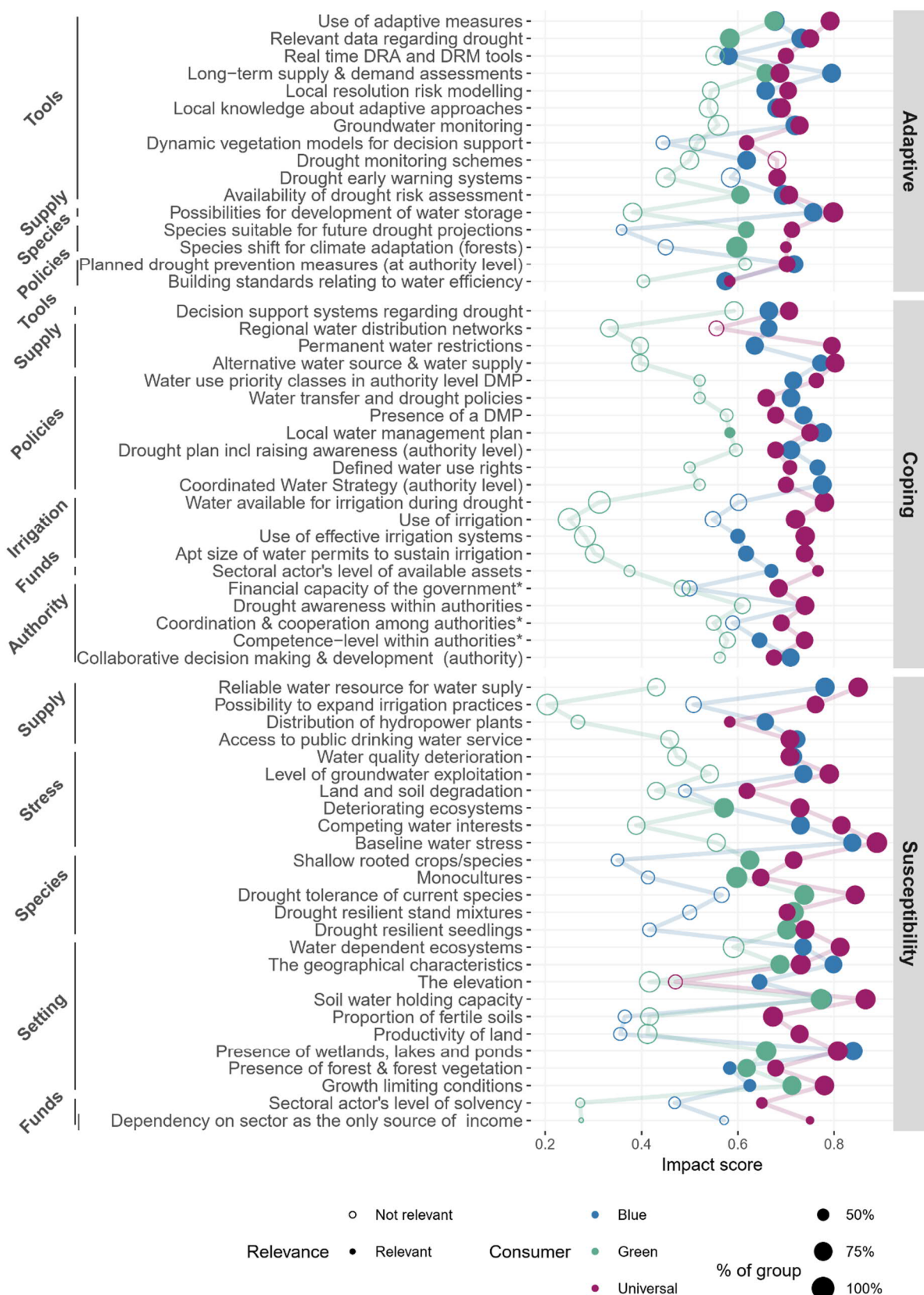
251 **Figure 5. Impact scores for vulnerability factors concerning adaptive capacity (adaptive), coping capacity (coping), and**
252 **susceptibility, rated regarding their impact on drought risk in blue, green and universal water-dependent sectors. Filled**
253 **dots indicate that the factor is considered relevant for the consumers (i.e., with a median score of 3 or higher), whereas**
254 **open circles indicate that the factor is not considered relevant. The point size signifies the percentage of respondents**
255 **within a consumer group that provided an impact rating for the factor.**

3.4   **Highest rated vulnerability factors for blue, green and universal water consumers**

The top highest rated vulnerability factors for green water consumers, related to species characteristics or the conditions of the surrounding settings (Figure 6). Their highest rated factors were soil water holding capacity, followed by the drought tolerance of current species. For blue water consumers, two of the three highest rated factors related to conditions of the surrounding settings, such as the presence of wetlands, lakes and ponds and the geographical characteristics of the area. The second highest rated factor for blue water consumers was baseline water stress. When comparing the highest rated vulnerability factors for universal water consumers with the other two groups, it can be seen that universal water consumers shared several factors with either ~~green or~~ blue or green water consumers. For example, their top-rated factor, baseline water stress, was the second highest rated factor for blue water consumers. The second highest vulnerability factor for universal consumers, the soil water holding capacity, was the highest rated factor among green water consumers.

Green

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Soil water holding capacity	0,77
Drought tolerance of current species	0,74
Drought resilient stand mixtures	0,72
Growth limiting conditions	0,71
Drought resilient seedlings	0,70

Blue

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Presence of wetlands, lakes and ponds	0,84
Baseline water stress	0,84
The geographical characteristics	0,80
Long-term supply & demand assessments	0,79
Reliable water resource for water supply	0,78

Universal

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Baseline water stress	0,89
Soil water holding capacity	0,87
Reliable water resource for water supply	0,85
Drought tolerance of current species	0,84
Competing water interests	0,82

267

Blue

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Presence of wetlands, lakes and ponds	0,84
Baseline water stress	0,84
The geographical characteristics	0,80
Long-term supply & demand assessments	0,79
Reliable water resource for water supply	0,78

Green

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Soil water holding capacity	0,77
Drought tolerance of current species	0,74
Drought resilient stand mixtures	0,72
Growth limiting conditions	0,71
Drought resilient seedlings	0,70

Universal

Drought vulnerability factor	Impact score
Baseline water stress	0,89
Soil water holding capacity	0,87
Reliable water resource for water supply	0,85
Drought tolerance of current species	0,84
Competing water interests	0,82

268
269 **Figure 6. The highest rated factors divided per water consumer group.**

3.5   Differences in impact scores depending on blue, green and universal water dependency

The three groups of water consumers showed different patterns in their ratings of the nine categories of factors (Figure 7). For example, blue water consumers, showed a relatively large spread in their ratings for factors concerning, for example, conditions of the surrounding settings and anthropogenic stress. On the other hand, blue water consumers consistently rated factors concerning species characteristics low, and policies and plans high. Contrarily, universal consumers tended to rate most factors highly, where the largest spread in ratings was seen for factors relating to water supply and anthropogenic stress. The universal water consuming group included agriculture, which was reflected in the results, as factors relating to irrigation received higher impact scores by the group compared to blue and green water consumers. Green water consumers generally rated most categories of factors lower than the other consumer groups, where the largest spread in impact scores was for factors concerning conditions of the surrounding settings. The group consistently gave low impact scores for factors concerning water supply, irrigation and available funds and financial capacity.
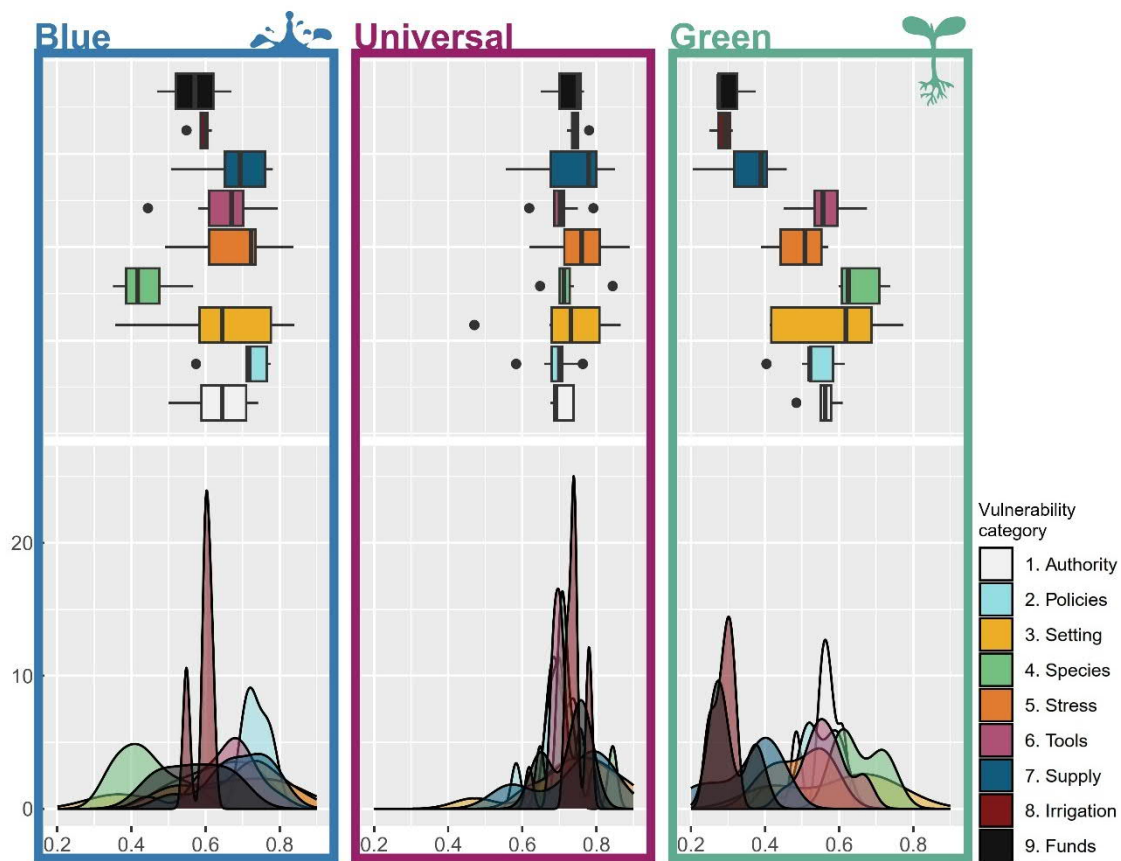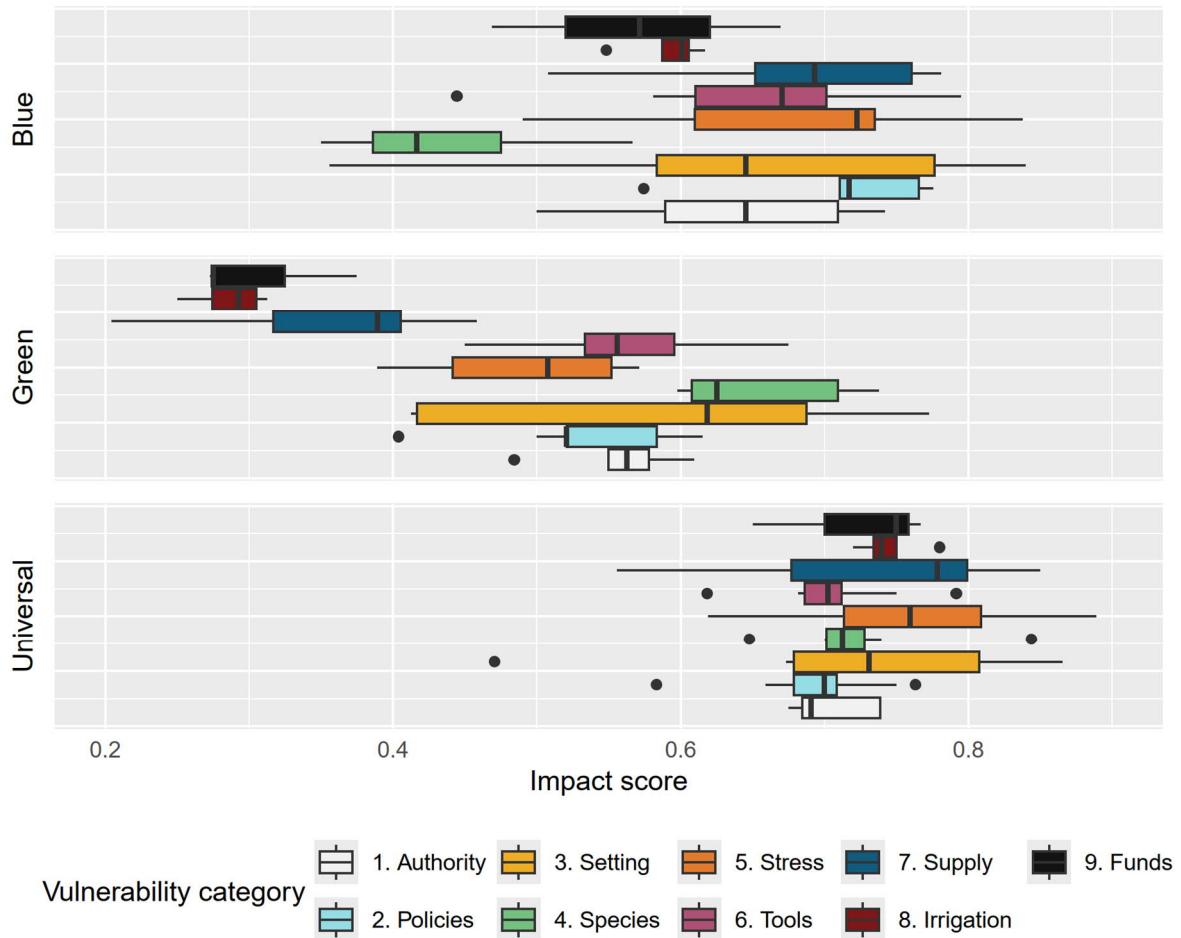
Figure 7. Distributions of impact scores for the nine categories of vulnerability factors for blue water consumers (~~left~~top), green water consumers (~~right~~middle) and universal water consumers (~~bottom~~middle).

Universal water consumers shared several factors with high impacts scores with both blue and green water consumers respectively (Figure 8). Both ~~universal and~~ blue and universal water consumers, highly rated several factors connected to water supply, policies and plans, anthropogenic stress, available tools and resources, and characteristics of authorities. In comparison, ~~universal and~~ green and universal water consumers, shared fewer highly rated factors. ~~Universal and g~~Green and universal water consumers mainly shared high impact scores for factors relating to species characteristics, conditions of the surrounding settings, and available tools and resources. Furthermore, the two groups rated a few factors relating to the characteristics of authority, and policies and plans highly.
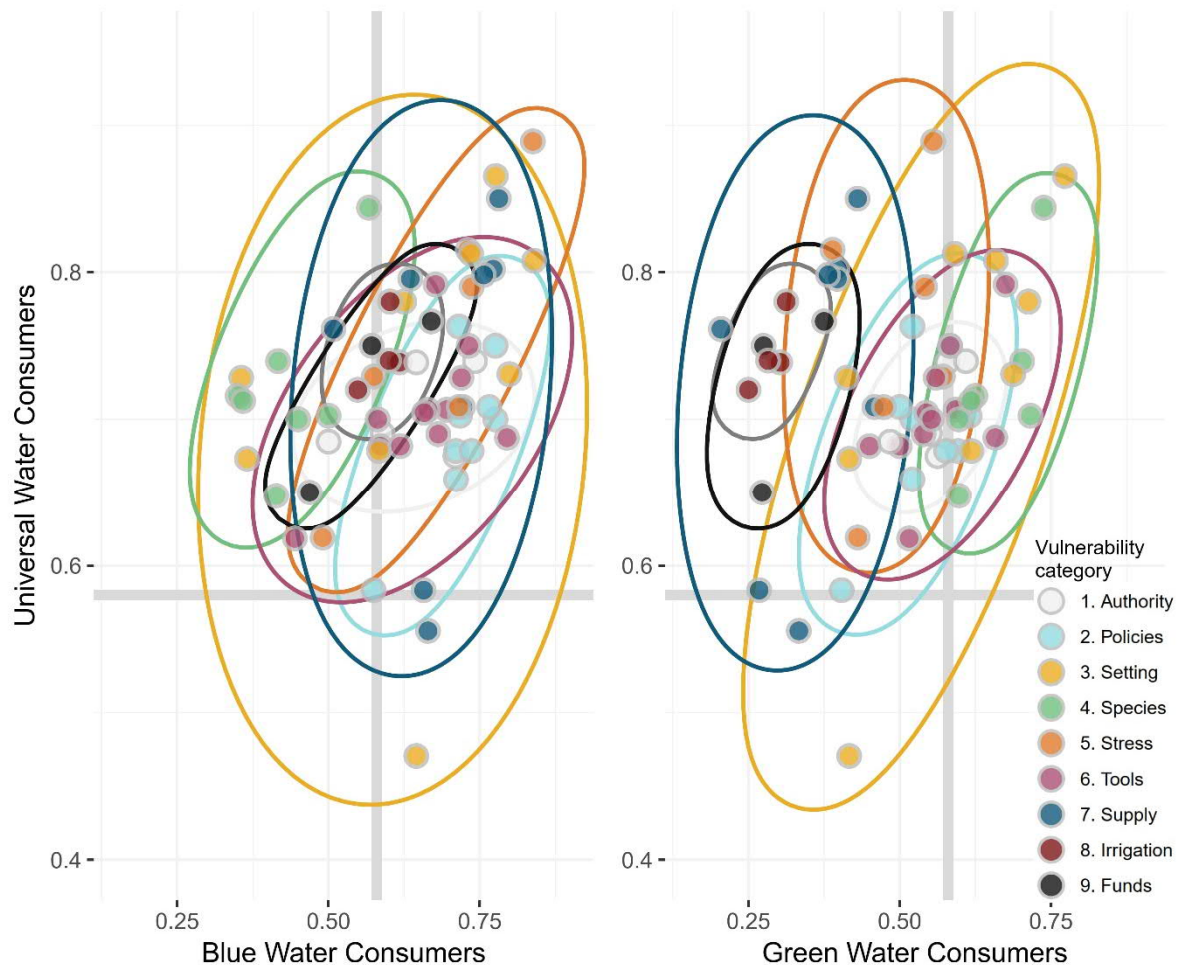
Figure 8. Impact scores for 63 drought vulnerability factors rated by universal water consumers (y-axis), blue water consumers (x-axis, left) and green water consumers (x-axis, right). Colors indicate that the factors belong to one out of the nine factor categories. Observe that the x- and y-axis has been adjusted for better data visualization, and does not start at zero. The thicker grey lines, mark the threshold above which vulnerability factors have a medium high to high impact score. This plot, with accompanying text labels for the individual factors, can be found in supplementary materials (S4 section S4.1 and S4.2).

In general, blue water consumers rated a majority of factors slightly higher than green water consumers (Figure 9). However, green water consumers rated factors concerning species characteristics highly, as well as most ~~a majority of~~ factors relating to the conditions of surrounding settings. In contrast, all factors concerning water supply received low impact ratings by the group, as well as factors relating to irrigation and available funds. Conversely, blue water consumers rated factors relating to water supply and policies highly, whilst all factors relating to species characteristics received low impact scores. Several factors relating to available tools and the conditions of the surrounding settings received high impact scores from both blue and green water dependent sectors. Looking at the highest rated factors, common for the two groups, factors were mainly related to available tools, the conditions of the surrounding settings and policies and plans.

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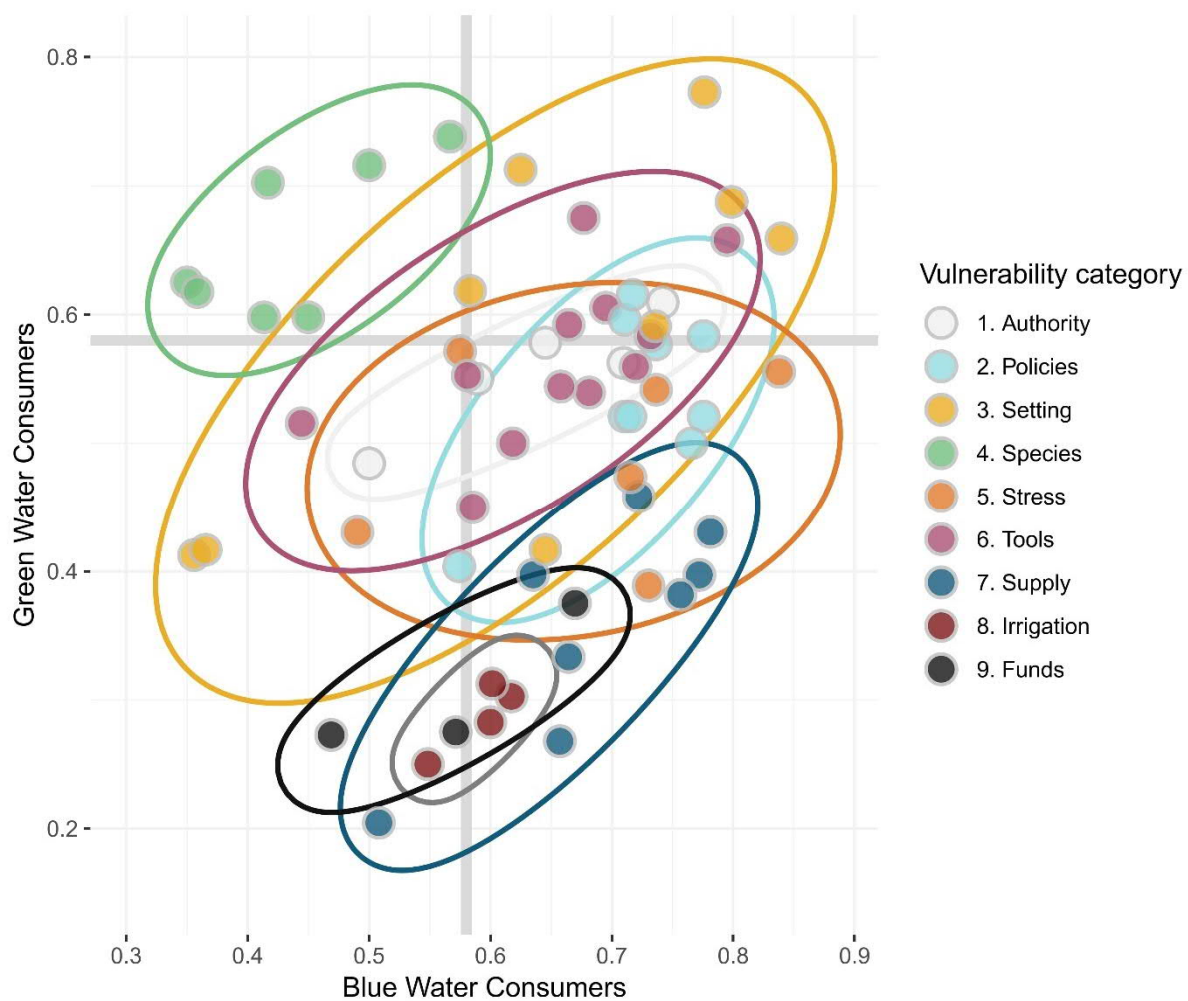
Figure 9. Impact scores for 63 drought vulnerability factors rated by blue water consumers (x-axis) and green water consumers (y-axis). Colors indicate that the factors belong to one out of the nine factor categories. Observe that the x- and y-axis has been adjusted for better data visualization, and does not start at zero. The thicker grey lines, mark the threshold above which vulnerability factors have a medium high to high impact score. This plot, with accompanying text labels for the individual factors, can be found in supplementary materials (S4, section S4.3).

When comparing ratings between ~~green and~~ blue and green water consumers, significant differences were seen for factor ratings for one or more factors in seven out of nine factor categories (Table 2). No significant differences between ratings made by blue and green water consumers were seen for factors relating to authority and tools. However, significant differences were seen for nine out of ten factors relating to water supply. When comparing factor ratings for ~~universal and~~ blue and universal water consumer groups, significant differences were seen for several factors relating to species characteristics, whereas no significant differences were seen for factor ratings relating to authorities, policies and plans, anthropogenic stress, and available tools and resources. Three factor categories stood out as having significant differences when comparing factor ratings made by green ~~universal~~ water consumers and ~~green~~ universal consumers, namely funds, irrigation and water supply. For example, significant differences were seen for factor ratings for all four factors relating to irrigation, and seven out of ten factors relating to water supply, for these two groups. All factors exhibiting significant differences in rating between the consumers groups and their corresponding p-values are presented in the supplementary materials (S5).

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Table 2. Number of factors per factor category with significant differences in ratings between respondents from the three water consumption groups, together with the number of factors included in each of the nine categories. Significant differences identified using pair-wise Wilcoxon rank sum tests are shown for the water consumption pairs; green and blue water consumers (Green-Blue), blue and universal water consumers (Universal-Blue), and green and universal water consumers (Universal-Green).

	Survey	*Green-Blue*	*Universal-Blue*	*Universal-Green*
Authority	6	0	0	0
Funds	5	2	1	3
Irrigation	4	4	1	4
Policies	9	2	0	0
Setting	9	1	2	2
Species	9	4	5	0
Stress	8	3	0	3
Supply	10	9	1	7
Tools	14	0	0	0
Grand Total	**74**	**25**	**10**	**19**

341

4   Discussion

Our study explored the role of water dependency for drought vulnerability within a socio-hydrological system. Proactive drought risk management requires an integrated analysis of drought hazard, exposure and vulnerability. Using ~~user validation~~ stakeholder perceptions to analyse drought vulnerability across sectors categorized by their dependency on blue and/or green water sources provided a unique opportunity to deepen our understanding of drought vulnerability with respect to drought type and water dependency. This approach also enhances the quality of future drought risk assessments. We found notable differences in the perceived relevance, impact scores and overall ratings of various drought vulnerability factors among blue, green and universal water consumers.

Universal water consumers found the largest number of relevant factors. This outcome aligns with the distinction between blue and green water dependency, as universal consumers are likely to consider factors related to both types of water sources as relevant. In fact, all factors that were found relevant by either blue or green water consumers, were also relevant for universal consumers, with the exception of ~~for~~ three vulnerability factors that were only considered relevant by blue water consumers. Notably, blue water consumers identified more than twice as many relevant factors as green water consumers, many of which concerning water supply or the availability of tools and resources for managing drought and water availability. This could potentially be due to many factors found in the literature review being more geared towards vulnerability of blue water consumers. In fact~~,~~ in the survey, 17 factors were directly related to blue water, its governance, related policies, or monitoring tools, while only 12 factors were related to species characteristics, forest management practices or vegetation modelling. Although this unequal focus in the survey might partially contribute to the difference in the total number of relevant factors between the two groups, it cannot fully explain the wide gap and indicates that there are indeed underlying differences in how drought vulnerability is perceived between blue and green water consumers.

Our results highlight that blue and universal water consumers found several factors related to policies and plans, such as having authority level drought management plans, local water management plans and planned drought prevention measures as relevant for drought risk. Furthermore, the two groups found the existence of water use priority classes and defined water use rights as relevant. This ~~validates~~ indicates the importance of incorporating

367 drought and water management plans as tools for increasing adaptive and coping capacity for blue water
368 consumers in socio-hydrological systems, as has been described and promoted in literature and international
369 declarations (Sivakumar et al., 2014; UNDRR, 2021; Wilhite et al., 2014). However, further research is needed
370 to better understand the role of drought management plans for green water consumers, as only one vulnerability
371 factor connected to policies and plans was deemed relevant for the group, namely the presence of a local water
372 management plan. Notably, less than half of the respondents in this group provided a rating for this factor. Other
373 policy-related factors, such as the existence of an authority-level drought management plan or planned drought
374 prevention measures at the authority level, were not considered relevant by green water consumers. The reasons
375 for this lack of relevance are unclear and warrant further investigation to better understand how drought-related
376 policies can be adapted to be more applicable to green water consumers. Nevertheless, this may imply that there
377 is a gap between policy tools and this consumer group, that need to be better analyzed for improved policy support
378 for green water consumers.

379

380 Instead, green water consumers found seven out of nine factors relating to species characteristics to be relevant.
381 This category included factors such as drought tolerance of species and root depths, which considerably influence
382 the effects of green water deficits. Only green and universal water consumers considered this category relevant,
383 likely due to the minimal impact these factors have on blue water consumers such as energy production and water
384 supply during a hydrological drought, apart from the competing water needs arising from potentially irrigating
385 the species. Factors such as competing water needs, and other factors concerning anthropogenic stress on water
386 resources were instead considered relevant for blue and universal water consumers.

387

388 Both species characteristics and anthropogenic stress are categories of factors relating to susceptibility. Whilst the
389 three water consumer groups considered different factors concerning susceptibility relevant, this dimension of
390 vulnerability was generally relevant for all three groups. The same can be said for adaptive capacity, where all
391 three consumer groups found several relevant factors. Factors relating to coping capacity saw varying relevance
392 among the consumer groups, where the largest number of relevant factors for blue water consumers belong to this
393 dimension. In contrast, green water consumers found only one factor relating to coping capacity to be relevant,
394 which might indicate that this group has limited tools for coping with drought events. As a result, they may place
395 greater emphasis on anticipatory approaches that focus on increasing adaptive capacity and decreasing
396 susceptibility. However, this could also be a result of the specific vulnerability factors that were categorized as
397 coping capacity in the survey, as many focused on financial capacity, policies and characteristics of governance,
398 rather the reactionary management measures that can be employed in the case of droughts. For example, measures
399 for mitigating drought effects on forests, such as thinning, can be both anticipatory and reactionary. In the survey,
400 such factors were not included as standalone factors, but were incorporated in the factor "Use of adaptive
401 measures". Similarly, specific management measures for forestry and agriculture were subject to the same
402 aggregation.

403

404 In total, ten vulnerability factors were considered relevant for all three water consumer groups. The factors
405 primarily related to two categories of vulnerability, i.e., the conditions of the surrounding settings and the available
406 tools and resources. The list includes factors such as the availability of a drought risk assessment and having

access to relevant data regarding drought, as well as aspects such as the soil water holding capacity and the presence of wetlands, lakes, and ponds. Hence, these factors could potentially be viewed as universal vulnerability factors, relevant regardless of water type dependency or drought type exposure, suggesting that certain baseline conditions and resources are critical for managing drought risks, irrespective of the specific type of water dependency or drought exposure. This universality implies that these factors are foundational to overall resilience against drought, serving as key elements that all sectors should~~must~~ address to reduce vulnerability. This further supports the argument for cross-sectoral collaboration in drought preparedness and response strategies (e.g., Bretan and Engle, 2017; Medel et al., 2020), ensuring that all sectors can benefit from shared tools and data.

~~Both similarities and differences were found when studying the distribution of impact scores.~~ Across all three water consumer groups, the factors with the highest impact scores primarily concerned susceptibility, suggesting that minimizing susceptibility is a main priority for all water consumer groups. For example, the high impact scores for soil water holding capacity from all consumer groups, indicates the importance of this factor for assessing drought vulnerability. This supports recent drought vulnerability studies, where the factor has been used in connection to drought vulnerability in sectors such as agriculture (Stephan et al., 2023), or vulnerability assessments at basin (Thomas et al., 2022) or national scale (Beyene et al., 2025). The factor is also incorporated in the Drought Vulnerability Index (DVI) used by Pandey et al. (2010), together with factors relating to baseline water stress, such as groundwater and surface water availability, and water demand. In our study, baseline water stress received some of the highest impact scores from blue and universal consumers.

~~All three consumers groups generally gave factors relating to the conditions of the surrounding settings high impact scores. Furthermore, each water consumer group had at least one factor concerning the conditions of the surrounding setting among its five factors with highest impacts scores. The attributed impacts scores for this factor category, however, varied greatly among the respondents for several factors. Whilst blue and universal consumers both gave high scores to several factors related to water supply, blue water consumers put greater emphasis on policies and plans compared to universal consumers.~~

~~Universal water consumers gave some of the highest impacts scores among the three consumers groups. Baseline water stress, the soil water holding capacity and having a reliable water resource for water supply received the highest impacts scores from universal water consumers. Interestingly, these factors also received high impact scores from blue water consumers, with water stress and reliable water resources ranking among the highest for them as well. Soil water holding capacity received high impact scores from all three consumers groups, but it stood out as one of the top factors for both universal and green water consumers. Across all three water consumer groups, the factors with the highest impact scores primarily concerned susceptibility, suggesting that minimizing susceptibility is a main priority for all water consumer groups.~~

It is worth noting that some factors connected to irrigation, such as the amount of water available for irrigation and the use of effective irrigation systems, received higher impact scores from blue water consumers compared to green water consumers. While the exact reason for this is unknown, we can speculate that irrigation can put additional pressure on water resources, leading to competing water interests among blue water consumers. Such competition can exacerbate water stress during drought events in areas were total consumption needs exceed water

447 supply (Famiglietti, 2014; Rossi, L., et al., 2023). For example, in their drought vulnerability analysis for Finland,

448 Ahopelto et al (2019) found that some areas in southern Finland would have difficulties in supplying water for

449 the calculated consumptive water needs during a simulated severe drought. Universal water consumers also found

450 factors concerning irrigation as impactful. This may partly result from the inclusion of respondents from the

451 agricultural sector, as Stenfors et al (2025) noted that this sector rated such factors particularly highly.

452 Significant differences in the ratings of vulnerability factors based on water dependency were apparent for factors

453 relating to species characteristics, irrigation and water availability and supply. This implies that different water-

454 consuming sectors exhibit different vulnerabilities. Green water consumers tend to focus primarily on

455 vulnerability factors that affect or are affected by soil moisture deficits, such as drought-tolerant species and the

456 soil water holding capacity. Meanwhile, blue water consumers are more concerned with aspects related to the

457 availability, regulation and use of blue water resources, including the reliability of water resources for water

458 supply, authority level water strategies, and the presence of water stress. Consequently, as anticipated, blue water

459 consumers mainly focus on vulnerability to blue water deficits and green water consumers on vulnerability to

460 green water deficits. These distinctions have implications for drought risk assessments, underscoring the need to

461 consider the specific type of drought hazard when designing drought vulnerability and risk assessments. Notably,

462 Hagenlocher et al. (2019) found that 60% of the risk assessments included in their literature review did not specify

463 the drought hazard type used in the assessment. Based on our findings, failing to define the drought hazard type

464 could compromise the quality of the risk assessment, as the use of unsuited vulnerability factors may cause an

465 under- or overestimation of drought risk, depending on the exposed entities involved. Building on the results

466 found by Stenfors et al (2025), future vulnerability and risk assessments should be designed with caution to ensure

467 that the selected vulnerability factors accurately reflect both the sectors included in the analysis and their specific

468 water dependencies. This consideration will be particularly crucial for holistic approaches that incorporate

469 multiple socio-hydrological sectors in their analysis, each of which may be vulnerable to different drought types,

470 as well as anthropogenic pressures.

471

472 However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations in our study. For instance, respondents for the

473 agricultural sector could not be distinguished between those engaged in rainfed versus irrigated agriculture, which

474 limits insight into potential differences in agricultural drought vulnerability based on water dependency.

475 Furthermore, with only one response from water-intensive industries, their input on drought vulnerability among

476 blue water consumers was minimal. Despite this, the blue-water-consuming group included respondents from

477 various sectors - working with energy, water resources management, aquatic ecosystems and drinking water

478 supply – providing a broad perspective on drought vulnerability. Finally, our analysis was based on the perceived

479 impact of vulnerability factors on drought risk within respondent's individual sectors. The survey did not collect

480 data on whether impacts are perceived as positive or negative, a gap that future research should address ~~to validate~~

481 ~~and refine~~to further investigate the factors for future vulnerability assessments.

5   Conclusion

483 Using survey data regarding drought vulnerability in seven water dependent sectors, differences in drought

484 vulnerability in relation to water dependency could be explored. The results showed that drought vulnerability

485 differs depending on water type dependency, especially for vulnerability relating to water supply and species

486 characteristics. Differences in the perception of vulnerability factors between the groups were seen both regarding

the number of relevant vulnerability factors, as well as the category of factors found relevant. Furthermore, differences in the impact scores given to vulnerability factors depending on water type dependency were seen. The results reaffirms the division suggested by Stenfors et al. (2024), where drought vulnerability of direct water consumers depends on the water type dependency of the exposed consumer. The results also highlighted factors that seem to be generally impactful for all consumer groups, offering insights into potential universal vulnerability factors, relevant for all water type dependency. The impact of policies and plans on drought vulnerability of blue and universal water consumers, confirms their importance for tackling drought risk in socio-hydrological systems. However, further research is needed to better understand their impact on green water consumers.

Drought risk is expected to increase in many areas, and drought risk assessments are important tools for producing effective drought risk management strategies to minimize their impacts. Consequently, future drought vulnerability and risk assessments should put emphasis on clearly establishing the frame for the analysis, focusing on careful selection and consideration of vulnerability factors based on the studied drought type, the exposed entities and their specific drought vulnerabilities to that drought type.

6 Data availability

The data used in this study was collected from respondents under a confidentiality agreement. The confidentially agreement assured respondents that data would be anonymized and only be used within the frame of the PhD project conducted by the corresponding author. Hence, with respect to the confidentiality agreement, data cannot be publicly shared. However, an overview of the survey design and recipient selection procedures are available as supplementary materials. Please contact the corresponding author, for any questions regarding the data.

7 Author Contribution

Elin Stenfors was the lead in conceptualization, data collection and curation, formal analysis, validation, visualization, and writing. She was supported by Malgorzata Blicharska and Thomas Grabs in visualization, methodology development and writing. Claudia Teutschbein was the lead in funding acquisition, and supervision, and supported the corresponding author in all project parts, from conceptualization to writing.

8 Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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