HOW DOES GLOBALISATION AFFECT YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO WATER?1

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BACKGROUND

One of the key issues emerging in our time is access to clean water. The World Health Organisation estimates that 12 percent of the world’s population consumes 86 percent of available water, leaving 1.1 billion people (one-sixth of world population) without access to adequate water supplies (WHO 2000). This is aggravated by the fact that 2.4 billion people lack access to adequate sanitation facilities (ADB 2003).2

It is estimated that by 2025 water shortages could affect two out of three people globally, with developing nations most vulnerable (WHO 2000). As young people make up a higher proportion of the population in developing countries relative to developed countries, they are disproportionately at risk.

Access to clean water and adequate sanitation is important to all human beings for environmental, social and economic reasons3 (TearFund n.d.). The seriousness of the global water issue was recognised by UN member states as part of the Millennium Development Goals (September 2000), where one of the key goals is to halve the proportion of people who are unable to access affordable safe drinking water by 2015. This was re-affirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 where commitments were made to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

The many processes of globalisation have significant potential to strengthen an individual’s right to water, as a result of both better technology and delivery mechanisms. However, this has not always eventuated as global trends toward commodification and privatisation of water supplies appears to have further limited accessibility. The consequence being that the obligations of nations to ensure the right of individuals to access clean and affordable water is severely threatened.

For the most part, young people have been left out of the decision-making processes surrounding water accessibility. As young people will inherit the earth from the
current decision-makers, it is of vital importance that their voice in the management and distribution of water be heard. This chapter aims another key step in correcting this lack of representation.

KEY PLAYERS

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs): affect young people’s access to water in two ways. Firstly, by promoting an export-led growth model as a means of poverty alleviation. This encourages the export of water intensive cash crops in order to earn foreign exchange. Secondly, the influence of IFIs in public sector reform is maintained primarily through policy advice, loan conditions and direct funding (Grusky 2001).4

WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION (WTO): is a major player in the water debate as it was one of the first institutions to promote that liberalisation of services “would be just as efficiency-inducing as for goods” (Dunkley 2000). The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), an agreement within the WTO, attempts to tap into the services market including water. The services market is now estimated to represented 61 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) (Friends of the Earth International 2001).

GOVERNMENTS OF HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES: act as a source of pressure for liberalisation of water provision services. The US and the governments of the European Union are home to the world’s largest water corporations, as well as being over-represented within the IFIs. The influence of wealthy nations in the domestic issues of developing countries was acknowledged by the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, when he said, “too many rich countries are using their aid programs to satisfy domestic interest” (Wolfensohn 2000).

WATER CORPORATIONS: including Vivendi SA and Suez Lyonnaise desEaux. These two French multinational corporations dominate the sector and provide water to more than 100 million people in over 120 countries. Currently, only 5 percent of water utilities around the globe are privately owned. However, such transnational corporations (TNCs) are setting the reform agenda in this area. As Finger (2001) noted, “…TNCs can now also play a significant role in the international political scene by means of partnerships and other governance mechanisms”.

WATER FORUMS AND COUNCILS: such as the World Water Council, World Water Forum and the Global Water Partnership. These groups represent partnerships between governments, major water corporations and non-government organisations (NGOs). Though such organisations have the potential to improve accessibility, they appear focused on a privatisation agenda (Grusky 2001).

MAIN ISSUES

1. POLLUTION

Young people’s access to clean water is often limited by high polluting industrial and agricultural practices. In many cases, economic globalisation has forced some countries to grow crops for export or to host large industrial activity. As a result of poor regulation, increased pollution places a huge strain on water resources and fragile ecosystems.

“At the moment due to large development projects initiated by the various multinational companies huge water pollution is taking place in Sri Lanka… This will become a major threat to the future of youth and for future generations.” Sampath Ariyasena and Sandun Thudgala, Youth For a Better World, IYP Submission, 2002: Sri Lanka
Damage caused to freshwater ecosystems greatly reduces both the quality and quantity of water availability (Finlayson et al 1999). Currently, more than half of the world’s major rivers are “seriously depleted and polluted” (UNEP 2003:153). In large part this is caused by the fact that 90 percent of wastewater in developing countries is discharged into rivers and streams without any treatment (UNDP 2001).

“The Ok Tedi gold and copper mine in Papua New Guinea is one of the largest copper mines in the world. The mine dumps 80 000 tonnes of mine tailings (waste) straight into the Ok Tedi river every day. 70-90 per cent of the fish in the Ok Tedi River have already died. Some 30-40 000 people living downstream of the mine have had their livelihoods and lifestyles permanently altered as a result of river dumping of the mine waste.” (Ruth Pune, Celor, and Andrew Stanton, Mineral Policy Institute, IYP Submission, 2002: Papua New Guinea and Australia)

2. PRIVATISATION AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER

If water is only viewed as an economic good and thus a tradable commodity, its price and availability will be dependent on the vagaries of the domestic and international markets (Gleick et al 2002). The experience of nations that have privatised their water services indicates that the theoretical efficiency gains rarely eventuate and in fact we see prices rise. For example, in Nouakchott (Mauritas), low-income families now pay up to a fifth of their household budgets on water alone, while in Cochabamba (Bolivia) water prices doubled overnight after privatisation (Marcus et al 2002; Schultz 2002). In the poor township of Fort Beaufort (South Africa), water prices increased by 600 percent between 1994 and 1996 following privatisation (Afrol News 2002). These increases are driven by attempts to gain monopoly profits through “full cost recovery” in both pricing and distribution (Gleick et al 2002).

Further, a World Bank commissioned report found that “efficiency is not significantly different in private companies than in public companies” when examining water utilities across Asia and the Pacific (Estache & Rossi 2000).

Partly as a consequence of these incidents, the Cochabamba Declaration (2000) referred to water as a fundamental human right, stating it should not be commodified, privatised or traded for commercial purposes.

“Throughout this long history Sri Lanka has been an agricultural country and water has always been treated with the understanding that it should be freely available to all beings, not only to all human beings, the rich and the poor but also to other living beings, the animals and plants. Humans don’t have any right to name the water as an economic commodity…water has only a life not a price.” (Youth For a Better World, IYP Submission, 2002: Sri Lanka)

Despite such evidence, privatisation and a push towards full cost recovery is often a loan conditionality of IFIs such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2001).

3. INCREASED INEQUALITY IN WATER ACCESS

“Poor people including youths have limited access to water... young people are mostly dependants. Bottled water is hardly at their reach. Most only buy water when they are in crisis (illness). Most drink just anything they could come by. Young people’s access to water is greatly reduced when it comes to user-pays systems.” Nkeng Pius, National Development Foundation, IYP Submission, 2002: Cameroon

Such experience confirms full cost recovery means that water is provided only to those who can afford to pay market rates. This was put succinctly by the Chief Executive
of Biwater: “the issues we consider include who the end users are and whether they are able to afford the water tariffs. From a social point of view, (some projects may be) viable but unfortunately from a private sector point of view they are not” (Zimbabwe Independent 1999).

This becomes particularly relevant in the process of distribution, as seen in the installation of pre-payment metres for water provision. Water supply is terminated when the pre-paid card’s balance depletes, so that the provider receives complete payment for water provided. Such pre-paid metres were outlawed in the UK in 1988, but remain in KwaZulu-Natal province (South Africa) by British companies.

Full cost recovery also means that corporations have greater incentive to supply water to urban areas where the transport of water can be achieved at a lower cost relative to non-urban areas that “lack the economies of scale” (World Bank 2001). As a result privatisation only involves urban areas. This effectively ends subsidies provided to rural areas:

“The IMF and the World Bank have concentrated their support to urban areas such as Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu and neglected rural areas where the demand for water is most important…”
Francis G. Anyona, Ikonzo Musanda, Self Help Group, IYP Submission, 2002: Kenya

“The World Bank made a private operator a precondition to the loans for the Melamchi tunnel, a $320 million project to provide the (Kathmandu) valley with water… The valley where 5 percent of the population lives, will benefit from about two thirds of all water and sanitation sector investments during this period, meaning that the needs of almost 22 million Nepali will not be met in the coming decade.” Young Water Action Team, IYP Submission, 2002: The Netherlands

The “social good” aspects of water cannot be fully protected if ownership rights are private. The basic goals of any water provision commitment (publicly or privately) should be to meet explicitly the needs of under-served communities through an expansion of access to water or wastewater services. Poor urban and rural populations have historically been under-served because they lack political power or representation (Gleick et al 2002). With this in mind, it is time to consider a re-regulation of the water sector.

4. LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY

Many concerns raised by young people with regard to water privatisation relate to the issue of control. The World Bank argues a positive outcome of the privatisation of water is the ‘decentralisation’ and transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions (Finger & Allouche 2001). The belief is that the move from central government authorities to subordinate or quasi-independent government organisations and/or the private sector allows for greater response to local needs. While such arguments seem acceptable in theory, they raise concerns about the issue of public interest. For example, the current Bechtel case against Bolivia being heard by the International Centre For the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) demonstrates how public participation can actually be removed from major decisions.

The situation is further exacerbated by the possibility of internationally traded water that may occur as corporations search for higher prices abroad. Turkey, for example, has recently proposed a contract with Israel under which water would be transferred from the Manavgat River, with tankers or giant bags carrying the water to an Israeli coastal port, where treatment and distribution would occur (Ekstract 2000; Turner
2001). Such a situation is likely if GATS is ratified, as it has provisions that appear to limit decisions on local purchasing preferences. Such provisions not only risk sovereignty, but also exclude young people from the decision-making process.

5. PUBLIC V. PRIVATE: MINIMAL PUBLIC SAVINGS

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) asserts that privatisation frees up government spending for direct poverty interventions (ADB 2000). However, many experiences indicate that the opposite occurs as the privatisation of water provision services is unlikely to occur if there exists little current investment in infrastructure.

It is here that we see a debt cycle emerging. To make these utilities attractive to the private sector, governments borrow to improve infrastructure. The returns received by the government are not sufficient for full cost recovery. Thus we see examples, such as Deli, were the government paid for most of the infrastructure and the corporations (in this case Suez-Degremont) saw most of the profits, prompting former World Bank employee and leading academic Vandana Shiva to state that the “Deli water privatisation is a clear example of how private-public partnerships in water amount to public cost and private gain” (Shiva n.d.)

6. PRIVATE SECTOR INEFFICIENCIES

Despite promises of private sector efficiency, evidence indicates that this is rarely delivered with regards to water provision. This in part is driven by the fact that water provision is a natural monopoly. This is even reflected in the global market, were two firms, Vivendi and Suez, and often in joint venture, control over two-thirds of the private water market (Hall 2002).

Corruption is another reason why the efficiencies are not achieved. A World Bank report noted “the privatisation process can create corrupt incentives... firms that make pay-offs may expect not only to win the contract or the privatisation auction but also to obtain inefficient subsidies, monopoly benefits, and regulatory laxness in the future” (Rose-Ackerman 1996). In July 2001, Alain Maetz, a senior manager within Vivendi, was convicted for bribery after attempting to influence the tendering process for a wastewater treatment plant in Milan (PSIRU database 2000).

KEY RIGHTS AFFECTED

“Water is a basic human right. Hence it should be accessible to all. By considering the values of globalisation such as economic growth and increased global trade, it will mean privatising water resources and treating it as a commodity to be bought, sold, distributed, managed and traded for profit. By privatizing water in such way, will mean violating the fundamental rights of access to water by all categories of people.”

Francis G. Anyona, Ikonzo Musanda, Self Help Group, IYP Submission, 2002: Kenya

The trend towards commodification of water has been closely paralleled with an alternative discourse of enshrining water as a human right. This move has only recently gained wider acceptance when the UN Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights took the unprecedented step in 2002 of agreeing to the General Comment No. 15 on the Right to Water.

A General Comment is an interpretation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The 145 countries that have ratified the ICESCR are now obliged to gradually ensure access to clean water, equitably and without discrimination (Capdevilla 2002). The Committee declared: “Water is a limited
The right to water was already present in the international human rights framework, but was not always stated explicitly. Both the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25.1) and the later ICESCR imply this right. Additionally, access to water is explicitly secured under the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Article 14.2): “State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure... to such women the right... to enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.”

The right to water is also explicitly mentioned in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24.2(c)), which requires that states take appropriate measures “to combat disease and malnutrition... through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into account the dangers and risks of environmental pollution”.

The General Comment on the Right to Water acknowledges that, “The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realisation of other human rights” (Article 1). It goes on to specify how the right to water is essential to secure the rights to food, health, work and to take part in cultural life (Article 6). In Article 29, the right to water is linked to the right to health and to adequate housing. With regards to the right to education, Article 16(b) requires that states take steps to ensure that “children are not prevented from enjoying their human rights due to the lack of adequate water in educational institutions and households or through the burden of collecting water.”

Multilateral institutions also have an obligation to consider the right to water in their policies and programs. Section VI, Article 1.60 of the General Comment declares, “the international financial institutions... should take into account the right to water in their lending policies, credit agreements, structural adjustment programs and other development projects.”

International trade agreements organised through multilateral organisations, such as the WTO and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), can lead to challenges of national laws and policies. Hence the state’s ability to respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to water may be constrained by international trade laws. For example, in 1991 the Canadian government banned bulk water exports; however the Canadian government is now being sued for $220 million by Sun Belt Water Inc. of Santa Barbara, California because the ban on bulk water exports contravenes NAFTA agreements (Barlow 2001).

Young people’s ability to exercise the right to water is potentially threatened when water is treated as an economic good. Article 27 of General Comment states: “Any payment for water services has to be based on the principle of equity, ensuring that these services, whether privately or publicly provided, are affordable for all, including socially disadvantaged groups.” In a full user pays scenario, water corporations can potentially threaten this right.

Ultimately however, it remains the responsibility of states to protect their citizens’ right to water. Article 23 of the General Comment affirms that, “the obligation to protect requires State parties to prevent third parties from interfering in any way with the enjoyment of the right to water. Third parties include individuals, groups, corporations and other entities as well as agents acting under their authority”.

natural resource and a public good fundamental for life and health” (General Comment 15, Article 1).
The General Comment on the Right to Water is of significant value to future generations. Article 11 states: “water should be treated as a social and cultural good, and not primarily as an economic good. The manner of the realisation of the right to water must also be sustainable, ensuring that the right can be realised for present and future generations.”

It is interesting to note that the final version of the UN General Comment omits an opinion on privatisation, so as not to “politicise the issue” (Capdevila 2002). However, there was certainly a strong debate about the issue as some members of the Committee argued that privatisation had resulted in treating water as a commodity that is sold to the highest bidder, whilst others argued that privatisation would be the means of ‘mass salvation against want of water’ (Capdevila 2002). Despite the lack of closure surrounding the issue of water privatisation, the Committee concluded that: “the right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, affordable, physically accessible, safe and adequate water for personal and domestic uses” (Capdevila 2002). Thus, it is now up to UN member states to act upon the General Comment and enshrine water as a human right in their domestic legislation.

“Humans don’t have any right to name water as an economic commodity... it doesn’t have any production cost but a heritage of nature; water has only life not a price. In the efforts for global economic growth and the trading of water, not only poor women, children and youth (lose)... their free right to use water.”
Sampath Ariyasena and Sandun Thudgala, Youth For a Better World, IYP Submission, 2002; Sri Lanka

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**GOVERNMENTS.** We urge governments to:

10.1 enshrine the right to water in domestic legislation. This should be led by the 145 nations that have ratified the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adhering to the General Comment on the Right to Water.

10.2 ensure that everyone has access to safe and secure drinking water and sanitation facilities equitably and without discrimination. This requires that governments take action to avoid inequitable price increases or the adoption of “full cost recovery” as a strategy within water investment.

10.3 consult with all stakeholders (including young people) before considering placing water as part of their GATS commitments. Article 36 of the General Comment compels states to “ensure that their actions as members of international organisations take due account of the right to water.”

10.4 ensure independent monitoring and enforcement of water quality standards.

10.5 allow greater debate over the issue of water privatisation. This involves greater transparency and wider representation in dealings with IFIs as well as with water corporations.

10.6 with particular reference to high-income nations, ensure more aid be directed towards increased development assistance for water which is not linked to privatisation.

**MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS.** We believe that multilateral institutions should:

10.7 halt privatisation as a condition of loans and reconsider the wider issue of encouraging private sector involvement in the water industry. The use of conditionality is contrary to the explicit statement agreed by the Bonn Conference on Water in December 2001 that privatisation should not be applied as a condition of finance by any donors.
10.8 ensure all stakeholders are properly consulted in the formulation of new water policies (including any potential privatisation) to avoid the mass displacement of Indigenous peoples as has occurred in the past.

10.9 identify the difference between appropriate and inappropriate subsidies. Before demands for the elimination of all subsidies on water provision are made, there needs to be an understanding of which subsidies are essential for the provision of universal access to water and which are merely draining the public purse.

10.10 consider the alternatives to privatisation, for a change in ownership is not the solution to the water crisis. For example, in Debrecen (Hungary) the city council rejected privatisation and decided to create a corporatised entity separate from the municipality, in which the business plan aimed to cover all costs without generating unnecessary profits. The cost of financing the important investments proved to be far lower under public provision, partly due to the use of local suppliers (Hall 2001).

10.11 release all documents surrounding proposed privatisation programs and disputes that arise. All issues that affect young people’s future to such an extent need to be open to wider representation.

10.12 with specific reference to the WTO, reconsider the supposed benefits that result from trade in water. All non-economic (social, environmental and cultural) benefits of water must be internalised in these considerations.

10.13 with specific reference to the WTO, consider the Bonn recommendation and consult all stakeholders when making decisions concerning trade in water. The WTO’s arbitration board must be made a publicly accessible institution with representation from all stakeholders including young people.

CORPORATIONS. It is recommended that corporations:

10.14 have a transparent and honest tendering processes. There must be an end to the practice of offering lowest price in the tender process then attempting to alter the deal to suit its financial interests after the contract is awarded. This is a process known as ‘dive-bidding’.

10.15 need to promote greater debate surrounding their dealings with governments and reduce any tendency to use libel laws to suppress research about their work.

10.16 change industrial and agricultural activities that account for 25 and 65 percent respectively of global water use. According to recommendations by UNEP, the right to water can be met by shifting to more water-efficient crops, changing industrial processes away from water-intensive production and using existing technologies such as drip irrigation as is the case in Israel and rainwater harvesting as is the case in Austin, Texas (UNEP 2003).

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS. We recommend NGOs:

10.17 educate and advocate the right to access water at all levels of society. NGOs should be encouraged to disseminate their findings and increase global awareness of water issues.

10.18 work to monitor the dealings of governments and corporations, ensuring that they are accountable for their actions. The General Comment on the Right to Water provides a tool for civil society to hold governments accountable for ensuring equitable access to water.
10.19 With specific reference to youth-focused NGOs, play a large part in recommending policies to be implemented in the water reform process. For example, the Pacific Youth Environment Network has issued a set of policy recommendations with regards to water that include catchment management.

**INDIVIDUALS.** We believe that individuals should:

10.20 With reference to young people, seek to be involved in the decision-making processes surrounding the protection and regulation, supply and management of water. As stated in the Bolivian Cochabamba Declaration in 2000: “Water is best protected by local communities and citizens, who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water... People’s of the earth are the only vehicle to promote democracy and save water.”

10.21 Participate in easing the global water crisis by changing certain household practices. For example, finding and stopping wasteful leaks, recycling wastewater and installing water efficient devices such as shower heads and dual flush toilets as is the case in Australia.

**CASE STUDY: BOLIVIA**

The case of water privatisation in Bolivia illustrates the effects of water commodification on communities. In 1999, Bolivia’s government agreed to privatise the public water system as a condition for receiving a US$25 million loan from the World Bank. Only one bid was considered and the utility was turned over to Aguas del Tunari, a subsidiary of a conglomerate led by the US engineering giant, Bechtel. The provider had an absolute monopoly over water supplies and, as a result, all water required a permit to access, including community wells and the collection of rain (Barlow 2001). Within weeks, the company doubled and then tripled local water rates. Families earning less than $60 per month had water bills as high as $20 (Barlow 2001). Many citizens responded with a series of protests, shutting the city down for a week, and refusing to pay. Military forces seeking to stop the protests used tear gas and live ammunition to disperse the protesters, killing a 17-year-old boy (The Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life 2000) and injuring more than 100 others. Eventually the government and the private water company were forced to back down, suspending the contract and rolling back the water hikes (Barlow 2001).

However, in November 2002, the company filed legal action against Bolivia. Bechtel is now suing South America’s poorest state for US$25 million for the loss of profits that the company would have recouped had water remained privatised. The company filed the case with the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a private tribunal administered by the World Bank. Thus, neither the citizens nor media of Bolivia can participate in or witness the proceedings. Despite petitions to the tribunal from Bolivian citizens and public interest organisations, those most affected are being excluded from participation in Bechtel’s lawsuit.

Such examples highlight the need for governments to enshrine water as a public good and human right.
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Studies revealed that out of 40 IMF loans approved in 2000, 12 included conditions imposing water privatisation and/or cost recovery requirements (Grusky, 2001).

For example, wetlands play a significant role in ensuring ecological biodiversity; they also store carbon, act as a natural water purifier and play a part in flood control. However, due to human activities, about 50 percent of the world’s wetlands have been lost during the 20th century (Finlayson, et al. 1999).

Bechtel is suing Bolivia for the potential profits it claims would have been made from the water privatisation scheme had the price rise protests not led to its departure from the city of Cochabamba in April 2000.

See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (Sixth session, 1991) General Comment 4, the right to adequate housing, Article (1)(1) of the Covenant.

For example El-Hadji Guisse, representing Senegal (where water services have been privatised).

For example Jack Moss, representing Suez.