

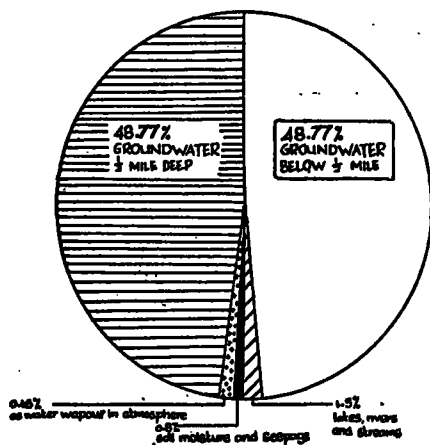
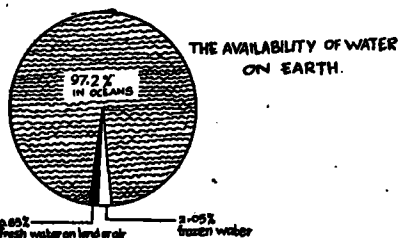
FEATURES

'Everything Living Is Created From Water'

Yahia Abdel Mageed

That quote from the Koran captures the incredible importance of water. Without this vital resource, there is no life. Man cannot survive without water, nor can he grow or develop. Water is the means through which mankind can banish hunger, drive industry, develop energy, destroy disease, promote trade and transport, enrich recreation and much more.

The amount of water on the planet is fixed. It cannot be increased like timber, nor can it be diminished like coal. While the supply of usable water has remained constant, the demand for it has increased enormously. In recent years as the world's population has increased (and experts say the population will double again by the end of the century), so has the demand for water accelerated in agriculture, in industry, in domestic use. Water is essential for development. Unless action is taken now, what has been a critical shortage in some areas of the world and an unconscionable waste in others will create a global crisis.



Water is a basic resource, but it is not always easy to come by. Only a fortunate few (one-fifth of the world population) can get water simply by turning a tap. For the remaining four-fifths among them Indian villagers, nomads in the African Sahel, and inhabitants of the teeming agglomerations that ring the great cities of Latin America and other regions—securing water is part of the daily struggle to exist. When contaminated, which happens all too often, water can be a source of disease and death.

Power-intensive modern technology with its need for coolants (water) and waste disposal (more water) tend to worsen scarcities. In heavily industrial areas growing needs of households, agriculture, industry and public sanitation often compete.

There is an urgent need for more water in agriculture. Only about 18 per cent of all cultivated land is currently under irrigation; yet it produces between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of all agricultural output. But more irrigation is not always the only, or even the best, answer. Since the total amount of water in the world is fixed, added supplies can only come from better distribution, greater efficiency in use, more economical application of available supplies, and above all, good water management at all levels, local, national and regional.

The United Nations Water Conference which will be held in Argentina from March 14 to 25, 1977, will focus attention of policy makers the world over on water needs that are likely to arise between now and the year 2000; the steps that can be taken to meet them; and finally, the difficulties likely to be experienced by those who fail to make adequate provision.

This Conference is a direct outgrowth of the international community's concern over the economic future of the world, and could provide a new intellectual and operational threshold from which greatly expanded attacks on the world's water problems could be launched.

Mr. Abdel Mageed who was Minister of Irrigation and Hydro-electric Power of the Sudan for five years has wide experience in water matters, serving recently as Chairman of the Technical Committee formed by the Arab League for the dispute on the Euphrates River between Syria and Iraq. And he was an executive member of the Permanent Joint Technical Commission for the Nile Waters from 1960 to 1969. He is the Secretary-General of the Conference.

That is why the United Nations Water Conference planned for March 1977, in Argentina is of utmost importance. When the Conference convenes in March with delegates from some 150 nations present, the international community will be given an opportunity to avert a growing crisis which threatens the quality of life for future generations.

Consider the situation today :

- * One-fifth of the world's city dwellers and three quarters of its rural people do not have reasonably safe supplies of drinking water. In many countries less than one-half of the urban population and less than one-tenth of the rural population are served with an adequate and safe water supply.
- * Groundwater supplies are being exhausted, while both surface and groundwater sources are deteriorating in many areas.
- * Spreading industrialization, the greater use of energy and increased agricultural activity are causing progressive and chronic degradation of the quality of available water by

the use of toxic compounds and other pollutants.

- * Increasing, unplanned concentration of population and industry in large urban areas strains water supply. This leads to problems of waste disposal which in turn endangers environmental health.
- * Water use is often needlessly inefficient and wasteful.
- * Purchase of expensive technology for water development (to compensate for its shortage) is straining inadequate resources in many regions.
- * Conflicts about rights and priorities among users intensify as the demand for available water accelerates.

In theory, the global stock of water could meet greatly expanded human needs. Unconventional water supplies—such as desalination, evaporation suppression, even the transportation of glaciers—could increase the world's water resources. In reality, water is inequitably distributed among peoples and countries and unconventional water supplies are priced beyond the means of many nations

which need them most. Water, frustratingly, tends to be available in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or in the wrong quality. And in one way or another, all societies are affected, however rich, however poor.

Indispensable Stepping-Stone

All the great challenges facing humanity, all the aspirations of a majority of mankind for a better life with a greater measure of human dignity, justice and security require a greater use of water. It is impossible to think of raising the living standards of our people without providing adequate and good quality water for basic human existence and survival. The bold resolves of the Conferences on Environment, Food, Human Settlement and the world's desire for a New International Economic Order will come to nothing unless concurrent steps are being taken to assure the growing supplies of clean water to meet these challenging demands and requirements.

The most obvious need is for drinking water for people and live-

stock. Those who are accustomed to drawing their water by turning a tap do not sometimes realize what a precious commodity water is to others. More than three-fourths of the rural population in developing countries have no access to adequate supplies of reasonably good quality water to meet their essential human needs. Lack of water and poor quality water are the source of some of the worst health hazards to which mankind continues to be exposed. To permit such widespread conditions to continue would be a slur on our civilization.

To the need for drinking water must be added the need of water for food. Only a relatively small part of the world's productive acreage consists of irrigated land and the potential of even this small area is not fully obtained. It is significant that the UN Water Conference and the UN Conference on Desertification will be held in the same year. They are complementary to each other. Together they can help the world make a new start on its most basic resource problem: the management of land and water under conditions of scarcity and of rapid population growth.

In the context of the energy and oil crisis in the world today, hydro-power assumes special significance in many developing countries and there is a lot of untapped potential which awaits development.

Another priority claimant is industry which needs water both for cooling and for cleaning. The thirst of industries for water can be gauged by the fact that in highly developed countries the water needs of industry often outstrip both agriculture and household use.

Such vast needs can only be met by a major effort of governments and the international community to mobilize the resources required to tackle the job of water development. The Conference should help such a comprehensive approach. It would be well advised to establish a perspective of perhaps 15 to 25 years for the accomplishment of the goals it sets.

The dimensions of the effort needed are truly staggering. The cost of



Water is everywhere the key to human health and ultimately life itself. Whether it is polluted or clean water such as this in which the boy is wading is the only source of drinking water for him and his many brothers in the developing world.

supplying adequate water of reasonable quality to all who need it has been estimated at \$60 billion. Requirements in the agricultural sector are likely to run even higher.

But such immense programmes require unprecedented efforts to turn out the engineers, geologists, administrators, extension workers and others in large numbers at a rate much faster than in the past for successful implementation.

We cannot rely solely on new water resources to meet our greatly increased water needs. Over use or "mining" of underground sources must be avoided. Fortunately there is immense potential in water savings through more efficient delivery and use, and through the reclaiming of streams, lakes and rivers which once produced clean water but have since become polluted or gone out of use.

One consideration that makes me hopeful that we will prove equal to the task is that water represents the point at which all our international programmes for the betterment of mankind meet: the need for food production, for a better life for the poorest population groups and for a head-on effort to restore a healthy balance to the total environment in which we live. I see the United Nations Water Conference as an indispensable stepping-stone to a better life.



Typical of the crisis in developing countries, is this picture of the parched earth in the Sahel, where persistent drought together with higher prices for imported grain and other basic requirements have compounded their basic structural problems.