



Water in Africa: Hydro-Pessimism or Hydro-Optimism?

Água em África: Hidro-pessimismo ou Hidro-optimismo

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The Market Economy and the Challenges of guaranteeing the human right to water in Africa

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WATER AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Universal Declaration of Human Rights Artº 3 states the Right to Life

Natural resources that are indispensable to life should then be considered as some sort of common capital for existence (see Petrella 2004)

Raul Alfonsin and Mário Soares in 1998 declared in a Manifesto that water is a common good belonging to all inhabitants on earth and therefore an unalienable individual and collective right

Water is a limited natural resource and a public good fundamental for life and health. This human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity and it is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights (UN 2002: 1)

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use

The minimum quantity should be 20 litres per day and there should no discrimination based on gender, religion or social condition

■ WATER RESOURCES AND PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO WATER IN AFRICA

Africa's share of global freshwater resources is about 9%

The water resources are distributed unevenly across Africa. The DRC has 25% of African resources and Mauritania has only 0.001%

Because of lack of rainfall in some countries ground water is the main water source, 60% in Algeria and 95% in Libya (2003IYFW 2008)

In Africa, of the estimated 800 million people who live in the continent, 300 million live in a water scarce environment. About two thirds of African population, 530 million, live in rural areas

On average, 64% of the African population has access to improved water supply, 86% in urban areas and 50% in rural areas. About 300 million of the African population are deprived of improved water supply

The urban areas have two problems: 1) many urban centres have declining water distribution systems due to inadequate, aging and overloaded networks; 2) the peri-urban dwellers live in slums and are poor and a large proportion lack a reasonable access to safe water (2003IYFW 2008)

■ CONSEQUENCES OF INSUFFICIENT ACCESS TO WATER IN AFRICA

On average, women and children travel 10 to 15 Km, spending eight or more hours per day collecting water and carrying up to 15 litres per trip (Conteb 2006)

Households living in African slums pay five to ten times more for water than wealthier households in developing world cities (UNDP 2006:10)

Water is prerequisite for the realization of the human right to health - about 3 million people die annually in Africa as result of water related diseases (UNEP 2002); Malaria, per se, slows economic growth of African countries by 1.3% a year (2003IYFW 2008; WWF 2002)

Water is prerequisite for the realization of the human right to education – the opportunities lost by women and the days of school lost by children with the time spent in water collection contribute to poverty in adult age

The overall loss due to lack of water and sanitation is about 5% of GDP

■ WATER POTENTIAL AND MILLENIUM GOALS IN AFRICA

The actual withdrawals in all but the northern region, are low as proportions of available water

In overall terms less than of 4% of Africa's renewable water resources are withdrawn for agriculture, domestic supply and sanitation and industry

There are ample resources available, which if developed and managed sustainably will enable Africa to reach the goals set within the framework of MDGs and the Africa Water Vision 2025

This calls for an increase in the water resources potential by 10% in 2015 and by 25% in 2025 and reduce to half the percentage of population without access to water (UNDP 2006)

Each monetary unit spent produces 8 units in savings and productivity

■ PRIVATIZATION AS THE PANACEA FOR WATER SUPPLY IN AFRICA

In many African countries users did not pay the true costs of supplying water and its use is heavily subsidized

Is water Privatization the solution for the dramatic problem of access to water in Africa?

The World Bank says that everything that can be privatized should be privatized

Since 1980 privatization has been the panacea for all that was wrong with economics of African countries. Privatization has been a central component of IMF and World Bank loans and debt relief programs as much as of donor-funded aid programs

Arguments in favour of water privatization in Africa are based on alleged operational efficiency, economic growth and the inability of public utilities to raise capital investment; and to provide fiscal benefits

Our purpose here, is to show why the market is not qualified to guarantee the human right to water in Africa

■ MARKET HEGEMONY AND THE RIGHT TO WATER

□ The Market does not utter social preferences

The promotion of human rights leads to the assertion of social preferences

Any situation other than universal water coverage constitutes a violation of a human right

The market does not utter social or structure preferences

Public Supply: Public incapacity to reach universal coverage and Water expensive for poor households – Ouagadougou, Dar-es-Salam

Water supply by the market has proven to be a poor alternative to public distribution - Many black townships in South Africa, Soweto, Mlungusi

■ MARKET HEGEMONY AND THE RIGHT TO WATER

□ The Market is not accountable

In human rights rhetoric water deprivation is a human right violation and should be considered illegal

If the state fails to ensure a human right, the state is accountable either legally or electorally

If the market fails to ensure a human right how can one prosecute or blame the market?

The market is anonymous and unaccountable and therefore not equipped to allocate human rights and the right to water in particular

In Porto Alegre Brasil – responsibility and democratic control of water supply have been key elements for reaching a universal coverage of water supply

■ MARKET HEGEMONY AND THE RIGHT TO WATER

□ The market is inefficient

Water Uses – human consumption, agriculture, industry, transportation, fishing, recreational, leisure, cultural, conservation and environmental activities

Competitive market can produce inefficient social water allocations and if inefficient for human consumption there is a violation of the right to water

Water is an exhaustible resource, extraction rate must be lower than recharge rate and no market mechanism satisfies this condition

In its essence water is a common pool good and by the prisoner's dilemma the best outcome for society and resource conservation is cooperation between resource users which the market cannot promote implying therefore public or communitarian engagement

User participation and resource valuation - group valuation - principles of deliberative democracy

■ MARKET HEGEMONY AND THE RIGHT TO WATER

□ The water market is not competitive

Physical characteristics

Irreplaceable and indispensable good

Nature is the exclusive producer

Free gift of nature

Non-consumptive market uses are a social want

The majority of consumptive uses has side effects

Water distribution is a natural monopoly

■ CONCLUSION

The impression one gets at the moment is that in Africa, as much as in other parts of the developing world as a matter of fact, privatization of water does not seem to be living up the expectations (Conteh, 2006)

Beyond the arguments seen here privatization is not a solution because there is, indeed, little practical evidence that privatization does in fact result in increased efficiency, economic growth and development; private firms are interested in profit not in social objectives; and the end users are unable to pay the tariffs required by privatized companies (Conteh, 2006)

Human rights are not optional but binding obligations to be met by governments of different countries and be universally enjoyed by all individuals

The non-compliance of the market economy with human rights is not the result of doing wrongly the right economics, but of rightly doing the wrong economics. Thus the market is inappropriate to meet the needs and rights of individuals and the planet

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