



Green Anglicans

Anglican Church of Southern Africa Environmental Network

WORLD WATER DAY 22

GROUNDWATER

Making the Invisible Visible

INTRODUCTION

Groundwater resources are the invisible lifeline of our planet. They provide almost half of all drinking water worldwide, about 40% of water for irrigated agriculture and about one third of the water supply required for industry. Yet, many people are unaware of the existence, let alone the importance, of groundwater. That is why the theme for this year's World Water Day on 22 March is **"Groundwater: making the invisible visible."**

Unfortunately, all over the world, groundwater is becoming increasingly polluted and overused. In some regions, the situation is already critical; with groundwater levels declining rapidly. As climate change leads to a reduction in rainfall and therefore available surface water in most areas, more and more people are sinking boreholes. This puts groundwater at risk – which could threaten food security for the future generations.

A large part of produce grown from groundwater resources is destined for export – think of grapes and wine in the Western Cape of South Africa. Cultivation of soya beans, cotton, mining of lithium for electric cars – all of these are very water intensive. Almonds being grown in California are having a devastating effect on groundwater (especially as almond milk grows in popularity).

"Those of us living in the industrialized countries need to be aware that our use of water, especially the 'virtual' water which is used to produce our food and other goods, has direct consequences for the lives of people in the Global South," *Dr Ingrid Jacobsen (Bread for the World, Germany)*.

Over-exploitation of groundwater is not the only problem. "Human development is disrupting groundwater recharge. We are facing rampant deforestation, intensive agricultural activities in the water catchment area, sand mining from the rivers, the loss of riparian vegetation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. The impact on groundwater recharge is huge." (*Dr Matthew Koshy, Church of South India*)

As groundwater and river levels decline, springs and streams begin to dry up. This means that fishing

communities can then no longer sustain their livelihoods as fish stocks decline.

"The pressure on groundwater is bound to increase globally, in many countries, including my home country India, people do not need to obtain permission to drill a borewell to extract water. People think they 'own' the groundwater in their land. With unbridled extraction of groundwater in the absence of strict regulations, this precious but finite resource may run out sooner than later." (*Dinesh Suna, Coordinator of World Council of Churches Ecumenical Water Network*)

If you are worried about the health of our surface- and groundwater resources, there are various things you can do: re-use water where possible (eg. water your grass with washing machine water or shower water), repair water leaks at your house, harvest rainwater and try to use as little water as possible in your daily activities. We need to make sure that our groundwater resources are used in a sustainable manner and that we prevent pollution of our water resources.

(Adapted from an article on WCC, EWN "Groundwater: a hidden treasure we need to protect, say EWN members")

Photo below:

Hoerikwaggo – From www.tripadvisor.com



WORLD WATER DAY

Groundwater: making the invisible visible

EXODUS 2: 15-21	Moses saves the women at the well
PSALM 104 : 10-17	Our God waters the earth, and provides for all creation
REVELATION 22: 1-7	The River of life
JOHN 4: 1-13	Jesus offers Living Water

LITURGY

The river of God is full of water
The springs of living water come up from the ground
Let us praise and glorify God's name

CONFESSION

God of mercy, we come before you seeking forgiveness because we know how much we have failed you.
You created a world of beauty; you gave your people paradise.
But we have not been good stewards of the earth we inherited.
The rivers are polluted;
the groundwaters are drying up
the air in our cities is made impure;
forests are felled and fertile land turned to desert;
and, for pride and greed, whole species are endangered.

CREED

We believe in God, who creates all things, who embraces all things, who celebrates all things, who is present in every part of the fabric of creation.
We believe in God as the source of all life, who baptizes this planet with living water.
We believe in Jesus Christ, the suffering one, the poor one, the malnourished one, the climate refugee,

who loves and cares for this world and who suffers with it.
And we believe in Jesus Christ, the seed of life, who came to reconcile and renew this world and everything in it.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, who moves with God and who moves among and with us today.
We believe in everlasting life in God.
And we believe in the hope that one day God will put an end to death and all destructive forces

Gurukul Theological college, India / adapted by Keld B. Hansen 2009 :
World Council of Churches

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

May clean clear water bless us by well-spring or waterfall, life in abundance – flowing, cleansing, refreshing.

May we use wisely God's gift of water, cherish each drop, shrinking all scrub land and deserts.

Jesus, pour your water, greening and satisfying, on the dry dustiness of the deserts within us.
Holy Spirit, flow through us, revive our faithfulness, cleanse our sinfulness, fill us with prayerfulness.

When the priest takes the bread and wine, he/she can

also take the water and say this prayer before adding the water to the chalice.

Blessed are you, Creator Spirit, Source of all life.
Through your goodness we have this water to offer,
which refreshes, cleanses, enlivens and invigorates
all your creatures.

Blessed be God forever.

Chris Polhill, Paris Vigil

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING

In the seas and the rain and in the deep hidden places
beneath our feet,
God bestowed on Earth the gift of water,
so that his creation could flourish into life.
Through the waters of baptism, God beckons us to a
new creation,
so that we may share in a life beyond life.
Today, by water also, including this water here,
may the Covenant which we have made be sealed,
and creation renewed and restored to God's eternal
purposes.

Go forth now to care for God's world.
Go out into all the world as heralds of a new rainbow
covenant
and preach the good news to all creation.
And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer
and Sustainer
be with you all now and always.

Amen.

(The Congregation is sprinkled)

From the Operation Noah Launch, Coventry Cathedral, 2004

Photo on the right:

Table Mountain spring – photo: Andrew Glaum



SERMON

Groundwater: making the invisible visible

EXODUS 2:16-17

The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defence and watered their flock.

In this passage the seven daughters of Midian are lucky, they are able to draw water from a spring or well. This shows that they were able to access groundwater. We often forget about the hidden water beneath our feet, which is a literal life saver when there are no streams on the surface. One wonders where the sons of Jethro were, was it only women who must fetch the water?

In most places of the world, it is the same, culturally it is seen as the task of women and girls to collect water. For girls, this impacts on their education as they are tired in class. For women, it limits their ability to look for other work. Carrying such heavy loads puts a strain on their necks and backs.

As climate change gets worse, then nearby streams and rivers dry up. This means that they must walk further and further. This puts them at risk of sexual harassment, they may have to wake up early in the morning and be seen as strangers by men from the neighbouring village.

The daughters of Jethro faced this same challenge, the shepherds came and chased them away when they wanted to draw water, preying on their vulnerability.

Moses' intervention reduced the time needed to fetch water considerably, so much so that Jethro commented on it. Moses' response is commendable but could have been unnecessary had the cultural norms been different. Had the culture been different then (and now), Jethro could have hired persons to ensure his daughters' well-being or assigned this task to males. Making females responsible for water-collection for their community's sustainability is injustice; especially when it places them at risk; and needs to cease immediately.

Safe water is not only a sustainable goal – it must be a human right for ALL. Water justice, climate justice and gender justice are all one.

Adapted from Water Justice towards Gender Justice”, by Nicqi Ashwood





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