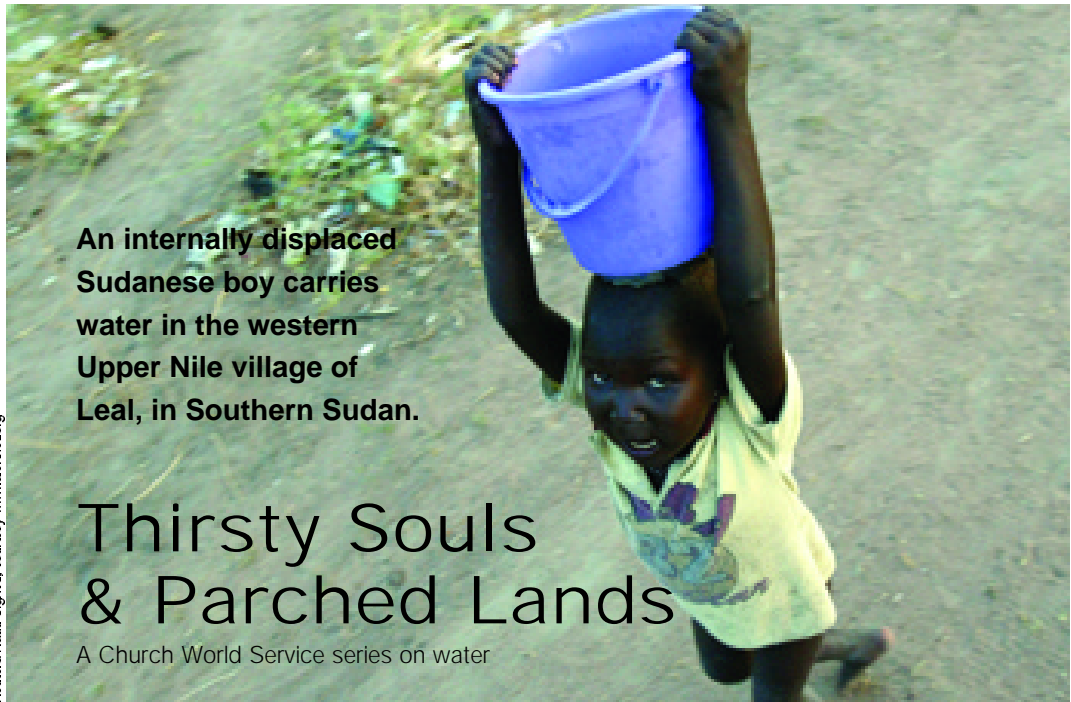


WATER



Let Justice Flow Like Water

Few things are as basic as water. In Christian theological reflection, creation began when the spirit of God “swept over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:2)

Later, drought becomes a symbol and image of divine judgment (Isaiah 33:9). Yet the prophets express their hope in a coming redemption and restoration through the promise that rivers will spring up in the desert (Isaiah 43:19).

This resource paper affirms that access to water by communities and individuals is a human right. Water is essential to all life on the planet. Therefore, it is not a commodity to be privatized. Its supply and use must be managed through structures representing all sectors of the population, with emphasis on local communities.

WATER IS LIFE

Acquiring water remains a grueling chore for those in the developing world — primarily women and children whose powerlessness gives them little say over water’s management, but who are forced to spend as much as four hours daily hauling water from distant sources.¹ No water, no life, and no way around it. It’s that basic.

In fact, the human body itself is mostly water — adult bodyweight is typically two-thirds water. We can go weeks without food, but no more than a few days without water before the kidneys cease functioning and death occurs. Again — no water, no life.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Clean, fresh water is a scarce commodity for millions around the world. Despite the image from space of Earth as a watery blue orb, only about one percent of the world's total water supply is available fresh water; the rest is salty, frozen in ice caps, lost as run off, or inaccessible. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one out of every six people lacks access to a reliable source of clean water.² In 20 years, water shortages may plague two-thirds of the world's population.³

Control over water sources has fueled human conflict since the dawn of history. Today, declining water supplies are a major factor in conflicts around the world, particularly in the volatile, and parched, Middle East region.⁴ Given the growing global water shortage, we can expect increased conflict over rivers, lakes, aquifers, and even rain clouds that cross national boundaries in mockery of humanity's proclamations of ownership.

The world's religions acknowledge the essential role of water in our lives by incorporating water in rituals that connect us to the realm of the sacred. Christians are baptized into the faith with water, and the image of bountiful, flowing water is evoked in God's call to work for justice (Amos 5:24). In John 4:10-15, Jesus describes the very spirit of God as "living waters." Ablutions, or ritual washing, are enjoined on Jews and Muslims before they pray, and Hindus and Buddhists use water as a symbol of spiritual purification.

A GIFT AND A RIGHT

The centrality of water to life — and the experience of water as gift — affirm the belief that water is a basic human right. Just as the biblical Jubilee declared that land belonged to no one but God, so does Church World Service affirm that water should be part of the global commons. To treat water as a gift of God and as a human right suggests that clean water should be available to meet the basic needs of all, rather than be a private commodity to be sold for profit.



Paul Jeffrey/ACT-OWS



Reuters/Sherwin Casab, courtesy www.alternet.org

Left: Carrying water across the dry bed of the Usmansagar Lake, in Hyderabad, India.

Right: Bath time in Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, after the tsunami.

Far right: Jules and Victor Salgado peddle water to neighbors in Hualmay Town, some 75 miles north of Lima, Peru. Church World Service partner Instituto Tierra y Mar advocates for water services for a fishing community there.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has affirmed this position:

Water is a limited natural source and a public good fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights.⁵ (See box, next page.)

Let everyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The UN also explicitly acknowledges water as a human right in its Convention on the Rights of the Child, in its Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and at its groundbreaking 1997 Water Conference. The UN General Assembly's 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development labels water a basic resource and calls its denial a "mass violation of human rights."⁶ In 2000, the WHO declared that "access to safe water and to sanitary means of excreta disposal are universal needs and, indeed, basic human rights."⁷

Several other international agreements and national constitutions also affirm access to water as a basic right. These include Geneva Convention statements on the protection of civilian populations during international and internal armed conflicts,⁸ the Organization of African Unity's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,⁹ and the national constitutions of Ethiopia, Guatemala, Gambia, Panama, South Africa, and Uganda.¹⁰

Universal access to water is rooted in the biblical quest for justice. A rights-based approach to development — which puts local communities at the center of sustainable development and obliges governments to recognize its citizens' economic, social, and cultural rights — is the cornerstone of an international community that seeks the well-being of all.

The urgent challenge, both in the developing and developed nations, is to create community-based models that are responsive and effective in meeting water needs. Space is needed for local communities to develop their own solutions and maintain their traditional rights and approaches to water use.

SCARCITY: RISING DEMANDS, DWINDLING SUPPLY

Rapid population growth, increased human-generated pollution, and environmental changes on a global scale are prime causes of the growing water scarcity. In the 1990s alone, global population increased an estimated 15 percent, from 5.27 billion to 6.06 billion. Significantly, one-quarter of that increase came in urban areas where population density and industrial concentration compound demands on supply and speed pollution. A further complication is that the bulk of the population increases are occurring in regions that already suffer the worst water problems — Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.¹¹

Population growth places greater demands on dwindling, finite supplies. Rivers are dammed, diverted, and drained. Aquifers that required tens of thousands of years to fill are emptied at rates that rainfall, the only renewable water source, cannot possibly match.¹²

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS THAT "NEED WATER TO GROW"

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1 — Between 1990 and 2015, halve the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2 — Between 1990 and 2015, halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5 — Between 1990 and 2015, reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6 — Between 1990 and 2015, reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Target 7 — By 2015, have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 8 — By 2015, have halted and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9 — Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10 — By 2015, halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Target 11 — By 2020, achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

From UN Millennium Project © 2005

In the last half-century, global water use has tripled,¹³ with people in the U.S. the greatest consumers — using, for example, roughly 25 times as much water per capita as do the Senegalese.¹⁴

Further, "more than half the world's major rivers are either polluted or going dry, or both. Half the planet's wetlands were lost in the 20th century, and freshwater systems around the world are losing their ability to support human, animal, and plant life."¹⁵ Africa, where the population increased 27.5 percent and economic resources are often most strained, is particularly at risk. "The combination of fast population growth with accelerated urbanization, and low levels of water supply and sanitation coverage make Africa especially vulnerable to the risk of water-related disease," the WHO warns.¹⁶

Water-related illnesses constitute 80 percent of all sickness and disease worldwide, and 19 percent of all deaths from infectious diseases are water-related, including the deaths of some 4 million children annually.¹⁷

PRIVATIZATION, THE INADEQUATE SOLUTION

It's not surprising that water's increasing scarcity — and hence its growing market value — has drawn the attention of profit-motivated multinational corporations.¹⁸ Nor is it surprising that governments desperate for quick fixes to water woes are increasingly turning to such companies for meeting immediate water needs.

These companies treat water not as a human right, but as a commodity to be bought and sold for profits. Their ethic is that “free global markets” — or globalization — serve human progress by encouraging business decisions that ensure efficient use of resources.

Churches and other critics of the negative impacts of globalization challenge that fundamental assumption. We believe that human beings come first, and that while efficient business decisions may increase profits for shareholders, they do not address the poor and the vulnerable who cannot always pay to access a resource such as water.¹⁹

Governments are attracted to privatization because of the enormous costs involved in operating large-scale clean water delivery and wastewater removal systems. Globally, an estimated \$14-\$30 billion in additional annual investment is needed to keep up with growing demands — and that's on top of the \$30 billion spent on maintenance.²⁰

The financial costs are staggering, not only for governments in developing nations, but increasingly for regional water districts in the United States, where some 15 percent of the water systems, covering more than 40 million people in 1,000 communities, have been taken over by private companies.²¹



Pablo Flores/Instituto Tierra y Mar

Globally, private companies currently operate water systems — either through outright ownership, lease, or contracts to manage — for about seven percent of the population.²² By 2020, the prediction is private firms will control as much as 75 percent of the water systems in Europe and North America alone.²³

In the developing world, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are the prime movers of privatization of previously public-owned sources and systems. The IMF and the World Bank contend that profit-oriented private companies are better able to manage water delivery and wastewater removal systems than public entities. Public entities, they say, are more likely to be inefficient, inadequately funded, and subject to political whims.²⁴

We have observed that the reality of water privatization proves otherwise — and that the private sector is least likely to deliver adequate service for poor people:

The fact of the matter is that private sector companies are organized to make profit, not to fulfill socially responsible objectives such as universal access to water and sanitation services. In many developing countries where most of the population earns less than \$2 a day, private companies cannot meet shareholder obligations to provide a market rate of return and also implement universal coverage with acceptable quality and at affordable prices. Private sector companies have little incentive to address the fundamental need to expand access to potable water when large sections of the population are poor.²⁵

Designed properly, with the full involvement of stakeholders, private management of water supplies may improve efficiency and minimize wastage. However, the experience of several countries shows high tariffs and rising costs of providing water hit hardest those who are most desperate for development — the poor and the marginalized.

When decisions on water are left to corporate elites, rate increases almost invariably result, water quality declines, management accountability and citizen control are lost, jobs are eliminated, and financing costs and the possibility for corruption grow. Multinational trade agreements that open the door to bulk water export send this precious natural resource to distant consumers — for profit. This “free market solution” can severely affect the environment and water supply of those whose water is siphoned off to foreign

markets. They can no longer afford to pay for a “product” they once considered gifted to them for the common good.

COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES

Expanding support to community-based initiatives goes a long way toward internationally agreed objectives related to water and sanitation. Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals — signed by 189 heads of state and governments in September 2000 — is to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015.

There are encouraging examples of community-based alternatives to privatization in various regions of the world.

ASA, a forum of non-governmental organizations, is promoting coexistence and environmental development in the semi-arid regions of Brazil. The forum is coordinating the building of one million cisterns funded by the Brazilian

government and several private banks.

In Kenya, the Kola people of Machakos have created 120 sand dams to harvest floodwaters from the long rains. Mountain catchments recharge ground water and reduce soil erosion, improving the livelihoods of 10,000 pastoralists between 2002 and 2004. In Bangladesh, partnerships between government, civil society, and multilateral institutions are promoting sustainable financing of household sanitation.

These and other successful community-based initiatives show there are alternatives to privatization — alternatives that respect local traditions, satisfy local needs for development, and preserve water’s legacy as a common good.

Church World Service advocates that communities should play a central role in finding solutions to their need for water. Responsibility for the management and distribution of water should be placed in the hands of the communities that depend on it.

Church World Service and Farming Systems Kenya team up on community water project

Hanna, a villager from Njokerio, Kenya, has been going down to fetch water from the Ndarugu River for four decades. Before, she went with her children. Now she meets her grandchildren at the river, also fetching water. It’s 8 AM — prime water-fetching time. Gone are the days when Hanna was strong and could fight her way to the riverfront. Now she watches from afar. Many times she has forgone the water, or spent her meager earnings buying from private suppliers, or come back late in the afternoon to collect the muddy remains of the morning’s stampede.

Chronic water shortage has sent Kenya sliding into an abyss of poverty and underdevelopment, according to Paul Maina, senior advisor at Farming Systems Kenya (FSK).

“Water resources are linked to forest coverage, for which the international standard is 10 percent,” says Maina. “In Kenya, deforestation was encouraged over the last two decades, reducing forest coverage to 1.7 percent.” The net impact, according to Maina, is that water tables are dropping, boreholes are drying up, and rivers are becoming seasonal. Almost two out of three Kenyans can’t access clean, safe water. For a largely agrarian people, the result is devastating: 56 percent of Kenyans live below the poverty level.

Recognizing that water is crucial to the revitalization of the agricultural sector, the Kenyan government has come up with a master plan for water management. The Economic Recovery Strategy for 2003-2007 and the Water Act of 2002 promote an approach that welcomes all stakeholders: self-help groups,

organized communities, non-governmental organizations — and particularly in urban areas — private companies. The government recognizes that it cannot manage water on its own.

In Hanna’s village, and in others in Lare and Njoro divisions, Church World Service and FSK are partnering to provide clean water for 21,167 people, about 10 percent of the population. The projects are community-based alternatives to privatization of water resources in Kenya.

Villagers identified an abandoned borehole, owned by white farmers in the 1960s, and worked with government and non-governmental bodies to revive it. The well was cleaned up. Two water tanks were built. The community provided materials, unskilled labor, and housing for skilled masons. Over 200 residents were assigned major tasks. “If the community doesn’t have ownership,” says Maina, “the project is doomed to fail.”

The time that Hanna and other Njokerio women spend fetching water — estimated at one-third of their lifetimes in some communities — can now be used on economic activities like poultry farming and kitchen gardens. Her grandchildren can focus on their schooling, instead of expending time and energy fetching water, or falling victim to waterborne diseases like typhoid or cholera. With water in their troughs, even the dairy cows can produce more milk.

Photo: Community leaders filling jerry cans at Njoro borehole. After the main water tank is cleaned, water will be pumped there for distribution to several outlets across the community.

Ryan Pepperni/PCUSA/CWS East Africa

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Protect everyone's access to safe, affordable water:

- **LEARN MORE** at the Church World Service website: www.churchworldservice.org
- **CONTACT** your elected officials and join the CWS Speak Out network to receive legislative alerts: www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/index.html
- **CONSIDER** and **CELEBRATE** the importance of water using CWS educational and worship resources on water: www.churchworldservice.org/resources.html
- **GET INVOLVED** in the work of Church World Service by calling your CWS Regional Office toll-free at 1-888-297-2767. CWS is helping local communities meet their water and sanitation needs in self-reliant and sustainable ways that represent positive alternatives to water privatization: www.churchworldservice.org/Development/water.html
- **CONSERVE** water by repairing all leaky fixtures, paying attention to your water usage, and turning off the water in sinks, baths, and showers when you are not using them.
- **CAMPAIGN** with others to advocate for the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals that include reducing by half the number of people without clean water and adequate sanitation by the year 2015: www.millenniumcampaign.org



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Church World Service is a cooperative ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations, providing sustainable self-help development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in more than 80 countries.

RESOURCES

"Reclaiming Water" video co-funded by United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries Women's Division. www.sparklehouse.com/angela/WaterEverywhere.html

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Agricultural Missions: www.agriculturalmissions.org/index.html. This international non-governmental organization facilitates sustainable models of development by working with grassroots groups, non-governmental organizations, and churches. Water-related activities include a Study Session, "Water for All," March 11-13, 2004, and an article in the August 2004 Netline newsletter, "Privatization and Pollution: Threats to Water Justice in Latin America."

Global Water Partnership: www.gwpforum.org/servlet/PSP. "Working partnership" of public and private water "professionals" dedicated to the "sustainable management of their water resources."

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility: www.iccr.org/issues/waterfood/resources.php. This international coalition of faith-based institutional investors is engaging in dialogue with corporations on issues pertaining to water misuse, including issues of control, privatization, overuse, and pollution.

National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Programs: www.ncccojustice.org/. Provides ecumenical information on events, worship, advocacy, and resources related to water and other environmental issues.

Public Citizen: www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/. Consumer advocacy group concentrating on environmental, health care, and "economic justice" issues.

The Center for Public Integrity: www.publicintegrity.org/water/default.aspx. Conducts research and reports on U.S. and international public policy issues.

The World's Water: www.worldwater.org/. Provides up-to-date information and Web connections to institutions and individuals working on global freshwater problems and solutions.

Women's Environment & Development Organization: www.wedo.org. WEDO's publication, *Untapped Connections: Gender, Water, and Poverty*, www.wedo.org/sus_dev/untapped.pdf, provides a comprehensive overview of the importance of potable water and sanitation facilities and its impact on global poverty and women.

World Council of Churches Ecumenical Team: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/csd12.html. The Ecumenical Team's statement, "Water as Gift and Right," is on this website.

World Water Council: www.worldwatercouncil.org/. Think tank dedicated to strengthening management of the world's water resources and water services on an "environmentally sustainable basis for the benefit of all life on earth."

ENDNOTES

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March 22, 2005, marks the start of a new United Nations International Decade for Action on Water. Find out more on www.worldwaterday.org.

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