

Water, Water, Everywhere, Yet Not a Drop to Drink

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Abstract

On a global level, water has become a commodity that is no longer taken for granted. Whether it is due to determining the rights to water, or determining the channeling of water with dams to create reservoirs for consumption, water violence has become a reality. Significant contention had developed between users of water for agriculture, industry, and households. Such environmental conflict situations tend to be both challenging and convoluted. These situations are affected by the difference in priorities of the stakeholders and resource management decisions (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). As a result, solutions can be quite complicated and difficult to resolve.

Water Wars or Water Woes? Water Management as Conflict Management was the title of a lecture presented by Goeff Dabelko, Director of Environmental Change & Security Manager at the Woodrow Wilson Center (2008). Dabelko explained that 97% of the world's water is either salty or brackish, and of the remaining 3%, only 1% is available for use. Thus, the scarcity of water has been the cause of conflict between many countries. In these interactions between countries, there has been a great deal of highly political verbal hostility. Fortunately, this rarely escalates into physical wars. There is a vital need to effectively communicate the issues to the stakeholders who are affected by these problems and work toward conflict resolution. During the last twenty or thirty years, states Dabelko, there has been increased cooperation between the disagreeing parties. This is a good sign that disputing groups are engaging in advocacy and inquiry, rather than simply advocating for their personal needs.

Egypt is significantly affected by the Nile River and the availability of its water. Other countries affected by the Nile would like to harness the river and develop hydroelectric power, but Egypt refuses to go along with this. However, in order to work in harmony with the other countries, Egypt is involved in the Nile Basin Initiative. This group examines the energy, ecosystem and household needs for water from the Nile River. Rights to the water and needs for the water require sharing. This group is still working in the developmental context.

Water violence is a reality. There is much contention between users of water for agriculture, industry, and households. This is just as true of California as it is of Darfur, which has lost 30% of its water in recent years due to environmental shifting of arable land. Privatization and access to water has created major turmoil in Bolivia, due largely to politics. China has recently completed the Three Gorges Dam. This dam, as well as others, has caused the displacement of approximately 40 to 80 million people, and provided a great opportunity for corruption.

In a recent study done on the leadership of Dubai by Sheik Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Mahktoum, results indicate the world views him as the idea transformational leader of the Emirate of Dubai. Results of the study conducted with members of the Dubai executive team emphasized the highest scores in the area of cooperative discussion

and openness (McLaurin & Mitias, 2008). It is vital that an effective leader successfully communicate with those involved in dealing with common issues and problems.

The future holds a promise of water peace, according to Dabelko. The Picnic Table Talks between the Jordanians and the Israelis have proved effective. The communication was held at a picnic table. This seems rather informal, but it was nonetheless quite effective. Good Water Makes Good Neighbors is a slogan being practiced by the Palestinians and Israelis. This was a sanitation issue, with tainted water flowing from Palestine into Israel. Through effective interpersonal communication, this issue was peacefully resolved. India and Pakistan are working together to resolve their water differences, through effective communication and good will. The Nile Basin Initiative has been productive, with stakeholders who are affected by common issues and problems participating in peaceful communication.

The 32nd meeting of the Nile Technical Advisory Committee was recently held in Entebbe, Uganda. Representatives from member countries Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania were present. For the past twelve years, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) has been working to develop positive outcomes regarding the issues of poverty and the area's meager food supply. It has worked toward creating ownership of the Nile Basin by the member countries. The controversy today is primarily between Egypt and the Sudan on one hand and the rest of the above mentioned nations on the other, who do not want to get permission from Egypt every time they wish to use the water from the Nile River (Nile Basin Initiative, 2011). Egypt contributes no water at all to the Nile, yet considers the Nile waters to be a major security issue (Ali, 2010).

Engaging constructively in communications regarding conflicts about water or any aspect of the environment requires effective communication. The stakeholders must be appraised of the risks and rewards involved. Effective communication cannot occur unless negotiating partners choose to communicate in constructive ways. "Disagreements may signal the emergence of innovative, novel concepts as yet unrealized" (Flanagan & Runde, 2009). Conflict can actually become an advantage if issues are carefully examined and each party is open to considering new approaches and opportunities.

Environmental conflict situations tend to be both challenging and convoluted. Walker, Daniels, and Emborg (2008) suggest Collaborative Learning as a means of effectively communicating and resolving conflict. Collaborative Learning integrates aspects of systems thinking, negotiation, experiential learning, and interpersonal communication. Conflict situations involving the environment are affected by the difference in priorities of stakeholders and resource management decisions (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). As a result, solutions can be quite complicated and difficult to resolve. Collaborative Learning works on three levels: philosophy, framework, and techniques. Effective interpersonal communication is what makes the process work. "As a philosophy, framework, and set of tactics [techniques], the Collaborative Learning methodology may be useful in a variety of environmental policy, natural resource management, and sustainable development situations" (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). Whatever the process used, it is important to foster interpersonal communication between disputing parties, maintaining a balance of advocacy and inquiry, and working toward collaboration for the good of all involved.

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