



**SERIES HUMANITY AND BIOSPHERE**

# Proposals related to the question of water



## Proposal papers for the 21th century

*The proposal papers are a collection of short books on each decisive area of our future, which assemble those proposals that appear the most capable of bringing about the changes and transformations needed for the construction of a more just and sustainable 20<sup>th</sup> century. They aim to inspire debate over these issues at both local and global levels.*

The term 'globalisation' corresponds to major transformations that represent both opportunities for progress and risks of aggravating social disparities and ecological imbalances. It is important that those with political and economic power do not alone have control over these transformations as, trapped within their own short-term logic, they can only lead us to a permanent global crisis, all too apparent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the United States.

This is why the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World (see appendix) initiated, in 2000-2001, a process of assembling and pinpointing proposals from different movements and organisations, different actors in society and regions around the world. This process began with electronic forums, followed by a series of international workshops and meetings, and resulted in some sixty proposal texts, presented at the World Citizen Assembly held in Lille (France) in December 2001.

These texts, some of which have been completed and updated, are now in the process of being published by a network of associative and institutional publishers in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic and Chinese) in 7 countries (Peru, Brazil, Zimbabwe, France, Lebanon, India, China). These publishers work together in order to adapt the texts to their different cultural and geopolitical contexts. The aim is that the proposal papers stimulate the largest possible debate in each of these regions of the world and that they reach their target publics whether they be decision-makers, journalists, young people or social movements.

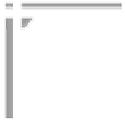
# Presentation of the proposals paper

## « Proposals related to the question of water »

Water is a vital, irreplaceable resource, thus it is a powerful economic and geopolitical instrument.

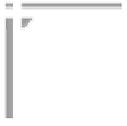
Its management nowadays in the sectors that use it most (agriculture, urban water supplies, energy and industry) is increasingly dominated by major industrial corporations and financial establishments whose only goal is to generate short-term profits.

The management of water is a "concrete, urgent and global challenge" that this document highlights via an analysis of what this resource not only represents socially and economically, but culturally and symbolically. This analysis results in seven proposals for the long term, for the united and responsible governance of water.



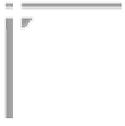
# Proposals related to the question of water

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# Introduction

*"What makes the desert more beautiful, said the little prince, is that somewhere there is a hidden well"*

(Antoine de Saint Exupéry)

*"We the undersigned, recognized members of the world scientific community, hereby warn the whole of humanity of what might happen. A far-reaching change in the management of the planet and the life therein is necessary if we want to avoid widespread suffering and an irreversible mutilation of our entire habitat on this planet.*

*Our biggest danger is finding ourselves trapped in an ecological declining spiral, of poverty and unrest, leading to our social, economical and environmental downfall.*

*In publishing this warning, we, the scientists, hope to reach and move people everywhere. We need vast amounts of help. We are appealing to every man and woman to join us in our task[1]"*.

Extracts from "World's Scientists Warning to Humanity" (1992)

If there is one field in which governance is necessary, even vital, it is that of water supply, for it is indeed in this field *"that a far-reaching change in the management of our planet and the life therein is necessary"*. Why? Because water is Life and because, on this planet, water commands and regulates all fundamental phenomena and all essential interactions. The European Water Charter maintains as of its first article: *"There is no life without water, it is a precious asset, indispensable to all human activities"*.

Serious competitiveness currently exists in the field of water supply between the various sectors in which it is used: agriculture, towns, industry, energy, and leisure activities. Another predominant factor is the priority of cost effectiveness. Some people are worried about the formation of powerful financial networks and industrial giants on a world scale which could aggravate the economic and geopolitical struggle between the various parties concerned. Many specialists believe that supremacy, hegemony and absolute national sovereignty are the brakes on water supply governance implementation. They point out, for instance, that Egypt and Hungary are beholden for more than 95% of their water supply, with it originating from other countries, Rumania for 82%, Holland for 89%, Germany for 51%, and Belgium for 33%. Moreover, they stress, the Nile and the Congo concern nine riverside countries, the Euphrates and the Tigris four, the Mekong six, the Amazon seven and the Zambezi eight. In reality, there are more than two hundred catchment areas which ignore political frontiers. A vast coverage for a world-wide governance of the resource as noted by the Platform for a reasonable and united world. In the water supply issue, this text sees, in actual fact, a *"concrete, urgent, planetary challenge"* and, emphasizing, the vital role of this element, the Platform stresses *"active subsidiarity by prioritizing local initiatives and by placing them in an overall vision"*.

In point of fact, the quality of the water supply and the access to this vital resource are both matters for an eminently local and manifestly geopolitical management. A policy is not so much a group of rules, texts, laws and procedures decreed by the government as a system of thoughts, a philosophy, one might say, inside the distribution system itself; for, when all is said and done, is water not interconnected with the network of rivers all leading to the same point - the ocean, starting point and initiator of the hydrologic cycle ?

The control of the water supply is a powerful political instrument, more powerful even than that of another more viscous and fairly nauseating liquid: petrol. Moreover, contrary to petrol, water is irreplaceable: in the spring of 2001, Zhu Rongji, the Chinese prime minister declared: *"The scarcity of water is a serious obstacle to the economic and social development of China"*. ("Le Monde", 18th August 2001)

The governance of water must work towards peace and understanding between men because:

**A world in which the access to water is threatened is a dangerous world.**

The supply of water is the world's disaster zone - owing notably to irrational management. This situation is peace threatening. Water stress affects mainly the South, again emphasizing the differences between rich and poor countries. Since 1977, at the United Nations conference concerning the water supply in Mar del Plata, the same emergencies, as those currently mentioned, were already up for consideration.

Moreover, any water supply policy has repercussions on:

- The climate
- Food
- Human health via supplies of drinking water
- The environment
- The management of waste water
- Conflicts between men, within a country (India and United States) similarly between countries or States, as is proved by the military operations in the Middle East, to give just one most symbolic and distressing example of the suffering inflicted on men and the gross injustices suffered in the use of the resource. Often moreover, conflicts with regard to the supply of water find- in part, at the very least- their poisonous roots in religion, in the interest of the State, or in racism.

And, in point of fact, water is full of symbols, spirituality in many revelatory religions and beliefs. The Christian baptism, the obligatory ritual ablutions before each of the five Muslim prayers, and the Buddhist immersion in the Ganges are several examples of this. Water, for many human civilisations, is an environment in which rites of passage are taught, an environment where we are in contact with life, with the hard human condition, for water is the living environment par excellence. Water, say the Dogons, is inhabited by *Nommo*, a spirit with extraordinary, mysterious and sometimes formidable power to which human

beings have a duty to show absolute veneration. *Nommo* can, in actual fact, decide where it will rain and assure prosperity just as he can cause drought and misery, if, by chance, man happens to neglect his worship. For the Ancient Egyptians, the source of all life, whether it be human or divine, is the mass of primitive water personified by name Nu, and which is at the source of two sacred rivers: on the one hand, the Nile, which gives life and, on the other hand, the Sky, on which floats the boat of Râ, the sun.

The presence of water in spirituality is not a thing of the past. Far from it! In May 1999, the Roman Catholic bishops from the Columbia River catchment area in California highlighted, in a pastoral letter, the role of the river and wanted to influence the debate in progress concerning the watercourse which was the object of many controversial developments. These clergymen maintain that the Columbia River is a *"driving force in the spiritual life of the area"* and that it must not merely be seen as a *"beast of burden for the economy[2]"*.

Without water, health is illusive, food impossible to produce. They say in Mali: *"It is water that controls man"*. Man can survive for one month without food, but, deprived of water, he will die within a week. Water forms the base of food safety. Several weeks away from a vital conference on world food, Jacques Diouf, director general of the FAO emphasizes in the organization's annual report, published in September 2001, that food safety is deteriorating all over the world owing to drought, flooding and other natural disasters[3].

At the dawn of this millennium, Humanity who is able to explode the atom and control its infernal power, the same Humanity who has walked on the moon, accepts, without thinking, that more than two billion men are unable to satisfy their water requirements. **At the start of the third millennium, one person in six does not have access to drinking water and one person in four does not have any sanitation facilities.** Peter Gleick, in his book *"The World's water"*, estimates at 50 billion per year, the amount necessary to satisfy the water supply requirements of the poor including up-to-date sanitation facilities; this amount being by far inferior to the social costs currently incurred owing to bad management and inadequate sanitation facilities. To say nothing of the expense of weaponry and death missiles!

Millions of people are still exposed to waterborne diseases and the financial institutions, research establishments and international organizations such as the WHO seem curiously lacking in willingness to eradicate the affections of another age such as cholera, trachoma, malaria, bilharziasis and dracontiasis (worm from Guinea). But, in the rich countries, an unobtrusive, rampant, insidious contamination of water by pesticides, drugs, various chemical products even radioactive products and resistant micro-organisms is mobilizing vast sums of money and worrying specialists and lawmakers as is proved by the complex *"Safe Drinking Water Act"* and *"Clean Water Act"* voted by Congress in the United States for example, the delays concerning discussion of the law relating to water supply in the French Parliament or the powerful demonstrations observed in Spain with regard to the National Hydrologic Plan (NHP)- which aims to transfer water from the Ebre to Andalousia- and to the pollution from the river Segura in Murcie. The NHP is considered questionable, even absurd, by the demonstrators who are

appealing to the European Union about it and point out: *"Instead of managing a traditional supply-side policy, we are asking for a new method of management based on water supply requirements. The key word is: economise water[4]"* adding that water is wasted by the irrigated Andalusian agriculture. These accurate words would be applicable to many other countries where the only known management is that of supply when the aim must be to improve the efficiency of consumption. Irrigation, in numerous countries, is manifestly inefficient since only 37% of water supplied in this way to the crop is effectively absorbed by the plant; the rest can be considered as lost[5].

And, in point of fact, 70% of the earth's harvest only germinates as a result of irrigation water and this, in many places, is either inadequate or wasted. Sandra Postel, from World Watch Institute, draws, in a recent book, a very gloomy picture of the irrigation water situation - the levels of which are dropping everywhere, she maintains, owing to an excessive dewatering, a "mining" operation, just about everywhere in the world; from Central China and the north to the west of the United States and from the Arabian Peninsula to Pakistan not forgetting either South and North-west India or North Africa. This overexploitation of fresh water is highly dangerous as the lowering of the water table causes a catastrophic intrusion of salt water from the sea and subsidence, as can be seen, for example, at Gaza in Palestine, in Mexico, in California and around lake Houla, not far from the southern border of Lebanon. The effects of this excessive dewatering are added, in some cases, as in India, in Nepal and in China to the uncontrolled felling of the trees in the forests. The role of conservation of these trees vis-à-vis rainwater is, nevertheless, well known. To say nothing of their role in the struggle against erosion. A new system of irrigation has to be determined to avoid man facing a major crisis, threatened with soil salinization, waterlogging, sedimentation and siltation. All these factors are matters for world governance, assures Sandra Postel, who criticizes industrial agriculture as being guilty of a lack of consideration for the future and sustainability.

It is useful, here, to remember that sustainable agriculture calls on several important factors:

- Correct management of the available biomass - both plant and animal
- Integration of plant and animal production and the suppression of specialization
- Adaptation of cultivation to local climate and edaphic (relating to the soil) conditions
- Adaptation of food patterns to the agricultural possibilities of each area.

It is sadly clear that the consumer way of life led by some, is hardly encouraging to such an agriculture which, should it be extended to the entire planet, would be a genuine disaster for the hydrosphere with its annihilated forests, reduced biological diversity and agro-toxic products.

We must, in actual fact, bear in mind that a meat diet requires a lot more land than a vegetarian diet and that the production of a kilo of meat - in the case of battery breeding- bestows 350g of nitrogen on the environment whilst wise management of the biomass would have beneficial results for the resource:

regenerating the soil, correcting erosion, reducing irrigation, re-establishing the water balance in the fields, and eliminating the use of toxic pesticides which contaminate the hydrosphere. For Joseph Orszàgh (Mons-Hainaut University), *"the day humanity decides to stop throwing human and animal waste either directly or indirectly into water, we will have the key to mastering the world's water supply problems"*. Currently, men expect contradictory services of water: to clean them and feed them and at the same time, to dispose of their waste and rid them of pestilence! What a long way we are from the extreme wisdom of Gaston Bachelard who, observing that "water brings to mind the idea of purity" asks himself *"What idea of purity would we have without the image of a clear limpid water, without this wonderful pleonasm that speaks to us of a pure water?"!*

Moreover, Gilbert White, professor at Colorado University, in a conference for the American Academy of Sciences in 1999, asserted that *"The United States have not yet formulated political objectives, operational criteria and the institutions which fully recognize the interdependence between the health of the ecosystem and the social network with a view to achieving a sustainable quality of life via water supply management" and he concludes by maintaining: "Resulting in inefficient and sometimes counter-productive measures in a certain number of resource management sectors"*.

Thus, we can see, the benefits of good, healthy water governance will be to everyone's advantage, rich or poor but we are fully aware that there is still a long way to go, even for the most powerful and resource-full countries on the planet!

Poor water supply governance results in tragedy for Humanity as is shown by current, sadly daily, events: the flooding in Mozambique due mainly to inadequate management of barrage water, arsenic in the water in Bangladesh (responsible for one death in ten), flooding in the Mississippi valley, with its heavy chemical industry. This industry, as a result of the bad weather and the lack of foresight on behalf of man, has seriously polluted, not only the agricultural land and the marshlands along the water's edge, but also the Gulf of Mexico which is now suffering from a deficiency of oxygen and is fatal to many aquatic creatures, causing an enormous drop in the revenue of the fishermen. And thus, we see, yet again, that the actions of man- forever the sorcerer's apprentice- have the most unexpected repercussions and implications in the field of water supply.

Poor governance causes frustration and unrest and transparency should be the cardinal virtue where water is concerned.

The Earth Charter gives several pointers in this respect, when it maintains: *"The size and the speed of the changes that humanity has experienced over the last century, the rapid growth of the population, the damage to culture diversity and living creatures, the progressive exhaustion of its resources and their poor distribution between human beings, the inequalities between and in the heart of societies make for a **better balance between the diversity and the unity, the person and the society, the power and the responsibility, the having and the being, the short and long term both necessary and urgent**"* and, generally speaking, in the clearest of terms, it asks the direct question concerning

governance,: *"A government, even legally elected, loses its legitimacy if it does not manage the earth's resources wisely, if it does not ensure access to a decent life for all human beings"* and the Charter, concludes by dealing with equity and responsibility in these terms: *"Any person and any society that uses to his advantage an excessive part of the earth's resources incurs an infeasible debt with respect to the rest of humanity"*. These principles apply perfectly to the case of water supply.

The governance of a water supply requires assessment and reflection well beyond that of *"access to drinking water"*- even if this objective is totally laudable. For, we must not lose sight of the fact that, in reality, when the precious liquid fails to appear, poverty rather than drought or thirst rages. And, in point of fact, a lack of water does not generally result in dying of thirst but, above all, suffering from hunger; for a thousand litres of water are required to make one loaf of bread.

On the occasion of the Paris conference on water supply and sustainable development, in March 1998, the ambassador Stéphane Hessel said, *"If water is an economic asset, it is above all a social asset. It is equality of access to this common asset which must be built and upheld"*. This is, in our opinion, the touchstone of acceptable governance.

The French poet Paul Claudel said: *"The Earth sees through water, his instrument to watch time going by"* and the Indian environmentalist Anil Agarwal adds more prosaically: *"Water is the ultimate depository for all man's sins. All the waste that he produces finds its way there in the end. The more a society commits sins against water, the more it is impervious and indifferent to it, and the worse the state of the streams, the rivers and the lakes"*. Water has, in actual fact, an important role in the **revelation** of our behaviour and our social and economic life. The geographer Swyngedow shows, with regard to Guayaquil in Ecuador, how the distribution of water is inseparable from the social and spatial problems of disparity (rich/poor, man/woman, shanty towns/wealthy districts). He explains how, with regard to Spain, the modernization of the State has gone hand in hand with fundamental changes in the patterns of water use. Thus water supply policies, water culture and the engineering connected to water have played a major role in the formation of Spanish society, and he adds: *"Hardly anything in the contemporary Spanish social, economic and ecological outlook can be understood without an explicit reference to the state of water supply evolution within Spanish society such as we see it[6]"*.

#### The need for world governance of the water supply:

1- There is, first of all, the **physical primacy**: the world cycle of water obviously concerns the entire earth and all living things, even if the dispersion of water is completely unequal, and its quantity has been practically fixed since Earth appeared in the Galaxy. Water links us all to this earth, and the chemical composition of the sea of origins, there, where Life began, is still linked to our human blood plasma.

2- Technical advances mean that this cycle is verging on disruption by human activities: in addition to the induced climatic disruptions, we have known since 1986 that rainwater contains residues from pesticides and industrial products, and that these can be transported over long distances, thus contaminating countries and regions that have not used them. Similarly, the same scenario can be seen in the pollution of the transboundary water tables.

3- Confronted with the attempts of those who want to turn this vital liquid into a vulgar commodity subjected to the shifting and changes of mood of the markets for "*water spreads and progressively fits into the contradictions of the world economic order*", we must oppose this essential fact: water is **an asset common to humanity**- heir to the Roman law notions of *res nullis* and *res communis*, for example-, bearer of symbols and unique and particular ethics in all cultures and all human civilisations throughout the ages.

The onus, as far as an asset common to Humanity is concerned, is on man to organize the sustainable management of it, and to curtail irresponsible behaviour and laissez-faire attitudes. This notion of common asset clearly implies an international society founded on public space and political rules, setting up rights and duties of members of the sovereign political community. This said entity ought to be able to regulate the sharing of the water using common values, resulting in responsibility- which would be under the control of an independent, higher authority.

4- Gross differences in water consumption cannot continue indefinitely without affecting **peace amongst men**: an equitable global regulation is required. The aim will be to further values of unity, mutual aid and co-operation, and to aim for the emergence of an **independent assessment** of the subject, and the materialization of an "*environmental engineering where a collective learning process makes the development of a socialized management of resources and risks possible*". (Bernard Barraqué). An international programme complete with tangible means to assure a better coverage of the elementary needs of the most deprived must be set up and put an end to the dispersal of the efforts between FAO, WHO, INBO, IOE, etc.

5- If there is a water supply crisis, it is not due to a water shortage, even if, objectively, there are local shortage situations. Anil Agarwal hardly believes, in actual fact, in the existence of a "*crisis*": he blames, first of all "*poor management*" because "*the crisis*" can be used for certain purposes. We have shown, for example, how the drought in the second half of the 80's in the county of Santa Barbara in California was built up and used by industrial lobbyists. The perception (controlled) of the drought, in actual fact, led the county population to approve, by referendum, the extension of the *State Water Project* of the State of California to their territory. If the objective of the supporters of this extension was to boost urban development and economic growth, it was never expressed in such terms. The idea of taking part in the State of California's general water plan was presented as a kind of drought-insurance rather than the promotion of economic growth. The water lobby used three stratagems to push the debate in this direction, writes Pierre Cornut: (i) organization of the water distribution

infrastructure within the County in such a way as to avoid any interference from the population in the decision making; (ii) avoidance, right from the start of the drought, of the use of any water economy technology; and (iii) the description of the drought during public debates as a "*crisis*".

Moreover and generally speaking, failures in supply are the result, above all else, of an incapacity to manage the resource competently. The water supply crisis is not the sole, sad prerogative of the South. Drought is hitting Spain and the United States. Colorado is dry: its water fills Los Angeles' swimming pools, and is used for the water displays in Las Vegas. Pollution from nitrates is widespread in Brittany "*for environmental concerns today only take up a marginal place in the agricultural policy*" notes the extensive report on water by the French Planning Office (September 2001). This text deplores the inadequate measures implemented in the struggle against pollution from nitrates and pesticides, and notably, the lack of a genuine water policy that will impose compliance to standards on the polluters. Flooding is more and more frequent in the French valleys. In France, several hundreds of drinking water catchments are closed annually being declared unfit for consumption owing to agricultural pollution, reports "*Le Monde*" on the 11th September 2001. Thus, objectively, pollution is diminishing water reserves and France is far from being an isolated case amongst the industrialized countries. France has even been sentenced, on the 8th March 2001, by the European Court of Justice, for the poor quality of water in Brittany. The wetlands, essential for the bio-aquatic balance are in the process of disappearing from Elbe in Gadalquivir. Of course, the North is infinitely better equipped than the South for dealing with the crisis, especially as, in the poor countries, the biological hazard adds its ill-effects to those of uncontrolled industrial and chemical pollution.

# Proposals

Confronted with this situation, the key word is unity; co-operation and mutual aid must govern relationships between people. Thus, the need for a worldwide governance is emphasized.

## FIRST PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*Water is an infeasible right for every human being.*

*Water is an asset common to man.*

*Water is also a social and economic asset.*

*Any governance of the water supply must contain a social section as nobody should be deprived of water due to their inability to pay for it.*

Professor Kader Asmal, South African minister for water reserves and forests from 1994 to 1999 is the author of the famous law of 1998 (National Water Act) considered to be the most complete - "*visionary and all-encompassing*" - in the world on the subject. Ethics and acknowledgement of the requirements of the most in need, formed the basis of the philosophy which governed the drawing up of this legislation.

This law introduces the concept of "*water reserve*", highlighting human needs and the working of the fundamental ecosystems, and putting them before the interests of the economy or industry. Water, in this way, is paid for on a sliding scale: the biggest consumers- manufacturers and large farm operators- pay the biggest part of the bill; as for those of more modest means, they pay what they can. Asmal also did a great deal for women, lightening their arduous water chores as much as possible by means of his "*Feminization of the water policy*"; this policy also allowed reasonable access to drinking water as well as an acceptable disposal of wastewater.

## SECOND PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*All levels of water supply management are necessary and independent.*

*Transparency and democratic and effective participation -notably of women and minority groups- must be part of any water supply management.*

*Ethics must govern all management of the resource and anything which comes into contact with water*

Pierre Calame and André Talmant emphasize the special nature of this governance when they write: *"Water requires a scale of management for households and neighbourhoods as well as for the water table, the small catchment area, the large fluvial catchment area - often straddling several States- and finally, for the seas and the oceans. It is not possible to determine one good level of water supply management, they are all necessary and interdependent".*

We are forced to conclude, from a strictly scientific and technical point of view, that the technical solutions needed to master all the water supply problems within the framework of a sustainable management are within our reach. Their application on a large scale would solve, in the space of a generation or two, the most overt problems such as drought, flooding, the lack of drinking water, pollution, and erosion but we must also take into account the social aspects and the knowledge that populations have accumulated throughout the ages, and which, often have the great advantage of satisfying the criterion of sustainability. This is more than can be said for certain up-to-date practices.

Thalès de Milet- one of the seven Sages of ancient Greece- was already saying in the fifth century before J.C: *"Water is at the origin and the basis of all things"* and, nearer to our time, during the Renaissance, Leonardo de Vinci - who was also an excellent engineer-maintained: *"water is the driving force of nature"*.

## THIRD PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*The management of a shared water supply, common water zones and water catchment areas must be reinforced by regional co-operation and by an appropriate, fair and equitable legal structure.*

*The integrated approach to the catchment areas must take into account the needs of irrigation and those of towns, jointly and not separately as is often seen to be the case. Equipment must be sought to bring about an economy of water and to increase its efficiency in irrigation systems and industrial processes.*

The governance of water supply is so important to human societies that certain historians and specialists in social sciences pay homage to them. Hence, Karl Wittfogel[7] hails the dazzling emergence of "*water democracy*" of the Dutch State in the XVII century by contrasting it with the well-known oriental "*water despotism*", notably because the mobilization of vast quantities of water demand the use of abundant manpower which must be co-ordinated, disciplined and perfectly managed, and it is probably whilst thinking about water that Norbert Wiener- the father of cybernetics- suggested, in the 40's, a behavioural analysis procedure, valid for "*all natural, psychological and social phenomena*" which would allow the creation of a society without conflict and without politicians. We note that the question of water supply openly becomes a major issue in the chancelleries and in top politics. Madeleine Albright, American secretary of state, thus displays her willingness to give it an essential place in the United States foreign policy and suggests nothing less than "*a world-wide water safety alliance*" specifying on the 10th April 2000, for the occasion of the Day of the Earth: "*I have in mind an alliance not like NATO, limited to certain countries and only made up of governments, but one rather less formal, open to all those who understand the urgency of working together to conserve a water supply that crosses boundaries, to manage it wisely and to use it properly*[8]".

As a matter of fact, all over the world, each State, since the XIX century, has practically claimed the water supply as its right instead of the communities' and households' prior basic workings of supply, distribution and management of water, whilst the distribution of electricity and gas have not constituted such a monopoly. But, since the middle of the 80's, we note "*a penetration of the drinking water market by private capital, looking for new business opportunities right at the time that the massive, socialized investment stage is ending*" and the crisis of the welfare state starting which- do we have to remind you?- implemented, with just government funds, the most costly works and infrastructures and took care of the health of the populations and the work force through health and social education.

Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain note that, in the case of India, the bureaucratic regulation of the resource never lead to anything. They maintain that the nationalization of the management of the water supply in India only aggravated the situation. *"Let the local populations, who use it and for whom water is synonymous with all that is good and all that is prized, look after it"* they exclaim. The widespread implementation of decentralized, simple and inexpensive, and sometimes already existing, technical solutions, can allow the problems to be solved.

But equality must prevail for those who pollute the water must be compelled to restore it (Polluter payer principle).

The rights of certain communities must be scrupulously respected: as just a few illustrations, we could cite: the nomads, the animal farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian communities from the Andes, and the list goes on, noting that the injustice in this field leads to tragedies and suffering notably amongst the most underprivileged. Thus, the 14th December 1999, in the Gujarat in India, confrontation between police and villagers protesting against the decision of the State to keep the stocks of water for the towns, resulted in three dead and twenty wounded.

## FOURTH PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*Water is vital for the practice of **active subsidiarity**, in the fundamental decision making and in granting those without the right to speak.*

*Its governance start an **inverse globalization** being based on unity.*

*The traditional knowledge of the communities concerning water should be restored and taken into consideration on the occasion of any project and any new implementation*

At the start of the third millennium, the governance of a water supply becomes acutely necessary for humanity, for rich countries as well as for the less fortunate because it has world-wide ecological, financial, political and ethical implications. To say nothing of the suffering of men and women when water is lacking, is in short supply or is of dubious quality. It is generally said that the main characteristics for the near future will be the overexploitation of the resource, the access to a water non-contaminated by organic and chemical pollutants[9] becoming more and more difficult, and increased competition and potential conflicts. To this gloomy picture, we must also add the enormous requirements of the inhabitants of the large metropolises of the world whose growth does not let up for a moment and the appetite[10] of those who see a new Eldorado[11] in this

vital element. But we must not be unreasonable for calamity howlers cannot be very objective.

The industrial civilization in which we live is complex and difficult to penetrate for the citizen who must, at all costs, exert control over the experts and the technicians. But beware of simplifications! What is more banal and more innocuous than turning on a tap of drinking water[12]? This gesture repeated one hundred times a day, is, nevertheless, only possible thanks to a multitude of processes unknown to the end user. It brings up major issues which are connected both with the subsistence of the town and public health and with the historical construction of urban space and its zone of influence. From the source to the glass, many events are linked together: they relate to history and to the working of current day society, relations that this society maintains with nature, and the natural processes themselves. The glass of water is both natural and social[13]. Good governance of a water supply can only happen by taking this reality into account which justifies and establishes the active subsidiarity and opposes the globalization wanted by the wheeler-dealers, an inverse globalisation in which there is nothing to stop you giving your opinion.

## **FIFTH PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:**

*Water is not a commodity.*

*Access to water must necessarily make use of partnership*

*Financial responsibility for water must be assumed by the individual and by the community according to the principles of responsibility and use whilst respecting ethics and democracy.*

Given the vast variety of contexts, of physical, ecological and cultural data, of values and of the ethics particular to water which prevail within the various cultures and human civilizations, this governance must define the general principles and leave the job of local adaptations to the communities in question with a view to an equitable management of the resource, in the respect of dignity for everyone and in the framework of a sustainable development in order that neither future generations nor other living creatures who share the hydrosphere with us are wronged.

Painful lessons about water supplies and sanitary facilities must be learnt from the decade: a look back over this period of time would be beneficial for any possible future resolutions, the entire international community having been implicated.

We must not lose sight of the fact that current water management techniques often follow commercial and industrial logic: we only push for solutions which allow high profits to be made. Thus the resource is transformed: water becomes a

commodity with a financial value. This sometimes reinforces the repercussions of natural disasters. Thus, K. Bakker discovered that the crisis induced by the Yorkshire drought in 1995 is closely linked to the phenomenon of privatization of drinking water in the United Kingdom and our author emphasizes that the causes of the drought are both natural (adverse weather) and social, as the change of management of the distributing company placed the emphasis on efficiency (need for profit) rather than on the amount of the resource. And, in point of fact, the privatization of water in England is a complete victory for neo-liberalism, although not allowing any direct competition between the sector companies. Moreover, the water distribution companies hold an exorbitant power in relation to the rights of the consumers, they are opposed to physical interconnections between their respective networks so that their territorial monopoly is better protected. Thus, the democratic control of a vital asset is reduced, in practice, to very little. Pierre Cornut emphasizes in this respect: *"The privatization of the drinking water system in England and Wales, when all is said and done, only favours the private investors, at the expense of households and the community in general. The inefficiency which seems to belong to publicly-owned companies and their monopolistic situation is far from having disappeared with the privatization, especially if we measure this efficiency in terms of access for the entire population to drinking water. The financial resources that the privatization brought in for the State are vastly short of the profits garnered by the shareholders of the private companies. Finally, job losses result in supplementary costs for the community, while damaging the union structure of the civil service, the only potential guarantor for acceptable working conditions"* and the author concludes that this example *"makes us fear the worst in the hypothesis that the measures of liberalization or privatization would be applied in other European Union countries"* and the same author emphasizes: *"In Belgium, it is, in actual fact, forbidden for the supply of water to be profit-making under the reasoning that it has a fundamental, social use incompatible with the "spirit of gain"*".

This being said, confronted with the pressure from the water traders to get the most expensive, complex techniques of management and exploitation adopted, we must push for sustainable decentralized solutions to supply communities with water and assure them adequate sanitation facilities (upkeep of the engineering structures and the conduits, fight waste and losses, participation of the users, and preservation of the quality of open water lowered by pollution to give a few of the objectives of sustainability).

All things considered, we must work on denying this idiotic, Californian adage, related by Marq de Villiers, and who, in contradiction with the laws of hydrodynamics as well as those of morality and human feelings, said: *"Water follows its course going up towards money!"*

## SIXTH PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*The governance of a water supply must be guided by the principles of sustainable development.*

*It must respect the requirements of all living creatures on earth just as it must preserve the interests of future generations.*

*Science and technology must be used to meet the requirements of the communities both in the fields of drinking water supplies and sanitation facilities.*

*Science and technology must be applied whilst respecting and restoring local knowledge.*

Humanity needs bold initiatives on the institutional, political and technological fronts to take up these challenges. Thus, Stéphane Hessel is of the opinion that *"the need for efficient world bodies is more obvious than ever"*.

What about the State, communities, associations, universities, companies?

We note, first of all, that the major international meetings concerning water supplies over the last few years- and the meeting in La Haye in the month of March 2000 lived up to the rule- as in the case of agenda 21, have almost always brought up the question of governance and that one of the *"Principles"* set by the Dublin Conference (January 1992) demands that *"The development and the management of water must be founded on the participation of the users, the planners and the decision-makers at all levels"*, particular reference being made to the major role of women in the subject. The Paris Conference (March 1998) declares in its final resolution: *"The existence of a population with a sense of responsibility and rich in the wherewithal required to participate in the decision-making at a local level and at higher levels, is essential in order to achieve effective results"*. The Conference recommends in addition, as far as the management of water is concerned- notably in the towns- the *"active implication and participation of the local community including the individuals in question, the women, the youngsters and the local associations"* and calls for a *"dialogue between the stakeholders"* and for the affirmation of a *"willingness to inverse the traditional decision-making process from the top to the bottom"*.

For its part, the European Forum "Water, source of citizenship, peace and regional development" (Strasbourg, 12/02/1998) evokes *"The democracy of water"* and *"the democratic management of water using transparent participatory practices"* and calls to *"assure the protection and the representation of the citizens within the decision-making bodies for the water sector"*. Thus, the mishaps of the decade (1981- 1990) of water and sanitation facilities are evoked *"in which projects have been implemented and pitch-forked from on high"* and which have not drawn on

interdisciplinary knowledge and on various partners, with the exception of the water specialists and technicians, according to Nguyen Tien-Duc from the Seine-Normandie branch of the water board. This author maintains that the "Banque Mondiale" had *"accepted a new moral code giving priority to the financing of projects for which the decisions are taken at the lowest possible level"*. Let us accept this as a good omen even if the results of the Second Global Water Forum in La Haye (March 2000) were not, in this respect, up to expectations.

How do we explain then, when confronted with all these good intentions, the numerous failures witnessed?

For the participants of the meetings, in Penang (January 1997) and Cochabamba (June 2001) held by the WATER Mobilizing Programme Alliance for a responsible and united world, as for many other observers, the political will is missing. Investments in this field are usually inadequate in comparison to what is granted to the police or the army, the State often abandoning its prerogatives to partners whose first concern is profit. It is, in actual fact, easier to decide to create a barrage than to undertake strong water economy operations (battle against leaks, wastage, and theft) or to connect up underprivileged districts whose population does not have heavy political weight. In certain countries, for example, in order to participate and give their opinion regarding the management of the resource, associations have to prove that they are "non political" in order to be able to become involved in the management of the resource. It is also quite possible that certain "successes" are not well known. Thus, during the meeting of the WATER Mobilizing Programme Alliance in Teheran (April 1999), Anil Agarwal of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Delhi (India) went through the experiments carried out in the villages in the semi-arid, sub-humid hills of Madhya Pradesh and of Rajasthan. These experiments involved "participatory democracy" of water supply management- "water becomes everyone's business"- and they have such beneficial repercussions (Eco-regeneration) that these communities have obtained a well-being unequalled elsewhere in India, the sound water supply management having stopped erosion, removed the spectre of thirst and drought by developing catchment areas and small water works and by recuperating rain water[14], increased the surface irrigated and the head of cattle, reduced the exodus to the town, and the work of the children! Participatory democracy is exercised in the structure of "gram sabha" different from "panchayat sabha" (elected village council instigated by the Constitution of the Indian Union) in which every family of the village is actively involved in the decision-making and Anil Agarwal comments: *"The public discussion forums work much better than the elected councils as far as the management of natural resources is concerned"*- in spite of the conditions of poverty and inequality- especially if these Forums have good leadership and adequate legal coverage. For Anil Agarwal, if these experiments have remained fairly dissipated, it is due to the absence of a system of governance which could promote the control of the population concerning natural resources and he clarifies: "These examples exist in spite of the system and not owing to the system". In reality, an individual must have a lot of perseverance in order to bring about changes on the lowest of levels. However, if the system of governance allows local communities to care for and improve their resource, then changes will come about more easily. Thus, *"The Rajiv Gandhi Water Development Mission"* of Madhya Pradesh proved that the State can repeat these experiments based on the

efforts of the community, providing however, that there exists not only the political willingness, but also the technical and administrative pressure on the bureaucracy so that they are involved. As a result of their success in the struggle against drought and resistance to flooding, "johads"- traditional structures of catchment area management have recently been re-established in pride of place- the State of Rajasthan has modified its texts concerning government ownership of water authorizing the communities to rebuild them. Stressing the particular case of the Himalayan village of Jhabua, the Delhi CSE writes: *"Increased demographic pressure does not necessarily mean an irreversible tendency towards environmental degradation. It simply means improved environmental management, which is not generally possible without the involvement of people; the authorities playing a limited but strategic role"*.

It is clear that these examples find their roots in the Gandhian concept of *"village republic"* so well suited to ecological regeneration. It remains to be seen whether this kind of decentralized decision-making can suit the enormous cultural and biological diversity of, in the first instance, the Indian villages, and in the second, the world.

It is, as a matter of fact, a question of granting the power and authorizing the rural and urban communities to manage their environment, the State and the commercial corporation playing a vital support role in encouraging equity and sustainability in the use and management of water.

During the meetings in Casablanca and Penang, leaders of the WATER mobilizing programme highlighted the need to work towards the advent of a new society which would take into account the special character of water and notably its finitude.

## SEVENTH PROPOSAL FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A WATER SUPPLY:

*All governance of a water supply must promote a **society economical with water**.*

*It must watch over the harmonization of the values relative to water for a better co-operation between nations and organize the various levels of governance with a view to best assure compatibility between unity and diversity.*

*It must promote education in connection with water, and make the general public more widely aware of water economy and resource conservation*

*The Earth Charter says, in actual fact: "Societies and rich people must reform their way of life, moderate their consumption, learn and develop frugality" thus coming into line with the Platform for a responsible and united world.*

Humanity, in the era of interdependence, can only solve its collective problems through co-operation, unity and mutual confidence. This obvious point should always be present in our behaviour and our mind. Transboundary and international conventions concerning the Rhine, the Danube, the Mekong, the commission set up by Angola, Botswana and Namibia to discuss water rights, the agreement reached by India and Bangladesh concerning the Ganges after an interminable dispute, all show that water can and must be an element of reconciliation, of dialogue and of co-operation.

The current water supply issue reminds us constantly of this in a thousand ways.

World governance of water must mobilise men who should avoid, as Stéphane Hessel said, the political games and numbers which have flourished- and we are all aware of the results- in certain international circles.

*When all is said and done, the planet suffers less, today as in the medium term, of a global risk of a water supply deficit (even if some objective situations of shortage are real) than of a serious lack of governance. The inability of the States and the international organizations to implement the proposed measures whether through the communities or through the experts reflects a definite delay in the socio-economic thought process concerning the advancement of knowledge and rich expertise accumulated concerning water reserves, irrigation, sanitary facilities, water treatment, and the struggle against flooding.*

# METHODS AND MEANS:

## 1- Participants:

Insofar as the question of water is a vital question one concerning an irreplaceable resource, it is clear that every citizen is involved. **Special emphasis is placed on women who often have the difficult task of supplying the precious and indispensable liquid to the family.**

Then, special reference will be made to:

- The traditional communities and elected municipal corporations who must realize and build on active subsidiarity. We will repeat here, the insistent message with which we entrusted our Indian friends from Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Chilli, present at our meeting in Cochabamba in June 2001: ***"Never forget that water is a matter of policy"***. It is a question of taking appropriate action.
- The international community who breathes life into the decisions that are made in order that the concept of water as an Asset to Humanity can take shape and who upholds its historical responsibilities despite the multifaceted attacks against water
- The spiritual and religious leaders and, in particular, teachers whose role is in this respect fundamental: they are responsible for the future generations.
- The politicians and the civil servants notably responsible for the transparency of the delegated or public management contracts
- The associations concerned for the environment, for health and the entire commercial corporation
- The technicians whose knowledge and implementations must be balanced against the interest of the communities and the respect of the environment, local environment and the consequences to the water cycle and the means of subsistence and the local environment. Interdisciplinarity must be the cardinal virtue of these technicians (including sociologists and social sciences in general)
- The media who are responsible for passing on the message of sustainable development within water culture.

## 2- Concrete actions:

Our Workshop expresses the hope that this proposal brief will:

- Receive critical views concerning both the form and the content so that it can be improved
- Establish a realistic list of priorities
- Gather together ideas on strategies whether local, regional or international in order to bring our proposals to a successful conclusion as in the field of water supply, the interrelations of all these levels are linked and necessary.
- Collate examples of successes or failures of projects for the implementation of an equitable management or an in-depth analysis of water supply issues all over the world in order to improve control over both the action and the distribution of the information using notably experiment report sheets.

Concerning the methods to be used, an indepth analysis is required in order to avoid taking the easy way out in view of the interdependence and the infinite and infinitely complex relationships existing in this field (For example: nitrate pollution and its consequences on the chemical industry, agricultural yield, soil texture, fauna and flora, the pricing structure of agricultural equipment, employment, and social lassitude). We would ask all participants to think big and to integrate knowledge beyond their usual scope.

## 3- Perspectives:

Nothing can be taken as read and we cannot predict the results. However, we do know that many are willing to help and seriously committed participants from all over the world have their minds on the task in hand in order to bring one project or another to fruition according to the context in question.

Our friends all over the world have made it possible to draw up proposals as well as the many joint projects and international meetings that have taken place so far. They will, no doubt, strive to spread the ideas, make them understood and encourage debate on them within the most diverse of professional fields, as best suits this unparalleled issue.

The Alliance is the natural forum in which strategy might be defined, as it is the ideal vehicle for: distributing this brief and the water supply programme's documentation, developing proposals and establishing methodology workshops on strategy and visions of the future, and constituting groups of citizens to follow up and supervise the beginning of the work on these concepts in order to deal with such issues as irrigation, the question of costs, and food safety.

The water supply issue must unite men into federal organizations for it goes beyond disputes and nations and directly concerns Life.

It cannot be denied, there is no getting away from it. The European Water Charter (1967) stipulates in article XII: *"Water has no boundary. It is a common resource that requires international co-operation"*.

We at the Alliance are concerned with this co-operation. Our role is to define the ways and means. TOGETHER.

**By way of conclusion:** Let us not forget the words of Saint Ephrem:

*"The diver, also, finds pearls in the sea. Dive in and find the purity hidden therein"*

We are hoping for an abundance of pearls of wisdom from our readers concerning these proposals.

And finally, we ask at the same time, for our reader's indulgence, far be it for us claim to have exhausted such a subject? The Belgian actor Jean-Claude Van Damme says it better than anyone else when he maintains[15]: *"Water, it is something concrete but not concrete. Because water...can feed me, but also water...can carry me. Because water has magic properties. Water can support freighters in the sea, thousands of tons of steel...Water, is a thing which has many dimensions"*.

## Notes

[1] Position adopted in November 1992 by the "Union of Concerned Scientists" which assembles close to 1,600 scientists including 102 Nobel prizewinners.

[2] Los Angeles Times, 8th May 1999.

[3] International Herald Tribune, 12th September 2001.

[4] "Le Monde", 11th September 2001.

[5] J.W. Maurits la Rivière, "Threats to the world's water", Scientific American, September 1989, p.48- 55.

[6] Quoted by Pierre Cornut in his doctorate dissertation, "Université Libre" in Brussels, November 1999.

[7] - Karl Wittfogel, "Oriental despotism", "Editions de Minuit", Paris, 1964.

[8] The United States do not however set a good example in the matter themselves when we see their policy vis-à-vis Canada and, above all, vis-à-vis Mexico, for the sharing of the water from the Rio Grande.

[9] Sylvia Zappi, "A third of drinking water resources under the threat of nitrates", "Le Monde", 10th June 1997, P.13. See also "Pesticides in the water", French Environment Institute, Orléans, "Collection Etudes & Travaux" no.19, October 1998

[10] Tonino Serafini, "The price war mobilises from North to South", "Libération", 27th April 1999, p.19.

[11] - "La Tribune Desfossés" dated 28th July 1999 announces that the English government has imposed a price reduction on water of 14% on the private operators who market all the water in the country. Moreover, this price must drop by 38% in relation to current rates before 2004-2005.

[12] Sadly, only for the part of Humanity best provided for!

[13] Pierre Cornut, Doctorate dissertation presented to the "Université Libre" in Brussels, November 1999.

[14] We will note in this respect that even in a desert zone, with an annual rainfall of 10mm, modest catchment capacities and adequate storage are enough to assure top quality drinking water for one person. In tropical and temperate zones, it is even easier. We must revert to the technique used for so long by the Romans and the Arabs and which was used in North Africa barely fifty or so years ago.

[15] "Première", August 1999

# The Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

## Working together towards the challenges of the 21st century

Ever since the late eighties of the 20th century, numerous initiatives have been put forward from different regions of the world and extremely diverse contexts. Different social actors were thus put in motion with the aim of organising a vast worldwide process seeking to explore values, proposals and regulations capable of overcoming the modern challenges humanity is faced with.

A large number of thematic, collegial and continental meetings were organised in the early nineties, a process which led, in 1993, to the drafting of the *Platform for a Responsible and United World*.

Regional groups were set up, international professional networks and thematic networks on the fundamental issues of our era were developed: the Alliance was created. It is financially and technically supported by the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the progress of Humankind (FPH), among others.

The Alliance is focussed on inventing new forms of collective action on both a local and global scale, with the aim of shaping together the future of an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

The challenge of the Alliance is to actively support unity in diversity by asserting our societies' capability to understand and appreciate the complexity of situations, the interdependence of problems and the diversity and legitimacy of geo-cultural, social and professional perspectives.

**The Alliance, as a space of discussion, reflection and proposals, is built around three main orientations:**

Local groups aiming to bring people of a community, a region, a country or a continent together by looking at the realities and issues of their own societies. This is the **geo-cultural approach**. It reflects the diversity of places and cultures.

Groups of socio-professional actors wishing to provoke dialogue and mobilisation within a given social sector or profession (youth, peasants, scientists, local representatives, etc.). This is the **collegial approach**. It reflects the diversity of social and professional milieus, their concerns and responsibilities towards society and the challenges of today's world.

Thematic workshops seeking to create reflection groups centred around the major issues of our common future (sustainable water management, regional integration

and globalisation, financial markets, art and society, etc.). This is the **thematic approach**. It reflects the diverse challenges humanity is faced with in the 21st century. Thematic workshops are organised into four areas: Values and Culture, Economy and Society, Governance and Citizenship, Humanity and the Biosphere.

Seeking both to draw on the richness of materials and experiences gathered by these reflection groups whilst networking with other citizen dynamics with a similar focus, the Alliance fixed itself the objective of obtaining collectively developed, concrete proposals. The following meetings were thus organised:

- **international meetings**, for each thematic workshop and each college,
- **synchronized continental assemblies** (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe) and a regional meeting in the Arab world (Lebanon) in June 2001.
- a **Citizen World Assembly**, held in December 2001 in Lille, France, bringing 400 participants together from around the world.

These meetings together contributed to the drafting of some sixty *Proposal Papers for the 20th century and a Charter of Human Responsibilities*, published in several languages in different countries.

The Alliance has been involved in a process of disseminating and developing these outcomes since the beginning of 2002. Networks are expanding, branching out and their work themes are becoming increasingly transversal. They also strengthen links with other approaches aiming to create an alternative globalisation.

For further information, please visit **the alliance website** at [www.alliance21.org](http://www.alliance21.org), where the history of the Alliance, the challenges it is engaged in and the workshops and discussion forums being held can be viewed in three languages (French, English and Spanish).

E-mail: [info@alliance21.org](mailto:info@alliance21.org)

# The proposal papers on the internet

*Whether in their provisional or definitive form, all the proposal papers and their corresponding translations can be accessed on the website of the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World, at:*

<http://www.alliance21.org/fr/proposals>

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