**The dry facts on a wet resource**

[M Mohsin Atiq](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/m-mohsin-atiq/)

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Lahore is stuck between two interconnected crises; making water available for the current generation and saving for the next generations. Water is undoubtedly a fundamental right, but not only for the present generation. Water is not just an inheritance, it is also a security deposit, which has to pass down safely to generations.
The underground water reserves of Lahore are depleting at a rate of 3 feet per year. Water resources are, therefore, under considerable stress. This imbalance in supply and demand is a result of people not caring enough about water. However, just as the irresponsible usage of water can exhaust the resource, better management attitudes can reverse the effects.
The water crisis is a global concern, but various examples of people coming together for solutions give hope for a water-replete world. Although effective infrastructure can help conserve and treat water, without responsible public attitudes and practices, large-scale solutions are impossible to implement. Even if our country takes loans from international agencies to make up for the huge sums of money for infrastructure, the money must be reflected in water bills. And following the trend, the general population reacts negatively to anything involving money. Therefore, any initiative related to water management fails miserably.
Take Cape Town for example. In light of the city’s severe water shortage, Cape Town’s government foresaw a “Day Zero” when all city taps would stop running and residents would have to form queues to collect 25 litres of water per person. This alarming situation mobilised the people to work with the government and adopt sustainable activities such as arranging water-saving campaigns at schools, adopting water-efficient farming, putting price values on non-essential water usage, encouraging a reward-system for water-conscious residents, publicly discrediting water-negligent residents and so on.
The world’s first Day Zero was anticipated in March 2018, but compliance to water-efficient use pushed it back to the next year. By early 2018, the city’s water consumption dropped from 1.2 billion litres in 2014 to a successful 516 million litres only. The Day Zero’s countdown clock was paused indefinitely.
In another example in 2018, the Federal government of Mexico issued a decree, allowing constellation brands to extract surface water anywhere in the country. Not having enough water to spare for the brewery, the people held a series of protests in response to this privatisation project. The horrors of another Day Zero encouraged people to defend the vitality of water and they began conservation efforts at the individual level. They haven’t stopped to date.
We are blessed with a clean unconfined underground aquifer of water, which took thousands of years to form. Unlike some countries, where water is buried deep or lies below strong strata, unconfined aquifers are directly accessible through pipes drilled into the earth. Lahore’s underground vaults, too, are a high-capacity water ‘tank’ that is replenished through Ravi River or rain percolations.
But in the past three decades, it has been used without any consideration towards the sustainable extraction limit and its effects on future generations. The exploitation of water has led us to destress the repercussions of a potential water-starved Lahore, alarming experts that like Cape Town, this city may also foresee a Day Zero soon. What we don’t know is whether we will realise how valuable water is before taps run dry and we are forced to wait in long queues before getting just a limited quantity of it to take home.
It is a paradox that water is unquestionably an indispensable resource without which we would die and yet, it is not valued enough. As water gets scarcer, it is bound to become a commodity. The bank Goldman Sachs predicted that water would be the petroleum of the 21st century. Private funds, such as hedge funds, have started buying water, instigating concerns that they will take advantage of water scarcity to make profits.
Putting a price on water, however, is something which could prove to be a boon for the planet’s viability. Giving out a price signal would mean that we would not be growing water-intensive plants in arid areas and that non-essential water usage either by residents or industries would be sanctioned a water tariff. It would also mean that we would be vigilant about how much water runs out of your taps while brushing, taking a shower, cleaning our house or car, washing clothes, and so on. You would be able to hear a leakage in the pipe approaching because the idea of spending money would seem too important to ignore.
Optimum water pricing is therefore a clever way of employing psychology to socioeconomic issues that would otherwise never resolve. Already the water crisis is being politicised, such as the Pak-Indo water conflict. But just like water, time too is running out, and Lahore has still not changed its attitude towards water. Experts hope that a sustainable lifestyle combined with water pricing on any consumption above basic necessities can help realise the pricelessness of water. And since we only listen when we have an example to follow, Cape Town and Mexico’s fear of the Day Zero should be enough motivation.
Although the construction of recharge wells in houses is enforced by law, it is common psychology of our people to not comply unless the government takes stern action. The problem stands: we are obstinate in our practices that harm not only nature, but the country’s policy implementation process and the safe future of our generations. Where the government can encourage a reward-based system through water pricing, the public can play its role by being more careful about their water consumption at the domestic level.
Maybe we don’t care about water because we aren’t emotional about it. Maybe if we were as maternal about water, as it is to us, in its life-giving nature, we would not have to explain the very apparent concern of water conservation—we would do it naturally. Parents care for their children’s well-being all their lives, to provide them the perfect conditions to succeed and be happy. Yet, it evades them that without water, they would not even be alive.
Without water, no culture, no tradition, no values would survive. Without water, there is disease and death. Without water, there is no life. Generational care is the dire need of our time and if we do not value water today, there will be no tomorrow for future generations. The general population has to make its mind up to conserve water on its end on a war footing and to allow various plans to enhance infrastructure for integrated water management for long term water security in Lahore.
You can live without love. But you can’t live without water.