

Water & Government

Overview

The politics that surround the management of the world's water resources are an essential part of ensuring peace around the world. Because water is such a crucial resource, water stress can lead to heated disputes if it is not properly resolved. In order to maintain the peace that exists and resolve this water stress, global leaders must work together to achieve solutions for the world's water woes.

Water Governance and Management

Globally, water is primarily treated as a public good. In places where water has not been privatized, governments are most often responsible for allocating their available water resources in a way that is fair and efficient. While the people of a country are ultimately responsible for the consumption of water resources, the government has control of the supply and price of water in countries where water is publicly owned.

- What role does the government play in distributing water to citizens?
- In U.S. vs. elsewhere
- Private-public partnerships
- What are the unexpected consequences of poor water governance? How does inefficient allocation of water resources by a government hurt its citizens?
- What role does the UN play in resolving international water conflicts?
- What are important aspects of water policy when disputed waters are concerned?

Competing Domestic Interests

Although international water disputes are often the most discussed instances of water stress, competition for water resources within countries is also very common. Water is essential for drinking and other household uses, but it is also essential to the processes that produce much of our food. In many countries, water is also harder to access in rural areas than in urban areas. When water is scarce domestically, deciding who has a right to water can become very difficult for a government.

- What are the possible explanations for the urban-rural gap in access to water that is seen worldwide?
- When is it beneficial to provide water for agriculture instead of for household purposes and vice versa?
- How does industrialization conflict with the intentions of those who hope to preserve water resources for environmental reasons?
- What is the government's role in determining the water rights of its citizens?
- What effect have industrialization and urbanization had on competition for domestically controlled water resources?

Water Rights



When water resources of any kind are disputed, questions of water rights must be resolved. The answers to these questions are crucial for assigning responsibility for pollution of rivers, access to water displaced by dams, and control of water for agricultural or personal purposes.

- When a person, company, or nation pollutes a river, are they responsible for the downstream effects?
- Do states or the federal government decide issues of water rights in the U.S.?
- Is access to affordable water and sanitation a human right in U.S. law?
- What disputes arise when dams are built? What are the pros and cons of each side's argument?
- What conflicting uses for water resources are common in the U.S. and elsewhere?
- In disputes over water, what factors influence the decision made by the court?

Possible Topics

- Historically famous international water conflicts – Who, what, when, where, and why and significance
 - Euphrates River – Turkey and Syria
 - “Green Line” Aquifers - Israel and Palestine
 - Lake Victoria – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania
 - Jordan River Basin – Israel, Jordan, Syria, Palestine
- History of public-private partnerships in water distribution – have they been successful?
 - British Model, French Model, entrepreneurship
- How does the U.S.'s water distribution compare to that of other developed countries?
- Urban-rural gaps in access to water in the U.S. and elsewhere
- How have urbanization and industrialization played a role in access/rights to water?
- How can water be used to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals?
- The distribution of transboundary aquifers around the world
 - What common problems arise in these situations? What solutions have proved effective? What issues make the conflicts worse?

Lesson Plans

World View

<http://worldroom.tamu.edu/Workshops/GlobalIssues2009/Water/WVWaterLesson%5B1%5D.doc>

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National Peace Corps lesson plan on the human right to water and the Water Bill for the Poor Act of 2005.

Online Resources

The Pacific Institute

<http://www.worldwater.org>

Information on water scarcity and conflicts from the Pacific Institute, a nonpartisan research group dedicated to preserving the world's resources.

People's Water Forum

<http://www.peopleswaterforum.org>

A site that advocates community-based solutions to the looming water crisis. The site contains access to a wide variety of organizations and resources associated with water advocacy.

Blue Planet Project

<http://www.blueplanetproject.net>

Blue Planet works to achieve water justice, a fair and equitable distribution of the world's water resources. Their website contains access to resources and media releases about water around the world.

World Water Council

<http://www.worldwatercouncil.org>

Every three years, the WWC organizes the World Water Forum, the world's largest water-based gathering of community leaders, NGOs and government officials. Site contains information and resources related to past, present and future issues of water governance.

Articles

Rural Minnesota's Water Deficit

http://www.mn2020.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={D787D7F1-8593-4487-A21D-3AA2DE494863}&DE=

Rural Minnesotans drink worse water than those in urban areas, and MN2020 attempts to answer why that is.

Going Public: Southern Solutions to the Global Water Crisis

<http://www.wdm.org.uk/resources/reports/water/goingpublic14032007.pdf>

An article that addresses problems of privatization and effective ways of democratizing water governance in developing countries.

Talking Dirty: The Politics of Clean Water and Sanitation

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/359/8/784>

An article that argues that governments should be more proactive in creating legislation that supports development and sustainability.

Water Policy 'Failing to Deliver'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7657910.stm>

An analysis of the many problems with the UK's water management policies that will likely arise in coming days.

Tajikistan Hopes Water Will Power Its Ambitions

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/world/asia/01tajikistan.html>

Tajikistan is the source of nearly half of Central Asia's water supply, and the government hopes to wield this resource in the struggle to maintain their political existence.

A Godsend for Darfur, or a Curse?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/22/weekinreview/22polgreen.html>

In Darfur, a large underground lake was discovered in July 2007, and a Times reporter wonders whether it will be the solution to many of the area's problems.

Peace in the Pipeline

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7886646.stm>

In times of strife, providing adequate water resources for all can provide a surprising solution.

Videos

Leasing the Rain - <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/bolivia/> - 19:58

A PBS correspondent in Bolivia analyzes the politics and economics of a deal that privatized water in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba and incited riots and deadly protests.

Mount Kenya – Solving Water Conflicts – <http://www.thewaterchannel.tv> – 8:45

Mount Kenya captures rainfall and brings water, life and income to the otherwise dry lowlands. Pressure on land and water resources increases rapidly, generating conflicts between water users along the rivers. This video shows cases of these conflicts and solutions developed through research projects

In the Shadow of the Kilimanjaro – <http://www.thewaterchannel.tv> – 11:10

In the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro, the Pangani River is at the centre of a struggle for water. Demand is growing even as supplies diminish. Earth Report investigates the shortages, the conflicts and the plans to safeguard the health of the Pangani River basin.

Groundwater: A Borderline Case – <http://www.thewaterchannel.tv> – 4:47

This video addresses issues that surround underground transboundary aquifers. Interventions at one side of the border have impact on the other side of the border. Tensions rise where water is scarce. Examples of Kenya and Uganda are given.

The Nile: Our River – <http://www.thewaterchannel.tv> – 31:18

Africa's Nile Basin is home to 180 million people. The population is growing fast, increasing the pressure on existing water resources. This film looks at the developmental challenges facing both the peoples and governments in the region and examines the role of civil society and the media in Nile Basin development.

Water Voices – Upstream Downstream, Thailand – <http://www.thewaterchannel.tv> – 22:08

There is conflict over water use between upstream and downstream communities on the Ping River in northern Thailand. How can the competing demands for water be balanced? The Ping River Basin Committee brings all stakeholders together to seek common ground on sharing and protecting this vital river system.