

Forum: Youth Assembly

Issue: The question of exploring methods to ensure clean and perpetuating access to water globally

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Introduction

As the Slovakian proverb goes, ‘Pure water is the world’s first and foremost medicine’. Yet, the medicine that can be used to maintain life, and without which, the majority of species, or life at all, would not exist, is something that we now have to worry about the supply of.

It is a well-known fact that there are three things that are impossible for us, as humans, to live without, and these are air, food, and clean water. However, the latter has recently come under short supply, as the limited clean water supplies available on earth are unable to keep up with rapid rising demand, due to the earth’s population increases at high rates. This shortage leads to people not being able to have enough water to drink, let alone the fact that the water they might have to drink is highly disease prone and can often lead to spreading of diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, and more, and also cannot practice proper hygiene, further spreading diseases through their communities. According to the WHO, [one in three people do not have access to safe drinking water](#), and according to UN Water, [two out of five people do not have a basic hand-washing facility](#) with soap and water.

It is obvious that the UN has taken this into consideration, with ‘Clean Water and [Sanitation](#)’ being one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda that the UN launched in 2016. Furthermore, UN Water was founded in 2003, in order to create an organization that was able to direct the majority of its resources to solve this

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large and prominent issue. Partners and members of UN Water have done large amounts to help solve the crisis, by forming agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, and the 2015 Paris Agreement within the UN Convention Framework on Climate Change.

While water pollution and lack of water is an issue in most UN member states, there are some who are more hurt than others. Countries such as the United Kingdom, and Australia, have generally sufficient amounts of clean water and are easily able to support their people. However, many countries in the African Union, [with 9 out of the top 10 countries with least access to clean water being part of the African Union](#). Countries, such as Chad, Uganda, and Eritrea, with less than 50% of the population having access to clean water.

Lack of access to water is generally caused by many factors. One of the main reasons is lack of funds. This can be caused by a government having limited GDP, and poverty being common in the countries. This is worsened by corruption, as some governments might misuse allocated funds due to incompetence or for their own motives. Africa is generally largely plagued by corruption, with Sub-Saharan Africa, in which water security is a large issue, [was rated the lowest on the Corruption Perception Index](#) by transparency.org, over the year of 2020. Furthermore, another cause for poor water security is primitive systems. Many countries may lack basic facilities, such as proper functioning piping, which quite often causes families to have to travel long distances to get water, and the poor filtering systems cause the water to be extremely dangerous

One more reason for this is climate change. Increases in temperatures cause many droughts. This evaporates the limited water supplies present in many countries, and only more rapidly depleted the low amounts of fresh water that are assumed to run out eventually. While rising temperatures do cause more rain, this rain is generally in places

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where the rain isn't necessary for cultivation. In addition, these droughts can also hurt harvests, causing many families to not be able to sell crops, causing them to dissolve into poverty. They could also quite often starve in situations where they are self dependent.

There are a multitude of issues caused by lack of access to water globally. The first of these is [water scarcity](#). As mentioned, water is a necessity to live, and the lack of water access causes many people to die. According to water.org, [1 million people die each year due to lack of clean water](#). Another issue is the spreading of diseases. Many diseases can be spread through poor water quality, such as diarrhea and typhoid. According to the WHO, [829,000 people are estimated to die due to poor water quality](#). This is not helped by most countries suffering from lack of water having ineffective and insufficient medical systems, that prevent diseases from being cured, if they are contracted in the first place.

Definition of Key Terms

Economic water scarcity:

Economic water scarcity is where there is the necessary amount of water required, however governments and people are unable to afford it

Human rights:

Rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status

Physical water scarcity:

Physical water scarcity is where there is not enough water to meet all demands, including that needed for ecosystems to function effectively

Right to Water:

The right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses

Sanitation:

The provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces. It also includes necessary practices to keep humans clean, such as bathing. Inadequate sanitation is a major cause of disease worldwide and improving sanitation is known to have a significant beneficial impact on health both in households and across communities. The word 'sanitation' also refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal

Sewage:

Sewage is waste material produced by humans, consisting of faeces, and urine, that is carried through a sewer system from a residence or an industrial workplace to be dumped or converted to a non-toxic form

Water conservation:

Water conservation refers to the preservation, control and development of water resources, both surface and groundwater, and prevention of pollution

Water Purification:

The removal of contaminants from raw water to produce drinking water that is pure enough for human consumption or for industrial use

Water scarcity:

Water scarcity is the lack of fresh water resources to meet the standard water demand. Two types of water scarcity have been defined: physical or economic water scarcity.

Key Issues

Corruption:

In multiple developing countries, countries' GDPs are low and so are their Human Development Indexes, therefore meaning that they are unable to purchase water to provide to their citizens, and the citizens are unable to pay the high prices that water costs, which are caused by limited supply and high demand, creating [economic water scarcity](#). One of the main reasons that these countries may dissolve into a state in which they are unable to buy their citizens is corruption. Many African government officials

quite often participate in corrupt activities, such as bribery, or money laundering. This causes funds to be evaporated quickly, meaning these countries are unable to purchase water, facilities, to ensure clean water, and other necessities as well. Sub-Saharan Africa received the lowest score in the CPI conducted by transparency.org, with possibly the most concerning fact being that their score was a minor improvement since the previous year. Corruption has been a problem that has plagued many regions in Africa for a long time. This can be attributed to governments arising after colonialism. The leaving of colonialists left a huge void of leadership, that certain dictatorial leaders vowed to fill, by massively improving conditions, and making many false promises. However, these leaders often developed totalitarian and theocratic governments, which created mass amounts of corruption, which continues this day, with little to no improvement. This has been a huge disadvantage to African citizens especially, as selfish politicians cause them to be unable to care of themselves, due to extreme poverty.

Climate Change:

It is of no doubt that climate change and global warming is a prominent issue, and possibly one of the most important and urgent issues for humanity to deal with. The UN predicts that by 2030, [climate change will be irreversible](#). At that point, prevention will be impossible, and it will be extremely important to find a cure. Another situation that has been worsened by climate change is water availability. Climate change disrupts weather patterns, leading to extreme weather events, unpredictable water availability, exacerbating water scarcity and contaminating water supplies. These unpredictable weather events and changes in water cycle patterns hurts the ability to access water consistently.

Climate change also causes natural disasters. Rising sea levels can cause floods and tsunamis, which can be extremely harmful to water systems. When disasters hit, [they can destroy or contaminate entire water supplies](#), increasing the risk of diseases like

cholera and typhoid to which children are particularly vulnerable. Rising temperatures can also lead to contaminated water, as they may form deadly bacteria. [Every day, over 700 children under 5 die from diarrhoea linked to inadequate water.](#)

While 75% of the Earth is covered in water, only 1% of this amount is freshwater. However, rising sea levels, caused by climate change, are causing the limited freshwater supplies to become salty, and undrinkable. This is compromising water supplied for millions of people, causing many people to lose access to clean and safe water.

Primitive Facilities:

As mentioned repeatedly, many countries that suffer from water insecurity have low GDPs. This often causes them to be unable to invest in proper and efficient water systems, leading to their facilities being primitive. Women in Africa have to walk [an average of 6 km](#) in order to get water, with half of that trip being with 20 liters of water being on their heads. This is not helped by the fact that quite often, the temperatures are scorching, due to many African countries' proximity to the Equator. This makes it extremely difficult to get water, and, if someone is injured, the family may not have access to clean water the entire day. This is caused due to a lack of piping in rural areas, which are quite often in Africa. Furthermore, in areas where people are privileged enough to have piping, quite often, the water they receive is poorly filtered, meaning it could carry and cause many diseases such as typhoid. On top of contracting the disease, which is quite common, as it causes [485,000 deaths each year due to diarrhoea](#), poor medical facilities means that it is unlikely the disease will be treated, and vaccinations are rare, meaning that diarrhoea and typhoid are likely to kill children in Africa, and [diarrheal diseases are the third leading cause of disease and death in children younger than 5 years of age in Africa.](#)

Impacts Of Water Scarcity:

Economic:

Water scarcity decreases the harvests of farmer's globally. Due to the large dependency of many countries on farming as its GDP, and around a quarter of the world being farmers, increased water scarcity would cause billions, and possibly trillions of dollars to be lost, and would collapse the economies of many countries, and cause large portions of people to delve into poverty. According to [the World Bank](#), 'Unless action is taken soon, water will become scarce in regions where it is currently abundant - such as Central Africa and East Asia - and scarcity will greatly worsen in regions where water is already in short supply - such as the Middle East and the Sahel in Africa. These regions could see their growth rates decline by as much as 6% of GDP by 2050 due to water-related impacts on agriculture, health, and incomes.'

Environmental:

As climate change causes more droughts, and less water access, countries are turning to creating dams, and using desalination in order to create freshwater, while it is effective, it destroys the habitats of many marine species, and can have detrimental impacts on multiple species. Water scarcity also has many adverse effects on lakes, rivers, ponds, wetlands, and other freshwater resources. The resulting overuse of water associated with water scarcity generally occurs in irrigated agricultural areas and damages the environment in many ways, including increased salinity, nutrient pollution, and loss of floodplains and wetlands. In addition, water scarcity makes managing the flow of urban river restoration a problem. In the last 100 years, due to these effects, water scarcity has caused the destruction and disappearance of more than half of the planet's wetlands.

Social:

Water scarcity is responsible for millions of deaths every year, and kills many children worldwide. As other humans, it is undoubted that everyone has a social responsibility in order to help this prominent issue, and deprive future generations of a safe and secure future

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Water

UN Water is a sub organization of the United Nations. It was formed in 2003, and as the name suggests, it is intended to deal with all issues relating to water that occur globally. Some of these issues are [gender, sanitation, drinking water and health, climate change, transboundary waters, water scarcity and Integrated Water Resources Management \(IWRM\), among others](#). UN Water is quite obviously relevant to this issue as it is the main UN Body when it comes to dealing with the issues the topic discusses, which is global distribution of clean water. According to the [UN Water website](#), they assist policy creations by ‘identifying emerging issues and developing effective, collaborative responses’. It also provides reliable data, and creates initiatives to increase public engagement. UN Water can also be considered the main organization that overlooks the 6th SDG (Sustainable Development Goals). However, it is worth mentioning, that UN Water, is not a committee, such as the General Assembly, or the Security Council, but is rather just an organization, and is therefore not responsible for independently creating policies. UN Water’s main objective is to ensure water security for all countries across the globe, in all areas.

African Union

Africa as a whole, especially eastern parts of Africa, are largely hit by the water crisis. 9 out of the 10 countries in the top 10 worst countries for water access are in

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Africa, being Mozambique, Niger, Chad, Democratic Republic Of The Congo, Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, with Eritrea being the worst hit, with 4 of these countries, including Eritrea, being located in Eastern Africa. According to the [World Resource Institute](#), one in every three people across Africa face water scarcity and nearly 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are denied even a basic drinking water supply. All of this makes it no surprise that the African Union holds this issue in high regard, with the [Africa Water Vision 2025](#) being an official document signed by the African Union, UN Water, and the African Development Bank, which discusses key challenges for Africa to solve the crisis, reasons for this, and the way forward, to get past this issue. Therefore, it is easily determinable that Africa is willing to embrace change to make sure that its people have access to clean and safe water.

Papua New Guinea

Papu New Guinea is the only country not from Africa that is on the top 10 countries with worse water supplies, with the population that has water access being better than only Eritrea. According to the Borgen Project, [60% of the population lacks basic water services, and due to the poor quality of this water, 800 children die every year from diarrheoa](#). This can be also be partly attributed to the high price of water in Papua New Guinea, with a [report by Rakyat Post](#) suggesting that poor families use 54% of their income to buy water, and in some cases are unable to afford it, due to the intense poverty in Papua New Guinea, [as 40% of the population lives under the poverty line](#). It is therefore no question that the government is strongly aligned with quickly figuring solutions to ensure water security for their people.

Charitable Organizations

There are a multitude of non profit organizations that attempt to help the water crisis, especially in African countries. Some of these that are worth mentioning are

[Blood:Water](#), [Splash](#), and [Generosity.org](#), which are all non-profits that are dedicated to ensuring water security to many poor parts of different African countries that are hard hit by the water crisis due to poverty. These charities are often run by donations from civilians, and make valiant and helpful efforts to get water to the people who most need it.

UN Human Rights Council

The UN HRC website states that, ‘The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all [human rights](#) around the globe.’ According to the UN Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, [water is recognized as a human right](#), so it is of no surprise that the HRC has consistently delved into discussions about water security, with resolutions such as the HRC resolution 7/22 on the topic of ‘Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation’, and resolution 18/1 on the topic of ‘The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation’ highlighting the HRC’s willingness to develop solutions to maintain water security.

Farmers:

Water is quite obviously essential to farming crops. However, as droughts caused by climate change reduce most water supplies, farmers are quite often hurt. Approximately [2 billion, or 26.7% of the world’s population derive their income through agriculture](#), with this number being over 50% in many African countries. Agriculture accounts for about 70% of the world’s water use, [according to the FAO](#). This highlights not only how important of an industry farming is, but also how largely it is affected by water scarcity. A huge drop in food production caused by low water supply could be devastating, and could cause major fatigues over the world, meaning that another one of the necessary resources for survival being compromised

The United States of America:

Since 2010, the USA has recognized the human [right to water](#) and sanitation on several occasions. However, it has refused to accept the definition of the content that was set by the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. When the definition was first included in Human Rights Council Resolution 24/18, the USA dissociated itself from agreement by stating that ‘The language used to define the right to water in that paragraph is based on the views of the CESCR, but the Council has never previously adopted it, nor does it appear in an international agreement. The USA does not agree with this definition due to the expansive way this right has been articulated. This language does not represent a consensus position’. While the US does not seem to accept the UN’s definition of water as a human right, it is obvious that the USA is quite concerned with water scarcity levels, and is willing to make efforts to make sure it’s fellow member states do not suffer from the lack of something quite often taken for granted.

India:

Another country who is facing the issue of water scarcity is India. [600 million people in India suffer from extreme water stress](#), which can be attributed due to high poverty levels, and high population density. While India is a country with high GDP of 2.623 Trillion USD, [according to the world bank](#), there is mass wealth inequality in India, with much of the population living in poverty, which highlights the severity of water scarcity in India. Certain cases in India regarding the citizens’ rights to water illustrate that although the right to water is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of India as constitutionally protected right; it has been interpreted by the Courts that the right to life includes the right to safe and sufficient water.

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Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
March 1977	The Action Plan from the UN Water Conference recognised water as a human right for the first time:	This made it obvious that water scarcity would now be a priority of the UN, and an issue it would put efforts into solving
November 1989	The Convention on the Rights of the Child mentioned water, environmental sanitation and hygiene: ‘States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures: ... c) to combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution’	This can be considered of the UN’s first major efforts to ensure water security globally, as it is a clause in a major document that discusses explicitly the right to water
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September 1994	The Programme of Action of the UN International Conference on Population and Development affirmed that all individuals: “Have the right to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation.”	This is another major document that discusses the right to water, affirming the UN’s stance on water being a human right, and not just a luxury
May 2003	UN-Water, a committee focused on ensuring water security in all areas globally, was launched, as a sub organization of the UN	This was possibly the biggest stride to achieving water security, as a single organization would now be able to direct all its resources to getting past this issue

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22 March 2005	'Water For Life', a 10 year period dedicated to forming solutions for water scarcity, is launched by the General Assembly on World Water Day in 2005	This period was dedicated to forming solutions in order to be able to solve water insecurity through a number of means
1 Jan 2016	The UN launched the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, which was a set of goals, and issues the UN aimed to solve by the year 2030. There were 17 of these, and all were major global issues	The 6th SDG was dedicated to Water And Sanitation, which shows that the UN is taking action to get water access, and proper sanitation, to everyone across the globe through sustainable means
22 March 2018	The GA once again launches the 'Water Action Decade' on World Water Day in 2018	This once again mobilizes the UN to create solutions for water insecurity.

Previous Attempts To Solve This Issue

Mar Del Plata Agreement

In 1977, the United Nations Water Resources Conference was held in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Its goals were to assess the state of water resources; ensure that there is an adequate supply of high-quality water to meet the social and economic needs of the planet; improve water efficiency and promote preparations at the national and international levels to avoid occurrences before the end of the 20th century. global water crises. The meeting approved the Mar del Plata Action Plan, which was the UN's first internationally coordinated international water management method. The plan consists of two parts: a set of recommendations covering all the basic components of water resources management, and 12 resolutions on a wide range of specific subject areas. Discussed the evaluation of water use and efficiency; control of natural disasters, environment, health and pollution; policy, planning and management; public information, education, training and research; and regional and international cooperation.

The meeting in Mar del Plata was a success, in part because of the active participation of developing countries and the discussions on various aspects of water resources management, especially the specific analysis of countries and regions. The meeting reviewed water management on a comprehensive and comprehensive basis, as this was recognized as one of the key water management issues in the 1990s. In order to provide clean water and sanitation facilities to all and to accelerate political will and investment in the water sector, the meeting recommended that the period 1980-1990 be considered as the international decade of water supply and sanitation. This period caused 1 billion people to gain access to clean drinking water, proving it to be a viable solution

Desalination

Desalination is the process of removing mineral components from salt water. More generally, desalination refers to the removal of salt and minerals from target substances, such as soil desalination, which is a problem in agriculture. Salt water (especially sea water) is desalinated to produce water suitable for human consumption or irrigation. The by-product of the desalination process is brine. Many sea ships and submarines use seawater desalination. The interest of most modern people in desalination is focused on providing humans with a profitable supply of fresh water. Along with recycling wastewater, it is one of the few water resources that does not depend on rainfall.

Due to its energy consumption, seawater desalination is often more expensive than freshwater from surface or groundwater, water reclamation, and [water conservation](#). However, these alternatives are not always available and the depletion of reserves is a key issue throughout the world. The desalination process is usually driven by heat (in the case of distillation) or mechanical (in the case of reverse osmosis) as the main type of energy.

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Currently, there are approximately 21,000 desalination plants in operation around the world. The largest countries are the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The world's largest desalination plant is located in Saudi Arabia, with a daily processing capacity of 1,401,000 cubic meters. Compared to most alternative water sources, seawater desalination is currently expensive and desalination can only cover a small part of total human water consumption. It is generally economically practical only in high

value applications in arid regions. However, there has been an increase in the desalination of seawater for agriculture and the desalination of seawater in densely populated areas such as Singapore or California. The most widespread use is in the Persian Gulf.

Due to these reasons, it is undeterminable whether this is a viable and sustainable solution, however, the fact remains that it is quite effective when it is implemented.

Water For Life

The main goal of the Water for Life Decade was to promote efforts to achieve international commitments on water and water-related issues by 2015. These commitments include water-related goals in the Millennium Declaration and agreed in Johannesburg, The implementation plan of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as the "Agenda 21". This initiative caused roaring success. The global water community saw the Decade providing the framework for bringing together the many fragmented initiatives both within the UN and by non UN actors. The fact that the Decade was agreed through a Resolution of the General Assembly provided the mandate for the UN agencies to support, and for the member countries to engage in it. This meant that it was able to reach its goal quite efficiently, and it did so well. According to UN-Water, it caused a total of 1.3 billion to gain access to clean water, and proper sanitation. In addition, this initiative was redone in 2018, as the new Water For Life decade was formed, from 2018-2028.

Possible Solutions

Super Sand

Scientists have developed a method to convert ordinary sand, an important filter material used to purify drinking water around the world, into "super sand", which has five times the filtering capacity of ordinary sand. According to a report in the ACS Journal

Applied Materials and Interface, this new material may be a low-cost boon for developing countries, where more than a billion people lack clean water.

Mainak Majumder and his colleagues noted that sand has been used to purify water for more than 6,000 years, and filtration of water with sand or gravel has been recognized by the World Health Organization. They write that their research on a nanomaterial called graphite oxide (GO) shows that it can be used to improve sand filtration in a cost-effective way.

The researchers used a simple method to coat sand particles with graphite oxide to create a super sand that successfully removed mercury and dye molecules in the water. The scientists found that in the mercury test, ordinary sand became saturated within 10 minutes after filtration, while super sand absorbed heavy metals for more than 50 minutes. Scientists say its filtration performance "is comparable to some commercially available activated carbon." "We are currently investigating strategies that will allow us to assemble functionalized particles in sand to further improve the efficiency of contaminant removal," they wrote.

The Oasis Box

Oasis Box is an innovative solar water extraction and filtration system. There are solar pumps elsewhere, but US patent-pending technology is the only solution for integrating pumps, filtration systems, and storage tanks into a modular unit that is easy to install, sustainable, cost-effective, and easy to operate and transport. The solution is very suitable for remote and water-scarce towns.

Each system can produce 10,000 liters per day or serve 5,000 people per day (2 liters / person). Oasis Box was developed as a long-term solution that can be used for more than 25 years with minimal maintenance. The enclosed mechanical design ensures safety and durability in tough conditions. Containerized design, using industrial tires,

suitable for sea and land transport. The "IKEA style" components can complete the system setup in a record time of 7 minutes. Solar panels provide energy for clean water production and are compatible with integrated mobile phone charging stations. 3-layer filtration, minimal maintenance (once every 35 years): micron, carbon and Ionx filters. Filtration can be customized according to the specific needs of the oil wells in the area. Rainwater harvesting helps restore groundwater reserves during the rainy season. Quantity and performance data are shared daily for donor reporting and audit transparency. It can be configured to use extra capacity solar panels to provide off-grid power.

The system has been introduced in some villages in Pakistan and has been very successful because it is easy to use, configure, efficient and can meet the high requirements of the villages implementing the system.

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Awareness

The best way to solve any kind of issue is to get the public involved. Quite often, the public rising up, taking action, and influencing action, has paved the way for many major issues to be solved over the course of history, be it civil rights, refugees, and more. Encouraging the public to take action can have many positive results. In an issue where charities are quite common, involving the public could lead to billions of dollars in donation being gathered, which would be extremely beneficial to the issue, as it would allow more expensive solutions to be implemented easily.

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