
TO AVOID WATER CONFLICT BETWEEN NATIONS AND SOCIAL GROUPS, IS IT NOT TIME TO RECOGNIZE WATER AS A PUBLIC GOOD?

Prof. Diana Antonova, DcS

Department Management and Social Activities
Faculty of Business and Management
University of Ruse, Angel Kanchev
e-mail: dantonova@uni-ruse.bg

Abstract: *The resources available to individual economic entities and society as a whole to create goods are limited at a certain point in time. All individuals, organizations and society as a whole face the common economic problem of scarcity: needs are unlimited and resources are insufficient. The choice of one thing over another, the juxtaposition of alternatives, is an integral part of the economic system. Resource limitation, which manifests itself in the lack of balance between people's needs and the means to satisfy them, is a fundamental economic issue known as the problem of scarcity. Resource limitation gives rise to the need to choose for their alternative use. The essence of the main market problem in the economy is precisely the distribution of limited resources among the existing opportunities for their use. Goods are a means of satisfying needs. If they can be used freely without reducing access to them, they are public goods. If it is produced under conditions of scarcity, where a greater amount of one good means less of another, it is an economic good. Most goods fall into this category - they are not free, but some other good has to be sacrificed for their acquisition. Is water an economic or a public good?*

"If there's no water, people will start moving," says Kitty van der Heyden, head of international cooperation at the Dutch foreign ministry and an expert on hydropolitics. Water scarcity affects approximately 40% of the world's population, and according to UN and World Bank projections, drought could put 700 million people at risk of displacement by 2030.

The report presents a perspective of concern about the consequences of water scarcity. If there is no water, politicians will try to control water resources and may go to war over them. Over 270 hotspots around the world give rise to military conflicts caused by water imbalance.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Social investment

JEL Codes: M1, M14

INTRODUCTION

Modern humanity, almost half of which already lives in cities, is not quite aware that it is not the depletion of organic energy carriers, but the lack of clean drinking water that can turn our world into a real hell. Only 1% of all 1.4 billion cubic meters of water on the planet is potable. And if we exclude from this quantity the scarcely accessible glaciers and underground waters, there remain the rivers and lakes, which are the main source of life-giving moisture for drinking and household needs, as well as for industry and agriculture.

The largest consumer of fresh water (70%) is precisely the agrarian sector, while the share of industry is 20%, and 10% goes to domestic needs.

Few people probably think about how much fresh water is needed to sustain the existence of modern civilization. The production of a ton of wheat, for example, requires a thousand tons of water. Per kilogram of meat - 1.5-1.8 tons, and one car - up to three hundred tons of water. After all, the production of textiles and plastics, as well as metals and fuel, have their own "water equivalent". Water is needed even for the extraction of oil, let alone the extraction of energy carriers from the shale layers.

Back in 2008, American experts predicted that after a quarter of a century, the fresh water problem will directly affect as many as three billion people. That same year, the Joint Command of the US Army (USJFCOM) published a kind of military doctrine with the indicative title "The Joint Operating Environment - JOE". In fact, it was an attempt to predict the environment in which military operations will be conducted in the world in the 1930s.

Water scarcity can become the cause of fierce wars and conflicts. As the JOE authors remind in this connection, one of the reasons for the seven-day Israeli-Arab war in 1967 was the attempt by Jordan and Syria to block the Jordan River. By the way, Turkey is also currently building dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, taking away part of the river's outflow, thereby creating huge problems for Iraq and Syria. In the very near future, conflicts over fresh water could destabilize entire regions. Sudan's blood-soaked region of Darfur is a possible future for many water-deprived areas of the planet, with epidemics spreading due to lack of basic sanitation. And in the Third World, this problem will be further aggravated by the large quantities of untreated sewage discharged into nature by the growing cities with primitive communal economy and teeming with brothels.

Ten years ago, the authoritative American non-governmental organization World Future Society (WFS) predicted that in the 21st century water will become what oil was in the 20th. Moreover, according to WFS experts, water scarcity will affect both rich and developing countries. For example, 13 seawater desalination plants are currently under construction in California, with the goal of meeting 10-20% of the state's drinking needs over the next twenty years. That is, it is quite possible that it is refreshing technologies that will become the global technological hit of the future. Because what awaits humanity on an increasingly overpopulated Earth is a growing shortage of fresh water, combined with hunger and a shortage of affordable energy sources. In this regard, we should expect that countries with large reserves of fresh water (such as Russia, for example, where 25% of the planet's fresh water is concentrated) may become the object of aggression by those most acutely affected from this problem. In any case, in the future, it will be increasingly difficult for individual countries to agree with each other on the use of common water sources.

WATER WARS AS WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The truth is that today the "water wars" provoked by drought, low yields and the scarcity of fresh water seem to the population of many regions as relevant as the danger of the outbreak of wars with the use of nuclear weapons, chemical and other means of mass destruction. They provoke mass migration, exacerbate the political situation and are the immediate cause of actual hostilities and wars. According to forecasts, in 2025 the population of the planet will grow to 8 billion people, and 1/3 of them will live in countries suffering from "water deficit", and the expectations are that the regions with high birth rates and arid regions will suffer the most. climate.

On the other hand, the threat of expanding the influence of terrorist groups in Ethiopia and Egypt is very real. In Ethiopia's neighboring Somalia, the Islamist organization "Ash-Shabab", considered part of the Al-Qaeda network, is extremely successful. By the way, until 2016, it was the Ethiopian military, replaced later by units of the African Union, that fought the Al-Shabaab terrorists in Somalia. However, the latter are preparing to leave Somalia in 2023, which will probably free the hands of the local Islamists, who are already active enough (I will only recall the attack on an American military base in Kenya, at the beginning of 2022). By the way, the Islamic State also operates in Somalia.

The outflow of the Nile River, in addition to Egypt, also affects other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, a few years after the Aswan Dam came into operation in 1970, the sea began to erode the beaches of Cyprus, Israel and Lebanon. The reason is that before the construction of the dam, the Nile poured a huge amount of silt and sand into the sea, which partially formed the beaches in question, and after its release, these impurities began to accumulate in the Nasser reservoir, before the dam wall.

THE OTHER WATER CONFLICTS

Meanwhile, along with the "Battle for the Nile", the disagreements between two nuclear states - India and Pakistan - regarding access to the waters of the Indus River have been intensifying recently. I will also remind you that the ethnic clashes in the western Sudan region of Darfur, in 2003-2005, were largely determined by the "water war", which broke out due to the encroachment of the desert and the reduction of livestock herds due to the lack of pastures and the lack of water. It was they who stimulated the migration of the nomadic Arab tribes to the south and the civil war provoked by it, which cost the lives of several hundred thousand people.

Aware of the vital importance of ensuring sufficient volumes of fresh water for the regions and their populations, a number of countries are actively trying to use the "water factor", exerting force pressure on their opponents and provoking them to take retaliatory actions. Like this is happening not only in the Third World, but even in Europe. In its attempts to achieve a force-ful solution to the "Crimean problem", the Ukrainian government, for example, blocked the supply of fresh water from mainland Ukraine to the peninsula, although the North Crimean Canal was built in the late 1950s precisely for this purpose. By the way, Kiev acts in the same way towards the Donetsk and Luhansk regions controlled by the pro-Russian rebels, with the Ukrainian armed forces constantly trying to cut off their water supply system.

A similar "model" has recently been used by Ankara in relation to the Kurdish population in Syria. The Turks, in particular, have periodically cut off the flow of water from the Euphrates River to northeastern Syria, depriving residents of the neighboring Arab country of access to this key natural resource, which is used to generate electricity and irrigate agricultural land. The water shortage in Syria's largest dam, Tabka, has already led to a reduction in the electricity supply, which, among other things, is needed to provide dozens of villages in northern Syria with food. Not coincidentally, in March 2020 a number of international human rights organizations called on Turkey to refrain from cutting off "vital water supplies" to Kurdish-controlled areas in northeastern Syria, warning that water shortages would prevent humanitarian organizations from protecting vulnerable local communities from another explosion of the coronavirus infection Covid-19.

There are a number of indications that Al-Shabaab has recently been developing active propaganda among the 25-million-strong Oromo ethnic community in Ethiopia, almost half of whose members are Sunni Muslims dissatisfied with the policies of the central government. In turn, since 2011, Egypt (with the support of Israel) has continuously carried out anti-terrorist campaigns against Al-Qaeda militants and other groups in the Sinai Peninsula. Moreover, this war is being fought with variable success, i.e. two militarily powerful enough states cannot deal with the desert warlords generating a constant threat not only to them but also to their neighbors. It is enough to recall the downed Russian plane in 2015, the terrorist attack in Bir al-Abda in 2017 or the rocket attacks against the Israeli Red Sea port of Eilat.

THE MAIN QUESTION

Is it possible to predict in which regions of the planet the scarcity of fresh water and mass starvation could provoke conflicts?

Two years ago, in his article "Apocalypse Now", the famous Israeli political scientist and geopolitical analyst Guy Behor pointed out that: "We are witnessing something unprecedented - the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates are gradually disappearing. There is turmoil in Iraq: the bed of the Tigris River is almost completely dried up and the people are cursing the rulers for it. The looming simultaneous drying up of all three great rivers in the Middle East looks like some terrible biblical curse, giving the local Arab population the choice of leaving their lands or dying of hunger and thirst. The great Tigris River, which over the course of millennia flows through the territory of present-day Iraq, has become so shallow that it can now be crossed on foot as if it were some kind of puddle. In fact, in some Iraqi areas it has completely dried up. And along with it, all the fish and the surrounding vegetation. It is very possible that this will turn out to be the worst catastrophe in the history of the Middle East."

According to Dr. Behor, there are three main causes of this disaster, the grand scale of which humanity is yet to realize.

The first is Turkey's reckless and selfish actions. This country, which also suffers from a lack of living moisture, took advantage of the chaos in neighboring Iraq, which arose after the American military intervention and the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein, to build quite unhindered in the bed of the Tigris, on the Iraqi border, the giant dam "Ilisu", worth 2.6 billion dollars. At the bottom of its reservoir, dozens of Kurdish villages, as well as the mostly Kurdish-populated ancient city of Hasankeyf, whose age, according to archaeologists, is about 10 thousand years.

Of course, Ankara claims that most of Hasankeyf's relics were moved elsewhere, and its population was promptly resettled. Given the attitude of the Turkish authorities towards the Kurds,

however, this raises certain doubts. In the context of this article, more importantly, with the construction of the dam, the water level of the Tigris River in neighboring Iraq has dropped dramatically. As a result, Iraqi agriculture, which has already suffered greatly from the war with the US, is currently on the verge of collapse.

The second reason for the practical disappearance of the great rivers in the Middle East is climate change. Insufficient rains, the already ten-year drought in the region, the drying up of river sources and, as a result, the barbaric draining of underground water sources in villages, lead to a further lowering of the groundwater level. And since the authorities throughout the Arab space are either inactive or totally corrupt, there is practically no control over the exploitation of wells, moreover, often the government officials themselves drill new water wells, using them for their own enrichment.

The third reason is related to the lack of management capacity. For decades, authorities in most Arab countries in the region have ignored the needs of their own populations, forcing them to grow crops that require a huge amount of water (such as wheat or cotton, for example). On top of that, the waste, corruption, indifference of the rulers and, above all, the wars, have turned the power elites throughout the Arab space into a completely irrelevant factor, neither willing nor able to change things.

As a result, according to Guy Behor: "The whole of Iraq, once called by the Arabs Umm el Rafidiin, i.e. 'the land of the two rivers', is drying up." Moreover, the scenario of irreversible catastrophe is perceived there with apocalyptic pessimism, because on the day, in which the rivers finally dry up, the end of Iraq itself will also come. And the likely outcome of this situation may be the outbreak of a kind of "war of desperation" between Iraq and Turkey."

In neighboring Syria, a long-standing and chronic drought in the southern part of the country provoked a wave of millions of refugees to Syrian cities, which turned out to be one of the factors in the already ten-year-long war of the Islamists against the regime of Bashar Assad. By the way, the drought strongly affected Jordan as well. Across the Jordanian-Syrian border, Syrian villagers are uncontrollably drilling wells and barbarically draining water from the Yarmouk River, a key tributary of the Jordan River. As a result, the situation in the region worsens with each passing month.

ECONOMICS OF DRINKING WATER

Until the second half of the 20th century, in many economic books, nature as a factor of production was considered less significant. Water is not the domain of interest for economists. Historically, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Malthus, along with other classical economists, recognized land, as a factor of production. However, it is possible to say that the conflict between limited resources and development began with Thomas Malthus (1766-1834). The law of diminishing returns theory was heavily propagated by Malthus. According to the theory, the more capital and labor input is applied to a given area of land, the marginal product of capital and combined labor will eventually decrease, and hence output per capita will decrease. Unlike other classical economists, Malthus focused on the short-term rather than the long-term, and for him the earth was an immutable magnitude. Neo-classical economists concentrate mainly on labor and capital. In fact, in the past the indirect renewal of natural resources was easy, they were included in the production process and assumed to be inexhaustible and infinite according to the current demand. For example, according to C. Marx, natural resources can be used as free goods. He suggests that after the abolition of private property, a future society can produce nature's products only at real production costs (Krautkraemer, 2023).

CONDITIONS TODAY, HOWEVER, HAVE CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY

The population has grown almost 7.5 times since the industrial revolution. The world's population is increasing by about 80 million people every year. The world's urban population is expected to grow to 6.3 billion people in 2050 from 3.4 billion in 2009, representing both population growth and net rural-to-urban migration (WWDR, 2023). With such issues as global climate change and atmospheric pollution, depletion of natural resources, industrialization, the

environment is becoming one of the most limiting factors. Economics, as a science that studies how scarce resources can meet the unlimited needs of man, is not indifferent to this development; this leads to the emergence of a new field called environmental economics. As one of the fields of economic science, environmental economics examines environmental issues in relation to the economy and its contribution to the protection of the environment and natural resources of and covers many sub-fields such as energy economics, water pollution economics, water economy, water resources and economics.

Today, one of the most problematic areas of natural resources is water. In general, water is used in agriculture for irrigation, industrial and domestic purposes. Changes in lifestyle and food habits in recent years require greater per capita water consumption. As mentioned above, rapid population growth, urbanization, industrialization, global climate change, and atmospheric pollution or leakage from the distribution system remain factors that limit the demand for safe water. In addition, many groundwater supplies are already depleting, while rainfall patterns are expected to become more erratic with climate change. By 2050, worldwide water demand is expected to increase by 55%, mainly due to the growing demands of manufacturing, thermal power generation and domestic consumption. According to the UN World Water Development Report 2023, "... if the balance between demand and limited supply is not restored, the world will face increasingly severe global water scarcity" (WWDR, 2023).

THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMICS FOR THE WATER SECTOR

Water, as a natural source, is a basic element of human life. Clean drinking water and adequate sanitation are fundamental to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. The special character of water is essential for health as well as a key component in social and economic activities, defining a special cultural status and therefore a special position in public policy. Fresh-water resources have traditionally been seen as something to which all members of the human community have a right of access. Water is a basic human need and access to minimal amounts of clean water (20 liters per person per day) should be a right for everyone. Access to clean water and sanitation is considered by many of the current international programs and platforms as a basic human right necessary for leading a healthy and dignified human life (Beloev&Venelinova, 2022).

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF WATERS

Categorizing water or trying to define it in economic terms presents a serious challenge because water can be viewed in multiple dimensions in terms of its sources and uses. Water provides goods (eg, drinking water, irrigation water) and services (eg, hydroelectric power generation, leisure and recreation) that are used by agriculture, industry and households. The provision of many of these goods and services is interrelated and determined by the quantity and quality of water available. The management and distribution of water leads to consideration of its unique characteristics as a resource (Pandey, 2024). While in the past water was considered a free good, its definition has changed as it has become scarce. Today, water is considered an economic commodity because of how it is currently viewed. Economic goods are those that are the subject of production activity; these are goods that require labor, time, technology, and resource allocation. Viewing and managing water as an economic commodity was first advocated in 1992 during the "International Conference on Environment and Water" held in Dublin. According to the principles adopted at the Dublin conference, water is considered valuable because it contributes to economic activity and, in this context, has economic value in all the different areas of its use. However, it should be noted here that regardless of the fact that water is defined as an economic good, it does not mean that all its costs can be charged. The Fourth Dublin Principle defines water as an economic good, taking into account the right of access to safe water to those in poverty and emphasizing its social dimension. There is a consensus on this issue, both in local economies and internationally.

In addition, goods and services are divided into private and public goods and services. In a market economy, the allocation of limited natural resources (such as coal, oil, fish, grains, and

timber) is usually determined by trade in markets. Water resources have a number of unique characteristics. Should water be considered a public or private good? (White, 2023).

Private goods include two properties: competition and exclusion. Competition essentially means that if I consume the product you cannot. Exclusion means that if I consume the good, it excludes all the consequences of that consumption: it has no "externality" (Shaw, 2022). One of the most common ways of using water is at the household level for drinking, gardening, etc. These kinds of uses can be described as competition, in which one individual drinks a glass of water and prevents another from drinking it; here we also have exclusion because when the first individual has consumed it no one else can use it (White, 2022).

Also, bottled water is a private good because it is consumed by one individual and after consumption the bottle is thrown away. Property rights can lead to the creation of a private good. Private property, such as a home, is protected by property rights established by law. However, water rights are not typically worded in the same way as property rights for a home. Often, water rights are legal rights to use water - the volume of water itself is not owned by the individual (Shaw, 2005)

Public goods are not competitive goods: one unit of their consumption by one individual does not mean that another cannot do so. Public goods can include externalities. This means that benefits and costs do not fully reflect market prices. Due to its non-excludability and non-rival nature, water sanitation is a public good. Also, flood control services are public in nature. The non-competitiveness is related to the high costs of turning off the water. And this leads to parasitism, i.e. to use the water by those who did not help pay for its production costs (Farolfi, 2021). Dirty water is a public good, but clean fresh water is definitely a competition, but not necessarily excludable if it's a lake or an aquifer. Also, lake and ocean recreation is considered a public good (Sorkin, 2013).

There are mixed products in terms of competition and exclusion. Of these, club goods (eg, shared irrigation) are excludable but non-rivalrous. Conversely, common goods, such as aquifer water, are non-excludable and competitive. On the other hand, other types of economic commodity values associated with water may not require it to leave the hydrological system. These are, for example, water transport and hydroelectric power. These are the so-called stream uses and because they involve very little water consumption are also called non-consumptive uses. These uses have some aspects of the competitiveness of private goods (Farolfi, 2021).

In conclusion, the use of water (in the course of its use) is considered both a private and a public good, according to the source of the water.

CAN WATER BE FREE?

A pricing system ensures maximum allocation between limited resources and the alternative utilization sector. In 2014, Ireland began charging for drinking water that was once free. This situation leads to a significant amount of protestors. The argument is this: whether you are rich or poor, water is a vital commodity for everyone; thus, it is wrong for society to pay for a vital commodity. Therefore, the state must supply the water free of charge. This way of thinking is common. This is largely because water is seen as a communal resource, to which access is free, except for the costs of capture, storage and distribution. In fact, drinking (and also irrigation) water prices in many countries are well below the full cost of the infrastructure and personnel required to provide the water, which consist of the cost of capital charges, operation and maintenance costs (O&M). What would happen if water was provided for free instead of at an affordable price? There is a significant difference between the amount of water consumed at a reduced price compared to free water. As can be seen in the figure, the marginal benefit of most of the water consumed, when available, without payment is significantly lower. When there is additional consumption, one will move to an area of significantly lower marginal utility. For example, more water will be used when washing the car, or the necessary measures will not be taken regarding the drainage of water in the garden. The supply of additional water is expensive and it will be necessary to use scarce resources in the production of another good with the supply of free water.

It is difficult to balance the water market in the traditional sense. In the market, decisions are based on the private costs and private benefits of the participants. If the consumption or production of goods and services provides external costs or benefits to those not participating in the market,

however, then the market demand and supply curves no longer accurately reflect marginal social benefit and marginal social cost. Therefore, the market equilibrium will no longer be socially most efficient (Pareto).

EXTERNAL FACTORS – GENERAL SETTING

Externalities are the direct benefits or costs to producers and consumers from other producers and consumers as a result of their actions. Because externalities cannot be estimated, the social benefits and costs of production and consumption differ from each other, and this is determined by the market as a failure. This is observed when the pricing mechanism and costs and benefits do not equal production and consumption as desired by individuals and society, then there is a loss to social welfare/benefits.

(A) *In a situation where there is a positive externality:*

Social benefits = private benefits + external benefits *and*

External benefits > 0. *Therefore,*

Social benefits > Private benefits.

The economic benefits of improved water supply and sanitation affect households, businesses and industry that require tap water for various activities. Well-being affects countries by reducing the bad that can in part cause cognitive dysfunction, by reducing the scale of mortality related to the lack of water, etc. negative effects (externalities) for other users.

(B) *In the case where negative externalities prevail:*

Social costs = private costs + external costs *and*

External costs > 0. *Therefore,*

Social costs > Private costs.

WHERE DO BULGARIA RANK IN THE WORLD INDICES FOR CLEAN DRINKING WATER?

The water supply with clean drinking water in Bulgaria is not at a sufficiently good level. The facts are categorical - 14 out of 29 cities have outbreaks of drinking water contamination. One of the main problems facing access to quality drinking water is the outdated water supply network.

A leading disadvantage of drinking water in Romania is the presence of nitrates, bacteria and high chlorine content in it. This is shown by a study by the "Active Users" Association. The study analyzed 52 samples collected from 29 major cities. The established percentage of deviation from the standards is extremely high. The most numerous are the cases with a high presence of active chlorine. Prechlorination is the result of incorrect dosing by the operators of the water supply companies. In high concentrations, chlorine interacts with organic compounds in water, which leads to the formation of carcinogenic substances. Moreover, chlorine increases the corrosion of the water network and thus increases the amount of heavy metals in the water, which also have a carcinogenic effect.

CONCLUSION

Globally, there are thousands of deaths per year caused by *Escherichia coli* ingested through food or water. In addition, the presence of these bacteria is an indicator of the potential presence in the drinking water of other more dangerous pathogens, such as dysentery, typhus, cholera, some viruses, etc. For these reasons, the disinfection and control of microorganisms in drinking water is a priority for every national water operator.

The general conclusion of turning water into a public resource finds support in the European Parliament. The main objective of the proposal is to ensure a high level of protection of the environment and human health from the harmful effects of contaminated drinking water. The revision is also a direct result of the first ever successful European citizens' initiative Right to Water (Right2Water). On 1 February 2018, the EC adopted its proposal to recast the Drinking Water Directive. The Council reached a common approach on the proposal on 5 March 2019. Negotiations between the co-legislators followed. On 18 December 2019, a preliminary agreement was reached between the Council and the European Parliament.

Today, however, the path to the final adoption of a single European policy on this serious risk problem is still closed. Discussions continue...

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