



## Taking Stock/The President of the World Water Council

# Water Emergency

If we fail to manage the availability of water, we condemn entire populations to exclusion from development and equitable enjoyment of fundamental human rights

LOÏC FAUCHON



He has been president of the World Water Council since 2018, after having previously served two mandates from 2005 to 2012. From 1991 to 2019, he was successively General Director, Chief Executive Officer and President of the Water Supply Company of Marseille (SEM). He was awarded the French Legion of Honor in 2003.

The world is thirsty. Energy and water are becoming increasingly scarce or erratic resources. People are facing growing threats to their health, as well as vital food supplies. Billions of people all over the world are suffering from the accumulated effects of many crises. As demographic growth and urbanization reach unprecedented levels, as news spread ever faster, and people's hopes for a better quality of life are raised, this suffering is becoming more intense and more brutal. And at the same time, there is a new consciousness about the necessary environmental approach. Peace and dignity, and a fairer world, in the long term, depend on two elements: access to development opportunities and the need to protect the natural world. To develop and protect nature, we need to act with mutual respect and find a sustainable balance between the use of our increasingly coveted natural resources and the need to protect them.

Water is one of these resources. And it has become a rare commodity, in terms of both quantity and quality. Due to our careless domestic, industrial and agricultural uses of water, resources in our rivers, boreholes, water tables, dams and reservoirs are under pressure and are rapidly being depleted. As the demand for water increases, supply is stagnating.

At the global and local scales, our lives depend on the availability of water. If we fail to manage its availability, we condemn entire populations to being excluded from development and equitable enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Collectively →

**On the left, Aïda Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), "The Shackles of Limitations" (2018).**

**WATER LIFE**

In producing this series, the photographer has in particular addressed the difficulty of accessing drinking water and its effects not only on a society but also on women who live in rural areas. City dwellers often take for granted the privilege of being able to access water, while those who live beyond the urban network face challenges that not only affect their health but also their ability to contribute to the development of their community.

Each shot is therefore a reflection on how to deal with the consequences of access to water, since it concerns women's emancipation, health, hygiene and education. "Working in various regions of Ethiopia," explains the photographer, "I often come across lines of women walking along the road and laboriously carrying water. I realized that women spend enormous amounts of time going to fetch water for their family, with serious repercussions on women's emancipation in our society. I chose to take some of these shots in Dallol, in the Ethiopian region of the Afar, to emphasize the message I am transmitting and also to produce an anthology that uses art to spread a message using a different approach."

📷 A contemporary Ethiopian photographer and artist, Aïda Muluneh has published photographs in numerous international magazines and exhibited in major museums around the world. She founded the Addis Foto Fest, the only international photography festival in East Africa. As one of the leading experts on photography from Africa, Muluneh has been on the juries of several international photography competitions.

**Above, Aïda Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), "Steps" (2018); below, "The Woman's Work" (2018).**



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and individually, this is our responsibility, or rather, these are our responsibilities.

### We must ensure water security for us all

To secure water use, we first need to secure the availability and protection of the resource itself. We have to find the right approach between “Water Now and Water in the Future.” That means a balance between the demand for water and the restrictions that come with water stress.

Securing resources means finding the additional water resources needed to meet demand and respect that balance. To achieve all of this, we can rely on human ingenuity and the ability to constantly innovate and come up with new solutions. This begins with technical solutions. In the future, we will need to drill for water more deeply, transport it over longer distances, store it for longer and purify it more efficiently. We will develop new, cheaper and more advanced solutions, such as the greater use of

desalination and wastewater reuse. Energy and digital innovation will be key for water security. The great cycle of water supply and wastewater treatment is involved. For example, digital technologies include sensors, remote controls, weather forecasts, data processing, augmented reality and process optimization. And all kinds of mobile applications. Let us use the best of wireless networks, data processing, the internet of things, cloud and the blockchain for water but also for sanitation, waste, air and →

**Above Aïda Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), “The Meter” (2018).**



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**Above, Aida Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), "Burden of the Day" (2018).**

energy. The digital revolution will bring citizens closer to the decisions and will reinforce the feeling of a more local and more participative democracy. But we need to be careful and never forget to put the people "in the loop." Technological innovation will give us a fantastic source of freshwa-

ter for agricultural and industrial use. Technological advances will enable us to speed up the roll out of new, smarter, more efficient, more environmentally-friendly, more sustainable and fairer solutions. But apart from human technology, there is also the need, indeed the obligation, to take political action. Water is

not one Sustainable Development Goal among 17 others. Global water security has now become an integral part of every country's national security and foreign policy.

**The three pillars of water management**

We can think of water management →

# Water crisis numbers

785

**MILLION PEOPLE** – 1 in 9 – lack access to safe water

2

**BILLION PEOPLE** – 1 in 3 – lack access to a toilet

200

Women and girls spend **200 MILLION HOURS** every day collecting water

1

**MILLION PEOPLE** die each year from water, sanitation and hygiene-related diseases

260

**BILLION DOLLARS** is lost globally each year due to lack of basic water and sanitation

*Source: water.org*



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**Above, Aida Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), "Beside the door" (2018); on the left, "Star Shine, Moon Glow" (2018).**

as a house supported by three pillars: governance, finance and knowledge. These three pillars need to be well built to ensure that every drop of water is useful. To improve efficiency, we now need to go beyond the concept of integrated water resource management, which is a vertical approach, to the short water cycle. It needs to be combined with a horizontal approach, based on the fundamental links between water, energy, food, health and education, by applying the “Five Fingers Alliance” concept. This is a new approach, one which finally enables, at a national and local level, development policies to be implemented without segmentation or isolation, and without opposing each of the five “Fingers” against the others, seeing them as interrelated rather than conflicting. Thus expanding a city or building a school must answer each of these five basic factors simultaneously, rather than focus on one to the detriment of the others. The right to water, so easily proclaimed yet so difficult to enforce, will be the common thread running through collective action and policy on water security.

**Water and energy: rights and interdependence**

The right to water and the right to energy need a common approach, as the days of easy water and easy electricity are gone. Today, nobody questions the fact that water along with energy are essential to human, economic and social development. Water and energy are indispensable to fulfill humanity’s basic needs: health, food and education. There is also a strong interdependence between water and energy: water is key for clean energy production and energy is essential for water supply. When the cost of energy is too high, the cost of water is unaffordable. To implement access to water for all, we must take into account energy and water management. The World Water Council advocates five recommendations promoting a common approach for water and energy:

- 1 | Access to energy and water should be given the same importance and implemented together at international, national and local levels
- 2 | The financing of water and energy, together as a whole, should be considered as one main priority for sustainable and equitable development for humans and nature
- 3 | Urban and rural planning should include water and energy together as a whole, in the same scope
- 4 | Electricity and water resources should both be approached as renewable energies. Water recycling and re-use should be a legal obligation

**Aïda Muluneh (Ethiopia, 1974), “Access” (2018). The photo entitled Access is an artistic representation of the concept of access to water. As the photographer explains, “The world is continually bombarded with images of Africa’s social situation, so my special interest in this project was to address these issues without the clichés presented in the traditional media and in way to raise awareness through art.”**

- 5 | Combined governance of water and energy should be promoted at all levels in order to give consistency and priority to affordable and sustainable supplies.

We are on the road to the 9th World Water Forum, which will be held in March 2021 in Dakar, co-organized by the World Water Council and the State of Senegal. Let’s seize this opportunity to work together. I invite the large energy community to join the water community to bring joint solutions and give answers and responses to the world, as populations need our joint commitment to improve the planet. It is an emergency.



