

# Water Scarcity and Conflicts

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Although seldom the trigger for wars, the thirst and desperation created by water shortage or a threatened water supply fuels existing tensions between peoples. Among many others issues, the violence over water resources is probably the cause of the simmering conflict between African farmers and Arab nomads of Darfur, Sudan. Drought and desertification in the northern parts of Darfur has led to migration of the Arab nomads to the south of Darfur, where they came into contact with African farmers which resulted in disputes over land and water resources. From this example, we can see that through deeper investigations of such conflicts it becomes clear that what seems to be a dispute caused by ethnic divide in fact has its roots in water resource distribution.

The conflict in Darfur is by no means an isolated example. Many water conflicts exist in history and are proof for severe consequences that can arise from threats to water resources. Genuine water scarcity refers to situations where there is a real natural shortage of water in the region and is not due to restriction or control of water sources. Water used as a political tool refers to the control or cessation of water sources for extortion or threat by neighboring states even when water is abundant in the region.

Historically, in some instances, warring states made use of existing water resources to threaten the opposing country by poisoning wells or controlling access to water supplies that were not necessarily scarce. However, some recent conflicts over water were triggered by a genuine shortage more than accessibility. This is a worrying sign as it is no longer a situation of territorial dispute and ownership; the control of the circumstances has left the hands of the warring states and it is now a massive problem that calls for global responsibility and responsiveness.

The compelling evidence of climate change and its toll on freshwater resources makes every country responsible for water shortages the world over. This complicates matters when it comes to reaching a consensus as to how much each one of us should do in order to curb the problem. Firstly, it is difficult to see from the point of view of a single person or country what difference we can make by reducing carbon emissions or recycling products. Secondly, it is much easier to be indifferent to the plight of others and remain passive about the situation. Thirdly, it is hard to be convinced of the necessity of action when the effects of climate change have not hit us hard enough. This complacency which we suffer from will cost us dearly in the future if we only decide to react when it is too late.

Water has implicitly become part of basic human rights and to be wasteful, or to deprive others of an essential element of survival or even use it as a military/ political tool is increasingly unacceptable. Major polluters of the atmosphere may not initially seem to be taking away this basic right, but their prolonged contamination of the Earth makes them guilty of the same crime. It is thus important for a collective effort from every region to reduce the effects of climate change through international cooperation as indirect perpetrators of today's water conflicts. The only question now is: why isn't more being done?

Ignorance is always a convenient excuse for inaction. However, the existence of international conventions and treaties on various environmental issues give states no excuse to be oblivious to the situation. Being aware of the problems and the need for a concrete plan, it is up to these

leaders to facilitate nationwide understanding of environmental issues in their home countries so that environmental policies are effectively implemented.