



Water, energy: The same shock, the same battle

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While motorists worldwide, eyes riveted on the petrol pump, wait impatiently for good news from the Straits of Hormuz and the Libyan shores, do those same motorists, as French citizens, pay attention to the lowering of the Nile's water level or the filling in of Iguazu's lake? Yet water and energy, it's the same shock and the same battle.

Today, water and energy are interdependent resources. This question must be given a place within public debate. We can be pleased that it was at the heart of discussions during the 6th World Water Forum, which gathered from 12-17 March all those who wish to advance the cause of water and of energy.

On the demand side, it is the same disadvantaged populations that lack access to drinking water and to electricity: surely 2 billion people, if not more, not to mention sanitation. But water and energy are crucial for human, economic and social development. They are necessary for fulfilling basic needs for a decent life; without water and energy, there is no food, no health, and no education.

Water and energy demands are both continuously increasing. Every twelve years there are one billion more

inhabitants, overwhelming mega-cities that are growing like mushrooms and that are potential health bombs, with evolution in climate confusing political leaders' and citizens' actions. All these realities negatively impact the management of essential resources, becoming more and more rare.

Urgency knocks at the door; it is real and proven. For the medium-term needs are huge. By 2050, we are expecting to double energy production and experience a 50 per cent increase in water demand. If we do not act, if we do not create new offers, and if we do not drastically regulate demand, tensions will degenerate into conflicts.

Water and energy, common approaches

Because they are interdependent, both energy and water require regular dialogue and the sharing of experiences and solutions so as to generate more efficient and cost-effective ways of using these two resources in the future.

To do so, professionals from both fields must work together towards better knowledge and regular and sustainable support for issues that are common concerns for both water and energy. It is for this reason that, during the 6th World Water Forum, the World Energy Council and the World Water Council announced their intention to cooperate at the international level to promote greater energy efficiency in the management of water resources, to make known and enhance the necessary contribution of energy to the water sector and to facilitate cross-sector dialogue.

Additionally, a common demand regulation approach is also needed in both sectors. Over the last century, governments, political and financial authorities have strived to increase the offer through new infrastructure and more equipment, so as to improve access to water and electricity for all sorts of uses.

This policy of "offer at any price" that often resulted in subsidised costs for water and energy much lower than actual market prices, globally encouraged waste and overconsumption.

This policy of unprotected increases in offer and lack of harmonious resource management has very clearly shown its limitations.

Without drastic regulation, water shortages could soon give rise to conflicts





It is not only that the era of easy water is over, but the era of easy energy as well. Tomorrow, we will have to consume less, to consume “better” so as to respond to Mankind’s expectations, while respecting Nature.

Mobilising for investments and good governance

Many countries are also confronted with a severe lack of financial resources to secure their future energy and water supply. For water, energy is a pre-requisite and the survival of a part of future generations depends on the answer to this question. Today, the international community must reflect on, propose and pursue solutions to answer those challenges.

To accomplish this, it is necessary for the political world to impose that part of the energy for water, necessary for the poorest and most disadvantaged countries and populations, be made available at a sustainably low cost, so as to spare us a scenario where the soaring price of a barrel would inevitably result in the lack of access to water in the African bush or in Asian slums.

Could we also imagine a type of moratorium on price increases, a solution which would aim to neutralise part of the price or its recent or future increases?

Another possibility: use a specific fuel to produce the energy needed for water. This solution can be compared to what existed or exists in several European countries for so-called “domestic” diesel for use by farmers, fishermen or taxi drivers.

Another idea consists of the creation of a specific tax on petroleum products, to be discussed with oil-producing countries that would agree to support and invest in a special fund, directly in the poorest countries, dedicated only to water.

Those are just a few examples of potential solutions. Another is more of a global concern and could increase joint recognition for both water and energy needs. Before the Copenhagen Summit, the World Water Council asked to add water to the famous “energy-climate” package. Today, with the upcoming Doha Summit, it’s more pertinent than ever. We believe that the future of energy cannot be written without that of water.

The world needs a “water-energy” package, with climate change as a backdrop. For us, the water community, this idea is translated by the establishment of a “World Fund

for Rare Resources”, supported institutionally, especially created to encourage energy production specifically for water.

Through these new solutions that stand out among so many others, we clearly see that water and energy are at the heart of the world’s security for tomorrow.

This “Water Security” is one of a number of future strategic requirements, such as energy, nuclear and maritime security, in particular.

It is first of all human security, one that concerns basic needs: obtaining enough water (and energy) to feed and heal the planet’s population. It is also economic security to produce goods and services in a fair and incentive-based environment. Finally, it is also environmental security to give back to nature the water that is necessary for the preservation of both biodiversity and the life of future generations.

It is thus that harmonious growth in the coming decades can be imagined. A “Blue Planet” or “Green Growth”: the colour doesn’t matter. What matters is the very nature, quality and lifespan of this growth. What matters is to know if, in the future, growth based on the best possible management of water and energy will be sufficient, fair and respectful of both man and nature. □

Global demand for water is expected to rise by 50 per cent by 2050

