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2011



United Nations General Assembly: Water Resource Management

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Saturday, March 26th, 2011

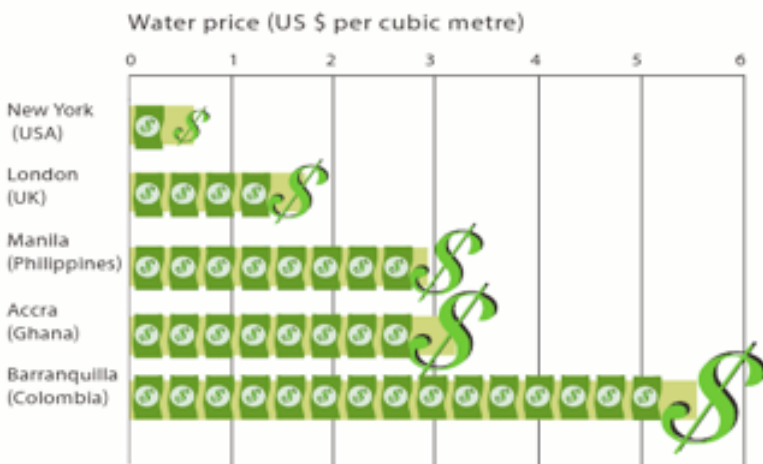
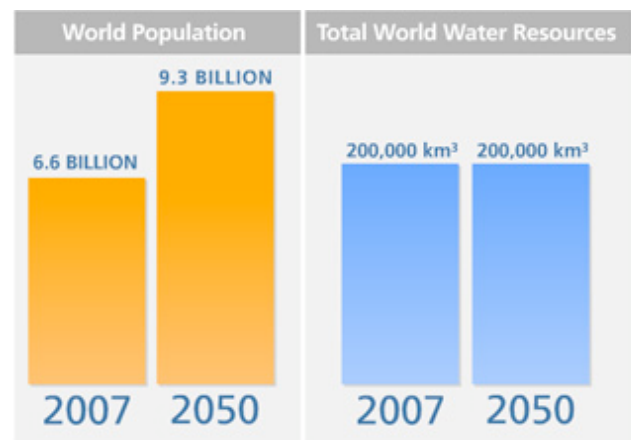
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Introduction

Water is an essential element to life. Humans not only drink it, but use the majority of it for irrigation, sanitation and industry. Because of that, there are a variety of problems related to the acquisition and use of this precious resource, from gender equality in local procurement of water, to ecological damage, to the price of desalination in different areas. To that effect, we will be limiting the discussion of this issue in a similar way to what the UN might do, carrying on with regards to Millennium Development Goal number 8: *Develop a global partnership for development*.¹ Our discussion will focus less on the specific technologies and their sometimes staggeringly complex advantages and disadvantages, and more on how governments should work to cooperate in the future. In general, the objective of this committee will be to produce a document along the lines of the World Water Forum's "Declaration of Heads of State," but with more specifics about the allocation and general shape of aid given or steps taken, which will put us closer to the objectives set out in the final pages of the UNDP's introduction to their 2006 document, "Beyond Scarcity." Links to these documents can be found in the Further Resources section at the end of this booklet.

Background

Over-withdrawal of usable water is a worldwide problem. While it is widely recognized that developing countries like India have major problems with the availability of water and proper distribution thereof, fewer people are aware that in 60 percent of European cities with more than 100,000 people, groundwater is being used at a faster rate than it can be replenished.² Today, some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation, and this problem is beginning to come to a head, with increasing population putting more demand on agriculture, the world's primary user of water. As the adjoining chart shows, world population levels are expected to increase as water levels remain static. Sadly, this is not a burden shouldered equally by all members of society. A 2006 UNDP report summarizes the issue succinctly:



*"There is more than enough water in the world for domestic purposes, for agriculture and for industry. The problem is that some people - notably the poor - are systematically excluded from access by their poverty, by their limited legal rights, or by public policies that limit access to the infrastructures that provide water for life and for livelihoods. In short, scarcity is manufactured through political processes and institutions that disadvantage the poor. When it comes to clean water, the pattern in many countries is that the poor get less, pay more and bear the brunt of the human development costs associated with scarcity."*³

¹ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml>

² http://www.unwater.org/statistics_sec.html

³ http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2006_Overview.pdf

Some basic facts about water use:

- About 77% of water is used for irrigation, 22% for industry, and 8% for other uses.
- It takes 1,000 to 3,000 liters of water to produce one kilo of rice.
- It takes 13,000 to 15,000 liters of water to produce one kilo of grain fed beef.
- In developing countries, 70% of industrial wastes are dumped untreated into waters where they pollute the usable water supply.

The last major discussion of the global water issue was in 2009, at the World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey. Over 182 countries were represented at those discussions, with many Heads of State, Environment Ministers and over 250 parliamentarians present.⁴ There, the assembled Heads of State produced a document calling for progress on the water issue, which stated:

“We affirm our political will to take rapid action bearing in mind the key elements of success: Solidarity, security, adaptability and useful dialogue and cooperation on transboundary waters between neighbors. Working together with a participatory, inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to manage water resources, the world can and will attain greater prosperity and increased stability through the sharing of the many benefits of water.”⁵

The reason this is so pressing is that sharing water resources is a reality in almost every part of the world, as shown in this data pulled from the 2006 UNDP report:⁶

Region	Countries receiving between 50% and 75% of their water from external sources	Countries receiving 75% of their water from external sources
Arab States	Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic	Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait
East Asia and the Pacific	Cambodia, Viet Nam	
Latin America and the Caribbean	Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay	
South Asia		Bangladesh, Pakistan
Sub-Saharan Africa	Benin, Chad, Congo, Eritrea, Gambia, Mozambique, Namibia	Botswana, Mauritania, Niger
Central and Eastern Europe and CIS	Azerbaijan, Croatia, Latvia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan	Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkmenistan
High-Income OECD	Luxembourg	Netherlands
Others	Israel	

Clearly, every region of the world needs a political infrastructure to manage water sharing and resource management. Well-designed systems, such as those currently employed in places such as the European Union and South Africa, can generate revenue, cleaner water, and overall increased quality of life for all parties to the agreement.

However, not all regions can necessarily be grouped as having similar problems or situations, as the figure at right shows. Africa’s diverse climate, from the humid central region to the arid north, makes each country’s situation different and prevents the international community addressing the problem here as if the entire region suffers the same plight.

⁴ http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/fileadmin/wwc/World_Water_Forum/WWF5/5th_Forum_Highlights.pdf

⁵ http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/fileadmin/wwc/World_Water_Forum/WWF5/Istanbul_Declaration_Heads_of_State_on_Water.pdf

⁶ http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2006_English_Summary.pdf

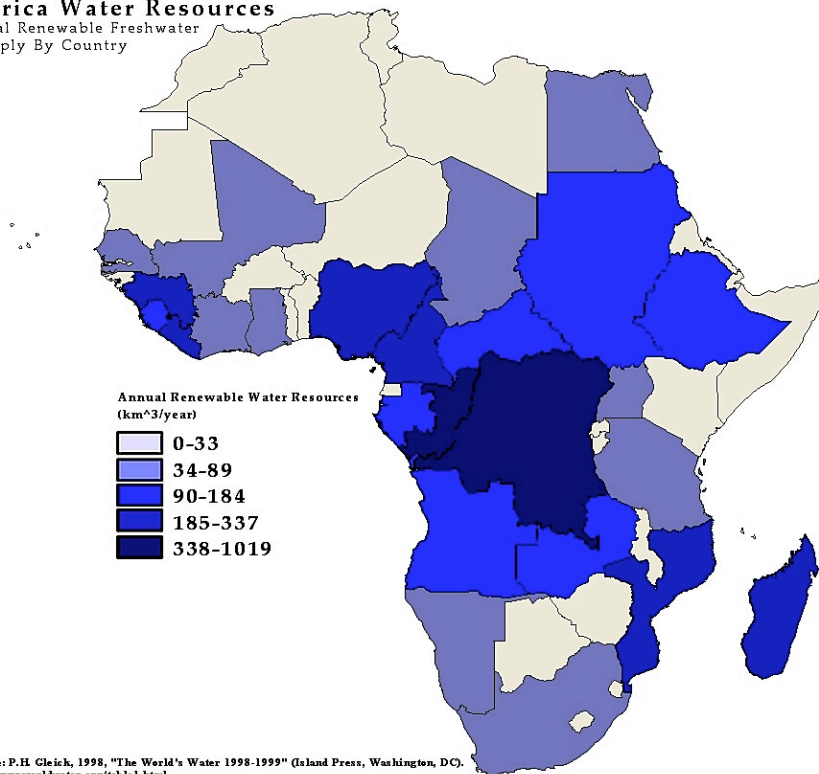
There can also be real risks associated when increased strain on natural resources from population growth is paired with weak international systems.

According to the UNDP, “while most countries have institutional mechanisms for allocating water and resolving conflict within countries, cross-border institutional mechanisms are far weaker. The interaction of water stress and weak institutions carries with it real risks of conflict.”⁷

Therefore, any solution that aims to comprehensively address the political issue at hand must include an outline of what sort of management or dispute resolution board might be employed in these sorts of situations, with multiple populations dependent upon the same, dwindling, resource.

Africa Water Resources

Total Renewable Freshwater Supply By Country



It is important to note that there is an existing UN organization, UN Water, which is already focused on many of these goals. However, it is not exclusively focused on trans-boundary and political issues, and is more of a facilitator than arbitrator. Additionally, the organization is highly focused on Africa, but as the above table clearly shows, water resource management is a worldwide problem. Revamping UN Water is an option delegates should consider while debating possible solutions to this problem.

Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent does a given country have the right to manage its own water (and other) resources, particularly when other countries are dependent on those resources as well?
2. How can we deal with inequitably priced water, when the poor are charged more for a resource they already cannot afford?
3. To what extent should the problem be handled regionally versus globally, in terms of funds and plans of action?
4. What sort of management agency should be set up to handle cross border disputes, if any? UN Water does this in some respects, but not nearly on the scale or with the efficiency or focus needed.

Further Resources:

- Executive Summary of the 2006 UNDP Report: http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2006_English_Summary.pdf (especially pages 32-34)
- World Water Forum Heads of State document: http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/fileadmin/wwc/World_Water_Forum/WWF5/Istanbul_Declaration_Heads_of_State_on_Water.pdf
- UN Water Brochure: http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_brochure_EN_webversion.pdf

⁷ http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2006_English_Summary.pdf