

Water for hope

The United Nations has set 17 Sustainable Development Goals. No. 6 on the list is the goal of ensuring the availability of water and sanitation for all by 2030. This goal is intimately connected to the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals, as it is a key part of development, health and food security.

Water is a common good that we must manage sustainably at all levels: from private individuals to industry, local authorities and countries.

In their strategic analyses, many companies have already established that profitability is linked to water management, climate change and environmental impact. In 2017, CDP, an international non-profit organisation, published its Global Water Report, which studied how more than 2 000 companies worldwide manage water. The most advanced companies set an internal price to factor in the environmental and social costs and benefits related to water use. In 2017, these companies committed \$ 23.4 billion for more than 1 000 waterrelated projects in 91 countries. This is a significant investment, but the G20 estimates that water sector investment requirements from businesses, cities and countries will be \$ 7.3 trillion by 2030. Under current projections, there will be an investment shortfall of \$ 1.5 trillion in the water sector.

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The wisdom of long-term thinking is required if water can regain its main role: as a resource for the future, a source of life.

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At the country level, catchment agencies have the core purpose of managing resources to guarantee water provision and quality in their areas. To ensure the proper management of water quality, there is a need to work closely with agriculture in the catchment areas. To this end, some farmers have committed to stop using synthetic fertilisers on their lands, making the switch to organic cultivation. This is a positive example of the interconnected nature of environmental issues, because as outlined above, ecosystems are interdependent.

Large-scale water adduction and treatment projects mobilise colossal energy and financing, coordinated by international development and financing organisations or global companies. They are necessary but not enough, as they are mostly connected to urban areas with high populations. In desert countries located next to large bodies of salt water, the use of desalination to make fresh water requires a lot of energy and expense, making this technique difficult to apply to other regions. However, technological progress has made it possible to expect a significant fall in energy needs and, therefore, the associated costs.

At the other end of the spectrum, I would like to pay particular tribute to the non-governmental organisations that work to provide low-cost drinking water where it is needed in rural areas, and to make this supply sustainable by creating local micro-enterprises, a successful form of the social and solidarity economy.

The large-scale works and multitude of local initiatives share the same goal, with different and usually complementary approaches. Often, certain industry players engage in parallel small-scale actions in communities via foundations or local civil society partners. Technology and financing are vital for both water and the climate, but will not be enough to resolve the monumental challenge facing us. The problem is above all related to individual and collective behaviours, conventional wisdom that has to be challenged, together with a development model that is far from sustainable.

We have had all the observation, analysis and dissemination tools for many years, and cannot feign ignorance. In 1972, the Meadows report for the Club of Rome, titled "The Limits to Growth", warned that we were doomed if current growth and consumption trends continued. After the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, a Nobel laureate in Physics, Henry Kendall, launched an appeal signed by 1 700 scientists to mobilise policy-makers. Now there are 15 000 scientists of all specialisations from 184 countries who are, once again, warning us that we are heading towards the accelerated destruction of the natural world. For myself, I can point out my own 2012 documentary, *A Thirsty World*, which remains entirely relevant.