On The Path To World Peace: Learning To Conscientiously Share The Supply Of Fresh Water

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ABSTRACT

On a global level, water has become a commodity that is no longer taken for granted. Whether it is due to determining the rights to water, or determining the channeling of water with dams to create reservoirs for consumption, water violence has become a reality. Many believe that intelligence is correlated with water consumption, and that six to eight glasses of water a day contribute to cognitive functioning of individuals (Garchik, 1999; Howard-Jones, 2008). Significant contention had developed between users of water for agriculture, industry, and households. Such environmental conflict situations tend to be both challenging and convoluted. These situations are affected by the difference in priorities of the stakeholders and resource management decisions (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). As a result, solutions can be quite complicated and difficult to resolve.

Keywords: Water Consumption; Environmental Conflict Situations

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Water Wars or Water Woes? Water Management as Conflict Management was the title of a lecture presented by Goeff Dabelko, Director of Environmental Change & Security Manager at the Woodrow Wilson Center (2008). Dabelko explained that 97% of the world's water is either salty or brackish, and of the remaining 3%, only 1% is available for use. The availability of clean drinking water and its positive effect on cognitive development for school children as well as adults has been a concern (Garchik, 1999; Howard-Jones, 2008).

In *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, author Shiva quotes Ismael Sheragldin, the Vice President of the World Bank, when he stated that the wars of the upcoming century will be fought, not over oil, but over water (Winder, 2007/2008). Shiva reasons that the very survival of the human race would be in danger if people lost their free access to the use of water. Not only is water necessary for agriculture and human consumption, it is also an integral part of numerous sacred cultural celebrations.

WATER WARS

Thus, the scarcity of water has been the cause of conflict between many countries. In these interactions between countries, there has been a great deal of highly political verbal hostility. Fortunately, this rarely escalates into physical wars. There is a vital need to effectively communicate the issues to the stakeholders who are affected by these problems and work toward conflict resolution. During the last twenty or thirty years, states Dabelko (2008), there has been increased cooperation between the disagreeing parties. This is a good sign that disputing groups are engaging in advocacy and inquiry, rather than simply advocating for their personal needs. Water conflict can be minimized if the peoples of the world accept that water is a shared commodity to be shared by all, not privatized by industry and bought and sold to the highest bidders (Winder, 2007-2008).

Egypt is significantly affected by the Nile River and the availability of its water. Other countries affected by the Nile would like to harness the river and develop hydroelectric power, but Egypt refuses to go along with this.

However, in order to work in harmony with the other countries, Egypt is involved in the Nile Basin Initiative. This group examines the energy, ecosystem and household needs for water from the Nile River. Rights to the water and needs for the water require sharing. This group is still working in the developmental context.

Water violence is a reality. There is much contention between users of water for agriculture, industry, and households. This is due primarily to the incompetent governance of the available water resources. When countries create dams to develop hydroelectric power, change the access to water, or impact the freshwater ecosystems, what might have once been small internal conflicts become worldwide disputes (Conca, 2008-2009).

This is just as true of California as it is of Darfur, which has lost 30% of its water in recent years due to environmental shifting of arable land. Privatization and access to water has created major turmoil in Bolivia, due largely to politics. In order to mine the rich deposits of lead, silver, and zinc ore, almost two million cubic feet of water, free to the mining companies, is used each day. This is in a drought prone area of the country, and has affected the nearby arid tableland, threatening severe drought and a negative impact on the population (Weinberg, 2010). The government of Bolivian president Evo Morales has supported environmentally destructive industries, as the people try to hold onto their water rights. The government argues that the mining can help to improve the economy of the country, while the people argue that the excessive use of water for mining is destroying the economy.

China has recently completed the Three Gorges Dam. This dam, as well as others, has caused the displacement of approximately 40 to 80 million people, and provided a vast opportunity for corruption. It has had a negative effect on the environment, as well, although China boasts that it is a marvel of an engineering accomplishment (Chellaney, 2009). China is working on rerouting other rivers, cutting into the waters needed by Tibet as well as by India. This rerouting will adversely affect both countries. To avoid war, it will be necessary to develop cooperation, rather than conflict, between China and India.

In a recent study done on the leadership of Dubai by Sheik Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Mahktoum, the results indicate that the world views him as the idea transformational leader of the Emirate of Dubai. Results of the study conducted with members of the Dubai executive team emphasized the highest scores in the area of cooperative discussion and openness (McLaurin & Mitias, 2008). It is vital that an effective leader successfully communicate with those involved in dealing with common issues and problems.

The future holds a promise of water peace, according to Dabelko. The Picnic Table Talks between the Jordanians and the Israelis have proved effective. The communication was held at a picnic table. This seems rather informal, but it was nonetheless quite effective. Good Water Makes Good Neighbors is a slogan being practiced by the Palestinians and Israelis. This was a sanitation issue, with tainted water flowing from Palestine into Israel. Through effective interpersonal communication, this issue was peacefully resolved. India and Pakistan are working together to resolve their water differences, through effective communication and good will. The Nile Basin Initiative has been productive, with stakeholders who are affected by common issues and problems participating in peaceful communication.

The 32nd meeting of the Nile Technical Advisory Committee was recently held in Entebbe, Uganda. Representatives from member countries Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania were present. For the past twelve years, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) has been working to develop positive outcomes regarding the issues of poverty and the area's meager food supply. It has worked toward creating ownership of the Nile Basin by the member countries. The controversy today is primarily between Egypt and the Sudan on one hand and the rest of the above mentioned nations on the other, who do not want to get permission from Egypt every time they wish to use the water from the Nile River (Nile Basin Initiative, 2011). Egypt contributes no water at all to the Nile, yet considers the Nile waters to be a major security issue (Ali, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging constructively in communications regarding conflicts about water or any aspect of the environment requires effective communication. The stakeholders must be appraised of the risks and rewards

involved. Effective communication cannot occur unless negotiating partners choose to communicate in constructive ways. "Disagreements may signal the emergence of innovative, novel concepts as yet unrealized" (Flanagan & Runde, 2009). Conflict can actually become an advantage if issues are carefully examined and each party is open to considering new approaches and opportunities.

Environmental conflict situations tend to be both challenging and convoluted. Walker, Daniels, and Emborg (2008) suggest Collaborative Learning as a means of effectively communicating and resolving conflict. Collaborative Learning integrates aspects of systems thinking, negotiation, experiential learning, and interpersonal communication. Conflict situations involving the environment are affected by the difference in priorities of stakeholders and resource management decisions (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). As a result, solutions can be quite complicated and difficult to resolve. Collaborative Learning works on three levels: philosophy, framework, and techniques. Effective interpersonal communication is what makes the process work. "As a philosophy, framework, and set of tactics [techniques], the Collaborative Learning methodology may be useful in a variety of environmental policy, natural resource management, and sustainable development situations" (Walker, Daniels, & Emborg, 2008). Whatever the process used, it is important to foster interpersonal communication between disputing parties, maintaining a balance of advocacy and inquiry, and working toward collaboration for the good of all involved. This conscientious sharing of the world's fresh water supply is a vital aspect to insuring world peace.

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