

WATER, WATER, WATER

The future of water is a closely related issue to those of global climate change and to the world's population growth and distribution. Water, appropriately termed as 'vital fluid' was a crucial component for the appearance of life on the surface of our planet and continues to be essential for its maintenance. The central character of water as a key element in the development of mankind becomes evident in the establishment of human conglomerates along riverbeds and the development of aqueduct and channel engineering as a manifestation of domination and wealth.

Food production and adequate nourishment, as well as health indexes of the population, can be related with the availability and quality of the water. In the Neotropical region this relationship is even more pronounced, given the large amount of diseases transmitted through contaminated waters. The relationship can be so close that the degree of wellbeing and development of a society can be determined by the level of availability, quality and reach of water, as well as the treatment it receives once utilized.

To make good use of the water resources, including people's entertainment, turning it into drinkable fluid in sufficient amounts, and effectively treating wastewaters is an obvious responsibility of local, regional and national authorities together with informed, organized and participative citizens. It is also a matter of worry and action of international organizations. This becomes mandatory given the multinational character of many shared basins, the fact that numerous rivers serve as national limits and the reach of contamination beyond borders. In the long run, whether water is polluted directly or by way of ground and/or air pollution, its negative influences will be manifest.

The establishment by the United Nations Organization, in 1992, of the World Water Day (www.un.org/es/events/waterday/),

its inclusion in the Agenda 21 and its yearly celebration since 1994, as well as the establishment of the World Water Council (www.worldwatercouncil.org) in 1996, are clear examples of the existing general preoccupation. The Council has promoted the triennial celebration, since 1997, of the World Water Forum (www.worldwaterforum.org) with ramifications such as the Water Agenda of the Americas in our region, in the five continents. These are important positive actions that merit the highest possible participations and that will attain their effects provided that the local environments can be reached.

The preservation of water sources and the appropriate treatment and distribution, as well as the recovery of water, in the fields and in the cities, are considerations that ought to be present at an outstanding position within any governmental action plan, together with the provision of the corresponding services. It is surprising, however, the low level of awareness on the part of government officials, professionals, scientists and of the whole population concerning the central role of water as an axis of progress and the need for its care and good handling.

To insure water availability for the future generations implies the avoidance of deforestation and pollution, a double result of the extensive burnings that are carried out in order to turn economically productive virgin areas of difficult or impossible utilization without destroying its vegetal cover. It requires considerable investments in infrastructure and appropriate legislative actions in the areas of environment, food and energy.

The first step is to become convinced of the fact that without clean and sufficient water there is no possible long term progress, however large might be the accumulated riches, but a dark, dry and uncertain future for the whole of mankind.

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