Abstracts
Translated by Victoria Bawtree

L’eau, patrimoine commun de l’humanité

Editorial
Water, source of life and our common heritage

Water is becoming a key issue for humanity. Its scarcity reflects social relationships between nations and within each of them. It is the cause of conflicts which could become extremely serious in the near future. Its pollution, which results from our development model, poses huge and immediate problems. Technical solutions are not neutral, while as for privatization, it reduces water to a mere commodity, subject to the laws of the market rather than meeting people’s needs. Water is an ethical question and should be considered as the universal heritage of humanity.

Water, the common property of the people
Samir Amin

Water, which is indispensable to life, is unequally distributed around the world. It is a major factor in influencing the future of peoples, as this common heritage is a source of abundance for some and a rarety for others. The current neo-liberal offensive, under the banner of the one world market, is increasing this inequality in that it wants to make water a commodity and hence subject to privatization and market competition. Whatever the motivations may be, this option does not take into account the needs of populations and still less does it respect their fundamental right to life through access to what is a basic element: water. And thus is it more urgent than ever to affirm the right of peoples to this common property, to promote economic prospects that are more concerned with human development than economic interests, and to encourage policy initiatives that favour the most under-privileged, especially as concerns access to water.

The water crisis in the Philippines
Antonio M. Claparols

Although it has one of the highest rainfalls in the world, the Philippines suffer from lack of water. This is caused by the growing desertification - which also affects a good many countries in Africa and Asia. To remedy this, some countries, including the Philippines, have officially banned the felling of trees. But this alone is not enough to solve the water crisis and its consequences: further measures are necessary. Among other solutions it is essential to develop an economic system that is based on the conservation and good management of natural resources and to give greater attention to the roles and potential of ecosystems in territorial development, the distribution of information on existing resources and their utilization, and the creation of effective development institutions and appropriate legislation.
Planning water resources: the change in perspectives in India
Ramaswamy R. Iyer

In India, the planning of water resources has meant for the most part the development of irrigation through large dam projects. Over the years, a powerful movement opposing such projects has developed. This article develops the questions underlying the opposing views, for there is a marked polarization in opinions on the subject. The issue will be taken up by the World Commission on Dams, established by the World Bank and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. A crucial question will be to identify effective alternatives to large dams that will meet future needs in water and energy. As for the conservation of water and social protection, local initiatives have shown that there can be significant results from such approaches. There needs to be a major reorientation in policies concerning water resources and some recommendations are put forward by the author.

Water, electricity and the population
Imtiaz Ahmed, Ajaya Dixit, Ashis Nandy

In South Asia, water resource development projects are still the prerogative of the majority and they are largely organized and implemented at the expense of the needs and well-being of minority groups, particularly the indigenous populations. This is above all the case of dams, canals and reservoirs. Such projects displace the people from their ancestral lands, with insufficient compensation or none at all.

Allocating the common heritage: the right to water and how it is managed in India
Marcus Moench

How to create a social base for reform of the rights governing the aquifers in India? How to elaborate political structures that will ensure that the common good is not damaged by the private allocation of water? Such questions bring up the philosophical question as to whether water is a useful commodity or part of the common heritage. The structures deciding the normal, statutory rights to aquifers and surface water in India are discussed. Then follows the debate on how to reform them, which new rights should be considered and what political structure should be set up that will take the present situation into account. The conclusion is that this last question must guarantee a balance between the interests of those holding private rights and the rights that stem from the common heritage nature of water resources.

Access to water in African cities
Mwanza wa Mwanza

Privatizing water management in the African cities comes up against a number of problems: lack of supply to meet the demand created by the growth of urban populations, the low level of water treatment, and the repercussions on public health. What policy should be adopted to ensure access to water, which is a fundamental right?

Water security in Southern Africa
Jo-Ansie van Wyk

Many countries in Southern Africa share common water resources. This makes water a priceless strategic resource which can be used to strengthen co-operation for development and security between States, or to exercise pressure on neighbours, especially those downstream. The Southern African States are aware of what is at stake and the absence of international regulations in this field, and have based their mutual security on water resources: their diplomacy is based on this reality. This provides
the background for the large projects and co-operation agreements signed within the framework of SADC - for example the LHWP and the ZACOPLAN.

**Water, source of life and conflict among the Andean communities of Ecuador**
*Aline Arroyo Castillo*

In Ecuador, water is the source of life for the Andean population. If it is unfairly shared or unwisely used, it can lead to serious, even violent conflict between the communities. While, in theory, the State is the only trustee of this resource, its everyday management belongs to the local communities, non-governmental organizations and some specialized institutions. Collaboration between these three bodies has made it possible, among other things, to develop irrigation projects and the sharing of water between the communities of Yurac Yacu and the Batán Puela. When confronted with the inevitable problems of water sharing and the management of this resource, it has been necessary, not only to take into account the juridical and technical aspects of the question but to be aware of the knowledge of the indigenous populations, their history and their long-standing concern over water.

**Water is like gold in Peru**
*Étienne Durt*

Peru is divided into several natural regions each of which has its own specific problems. On the side of the country facing the Pacific, the solution has been to build large dams which have had negative technical and social effects. On the Atlantic side the pollution of rivers by mining industries and towns has not been satisfactorily resolved. On the other hand, the micro-dams have been a success. In the region of Lake Titicaca, the rehabilitation of traditional techniques for using water resources has had good results. It is thus necessary to develop a genuine ecological policy to tackle the problems of water.

**Water as a public or private good ? The State, local communities and the multinationals**
*Joseph P. Thiery Amougou*

The debate on water management by the public or private sector is in full swing. Since water has entered into the market logic, privatization is on the increase everywhere, in different forms, including concessionary terms. The dilemma lies in combining the view of water as a natural heritage with economic criteria governing distribution and consumption. Various hypotheses are put forward. The increasing power of the multinationals causes great concern for the future.

**Access to water in the Sahel with the advent of privatization**
*Mariam Sow*

It is said that water will become one of the main sources of conflict during the 21st century. But this conflict is already a source of conflict for the Sahelian populations and has been for a long time. The issue is now exacerbated by the proposal to privatize water. While the public management of this resource is weak, is privatization the only alternative ? Would it ensure the population’s better access to water resources ? In other words, what social, economic and political benefits would it bring people ? Far from being just a mere rhetorical exercise, such questions require : meticulous research into the present water situation in this region which is threatened by the advance of the Sahara desert, as well as into the prospects and dangers of privatization, not forgetting the role of governments and of the populations concerned.

**The war over water in Cochabamba**
In Bolivia, like everywhere else in Latin America, the question of water is very much linked to the application of neo-liberal policies. More than ever at the service of private investors, governments are deaf to the demands of their people and do not hesitate to suppress them, sometimes in blood and violence, in order to defend the interests of transnational corporations. Confronted by problems like the rise in water prices, the lack of supply services and the fraudulent legal manipulation on the part of the authorities, Bolivians opted for civil disobedience, in its many forms, in order to make their voice heard and defend their rights. The case of the citizens of Cochabamba shows that it is not necessary, to solve social and economic problems, to submit to the diktats of the international financial institutions.

Troubled Waters. World Bank disasters along Kenya’s Tana river
Korina Horta

Almost everywhere in the countries of the South, the World Bank is financing large-scale projects concerned with the production of energy, agricultural development and environmental management. In most of these cases, these projects are counter-productive because of the lack of efficient coordination among the different sections of the bank concerned with the drawing up of the project, the lack of feasibility studies that can be relied on, the poor management of resources on the part of the local authorities, etc. This is the background for the construction, in 1985, of dams all along the river Tana, in Kenya, including the Kiambere dam, the Bura irrigation project and the project for protecting primates in this region. The effects of these initiatives have been negative from the start, ecologically, agriculturally and socially. It is thus necessary to carry out an objective evaluation and a complete reorientation of World Bank policies.

Hydro-electric dams: does the end justify the means?
Eduardo Tamayo G.

Using the pretext of promoting fast industrialization, the countries of the South have been subjected, during the last decades, to an amazing proliferation in the construction of hydro-electric dams. Taken all together, apart from their poor performance, these projects have, inter alia, destroyed eco-systems, flooded of land and displaced populations. As a result, there is increasing awareness among people in the South of the need to protect the environment. Such is the case of Honduras and Salvador which, after having set up an organization to defend their interests have successfully countered the arguments of governmental institutions and international financiers who continue to insist in their support for the construction of hydro-electric dams.

Exploiting the “blue gold” water of Lesotho
Falmata Liman

There are a number of Southern African States that have in 70 per cent of the disposable water in common. They are aware of the problems of political stability and economic development linked to water management and have signed an agreement to ensure fair shares for all and a judicious use of the resource. This is the framework for the collaboration between the Republic of South Africa and Lesotho, which is based on a huge project of dam construction (Lesotho Highlands Water Project), with the aim of supplying water and electricity to the two countries and to promote their respective development. However, the completion of the project has shown up its limits and numerous problems which had not been foreseen at the start. For example, damage has been caused to the natural environment and local populations have been displaced, while there have been financial difficulties and bad management on the part of those responsible for the project. It should also be noted that, because of its power and prestige, the Republic of South Africa intends to take the best part of the
available resources, at little cost to itself and above all to the detriment of its partner, Lesotho.

Water, a vital resource and the cause of conflict at the beginning of the new millennium
Zelmys M. Dominguez Cortina

Water is the source of life and a cause of conflict in the world. It is unequally divided round the world and the demand for it is increasing, both for consumer use as well as to satisfy agricultural and industrial requirements. Its management is the cause of many conflicts, especially in regions where water is scarce, as is the case in North Africa and the Middle East. Many experts believe that it will be increasingly at the centre of national and international debate during this new millennium. Despite the “Water Decade” proclaimed by the United Nations and the different initiatives that have been taken on the matter, there is still a long way to go in order to ensure improvement in water quality, an appropriate environment and a fair sharing of the resource.

The Faraka dam: the problem of sharing water between India and Bangladesh
Nazrul Islam

Despite the fact that they have large water courses in common, the countries of the Bengal delta do not agree on how the water should be shared. The construction of the Farakka dam on the Ganges and its virtually unilateral management by India, as well as the ecological damage that has resulted, has revealed this tension very clearly. Water in the region is often administered by politicians and technocrats, but there should also be participation by the populations concerned, not to mention a need to respect nature and the environment. There ought to be a massive dissemination of information, while a permanent exchange of opinions concerning water should form the basis for a bottom-up approach to the question.

The conflict over water in the Jordan basin
Maghfour El-Hassane

The river Jordan has long been a source of conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis. Both peoples belong to a region in which hydraulic resources are scarce. Co-operation in water management between the two is clearly indispensable but it has not taken place. Most projects are carried out unilaterally, causing damage to the other party. It is thus important to re-examine not only the distribution but also the utilization of this precious resource. Such an approach requires historical research and an analysis of the current power relationships in the region, as well as the legitimate expectations of the population.