



WATER: THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE FOR OUR FUTURE

Center for Global Studies - New York University

NEW YORK , NY

23 MARCH 2012

9h00-17h00

Annotated Agenda

Introduction

Without doubt, the world's most essential commodity is water. **Water is a source of life for all and as we speak, one in six people in the world has no access to fresh drinking water.** But despite its critical importance for life on earth, water is taken for granted and the burning issue of water security remains largely unattended, if not neglected. Under a business-as-usual scenario, it is predicted that by 2030, actual global demand for water will outstrip supply by 40 percent. Causes of inadequate water supply include inefficient use, degradation of water by pollution, and over-exploitation of groundwater reserves. Corrective action aims at achieving better management of scarce freshwater resources, with a particular focus on supply and demand, quantity and quality. UN system activities focus on the sustainable use and management of fragile and finite freshwater resources, which are under increasing stress from population growth, burgeoning pollution and the growing demands of the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Continuing down this path will likely mean that over the long term, any positive strides made in the quality of life will not be permanent unless water use can be brought under control especially in light of the increasing world population.

In many international fora and at the United Nations, all stakeholders, including private sector corporations are encouraged to attend more effectively to this strategic commodity. Increasing competition for water resources within countries and between countries is looming. This may well create a potential for water-related tensions and

even water conflicts. To date, the world has developed technologies to harness nature for renewable energies, such as wind, solar and geothermal sources - but with respect to water, there is, as yet, no diversification or substitute. Water is irreplaceable. Hence, the urgent need of advocacy for the sustainable management and use of freshwater, its conservation and recycling as well as rainwater harvesting.

To help raise public awareness on the importance of an intelligent development of freshwater resources, the UN General Assembly declared 2003 the International Year of Freshwater in recognition of the central role of water for the planet. Also in 2003, the Chief Executives Board (CEB), the coordinating body for the entire UN system, established “UN Water” — an inter-agency mechanism to coordinate UN system actions to achieve the water-related goals of the Millennium Declaration and the agreements of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg.

To further strengthen global action to meet the water-related MDG targets, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” (2005-2015). The Decade was launched on 22 March 2005, which henceforth is observed annually as World Water Day. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly designated 2013 as International Year of Water Cooperation.

In 2009, “UN Water” and its 26 UN agencies, working in partnership with governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders and expert groups, published the third edition of the United Nations triennial World Water Development Report, which analyses data and trends affecting the world’s freshwater resources. The fourth edition will be presented in March 2012 at the World Water Forum in Marseille, France.

Environmental awareness and educating the public on how to safeguard water for the present and future generations must gain momentum worldwide. The “Melody for Dialogue among Civilizations” Association and its partners have chosen this challenge as a priority objective for promoting awareness for global environmental protection and a green society.

This objective is taken up by various regional fora, addressing the diverse geographical specificities and needs of the overall planetary challenge. The African Forum was held in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria (30 November - 1 December 2011), The outcome of this African Forum will be presented to the International Forum scheduled to be held at New York University’s Center for Global Studies in New York City, with the support of Northeastern University, Boston on 23 March 2012. The New York Forum will mainly touch upon water-related issues in the North American region and address issues such as water security and conflicts, the role and rights of women, the role of the private sector and NGOs and the importance of culture as a catalyst for advocacy. Other

regional meetings in Europe, Middle East, Asia and Latin America will be organized between 2012 and 2015, the year when the UN General Assembly will review the extent to which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will have been attained.

In these meetings, in addition to securing the participation of well-known international experts in the field of environment and water issues, efforts will also be made to empower the public by creating awareness, drawing on soft power components like culture, the arts and music as a unique universal language understood by all. For this reason, each meeting will be associated with a major multi-cultural concert and multi-media show advocating for wise and sustainable water use. The multicultural concert in NYC is planned for World Water Day, 22 March 2012 at the Merkin Hall in Manhattan (for further information please see www.melodydialogue.org)

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Panel I: Water, Climate Change and Conflict

Five per cent of the world's population survives on 1 percent of its water. Recent studies show that over-withdrawal of surface water and groundwater has led to a depletion of water resources and environmental damage in some regions of the world, especially affecting developing countries. Inadequate sanitation has been a major cause of disease. As global warming continues, population increases and water supplies become ever more scarce and tensions may rise. This may give rise to lasting conflicts among and within nations. The prospect of human-induced climate change may give rise to neo-Malthusian scenarios. A number of claims about the conflict-inducing effects of climate change have surfaced in the public debate in recent years. Climate change has so many potential consequences for the physical environment that we might as well anticipate a number of causes for conflict and violence. A few examples of vulnerable regions in today's world could conceivably be in Turkey/Syria (Euphrates River), China/India (Brahmaputra River), Israel/Palestine (Jordan River), Angola/Namibia (Okavango Basin), Ethiopia /Egypt/Sudan (Nile River), Bangladesh/India (the Ganges River). Yet, the gaps and uncertainties in our knowledge about the consequences of climate change for conflict and security appear daunting.

The panelists are therefore invited to address the following issues:

- **The direct human impact on water supply and causes of inadequate water supply** (e.g. inefficient use, pollution, over-exploitation of groundwater reserves, population growth and demand of agricultural and industrial users)
- **Problems and opportunities related to the nexus of climate change and water supply:** how will climate-related environmental change influence human societies and give rise to conflict?
- **Opportunities for improved and sustainable management of finite freshwater resources and water infrastructure** (i.e. focusing on supply and demand, quantity and quality, environmental sustainability as well as partnerships for water development)

Presentation: film on “Water Security and the Impact on Women”

A consensus is gradually emerging that the sustainable development and management of water resources are essential to generate wealth, mitigate risk and alleviate poverty, particularly among women in rural areas. The producer Amy Hart will introduce her film which seeks to deepen our understanding of the importance of water resources management and development in enabling responsible economic growth and poverty alleviation. The dynamics of water, growth and poverty are complex and depend upon

specific physical, cultural, political and economic circumstances.

Panel II: Role of the Private Sector and NGOs in Water Challenges and Solutions

In this panel three high-level experts with extensive business and government experience will discuss the role of the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing water challenges and developing solutions. A number of salient issues will be discussed ranging from pollution prevention, to financial challenges related, to water protection and to private sector conservation initiatives. The principal focus will be the emphasis on solutions to water challenges in North America and the interface between the public and private sectors will be reviewed in this context:

- Ric Davidge, Chairman of Aqueous International, will offer a multi-pronged and strategic perspective in his presentation “Solutions to Today's Water Crisis”;
- Michael Washburn, Director of Sustainability at Nestlé Waters North America, will offer a big-picture context with the theme “Water: How we Use it and Why it Matters”;
- Phil Retallick, Senior Vice President of Regulatory Affairs at Clean Harbors Environmental Services, will reveal some relatively unknown challenges (and solutions) in his talk on "Management of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Contamination in our Nation's Water Drinking Supplies".
- Professor Chris Robertson of Northeastern University, Boston will moderate the Panel.

Panel III: The Role of Culture, the Arts, and a Plan of Action

Culture is an essential component of human development *sui generis*. It represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for individuals and communities as well as a tool for reconciliation and social cohesion. Beyond, culture possesses an intrinsic value for creating awareness on important social issues and is an asset essential for reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.

Cultural diversity has an important – yet often underestimated – role to play in tackling the current ecological challenges, coping with climate change, preventing biodiversity loss and ensuring environmental sustainability. Cultural factors influence individual behaviour, values related to environmental stewardship and the ways in which we interact with our natural environment. There is much to learn from the environmental management skills embedded within local, rural or indigenous peoples, including multi-use strategies of appropriation, small-scale production with little surplus and low energy needs, and a custodial approach to land and water resources which avoids waste and resource depletion. This underlines that culturally-based knowledge is a core resource for sustainable development.

This Panel will dwell on the importance of culture and cultural diversity in general and the arts and music in particular for creating awareness and encouraging education to help and preserve the sustainable use and management of freshwater.

Conclusion

The outcome emanating from the various panel debates and discussions throughout the Forum will be highlighted at the final meeting and then adopted as the Forum's recommendations, which will be forwarded to UN Conference for Sustainable Development (Rio+20), due to take place in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, and to the various events and processes leading to the MDG review by the United Nations in 2015.