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MASTERING THE ELEMENTS: ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

In this edition of the SA Globalist, the four classical elements (fire, wind, air and earth) are used as a way of linking together contemporary issues surrounding environmental politics.

Fire
Our use of fire symbolises burning and heating of the earth. The articles placed under this grouping represent the political status quo currently leading us towards the destruction of the earth's ecosystem. This is explored through critiques of the Trump administration's withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Climate Change Accord, as well as an analysis of the shortcomings of the Kyoto Protocol. It also includes a review of the timely sequel to 'An Inconvenient Truth', analysing its relevance in the current global political context.

Earth
The earth section concentrates on the economics and politics of natural resources and energy security in Australia. This theme is examined through specific case studies of fracking and mining in the Northern Territory, as well as the controversial supply of natural gas in Australia.

Air
Air represents a metaphor for the winds of change in environmentalism. These articles showcase the developments and changes surrounding environmental politics and energy security that are taking place within Australia. This is exemplified in an article detailing Australia's actions on climate change and an interview with the Chief Executive of Conservation SA, Craig Wilkins.

Water
Lastly, the element of water, an essential nutrient for the survival of all living things. Therefore this section will take a global view of survival crises, specifically issues pertaining to food and water security.

Editor's Note
Humanity is slowly realising the critical role it has to play in protecting the environment. However, the need to take action is becoming increasingly urgent. The catastrophic effects of climate change are becoming more evident every day, not only affecting weather temperatures but also our supply of basic necessities like water and food.

While the four classical elements may no longer be relevant to scientific discussion, they are still important to consider in environmental political discourse. This issue of the Globalist shares ideas and opinions relating to environmental politics with the goal that one day we can work harmoniously with all the elements and address the issues highlighted in this edition. We have done this in hope to create a better future that progresses humanity and nourishes the earth in the process.

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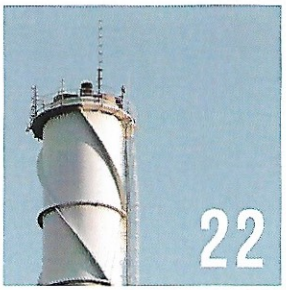

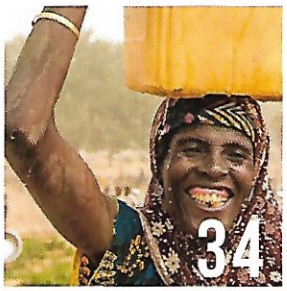

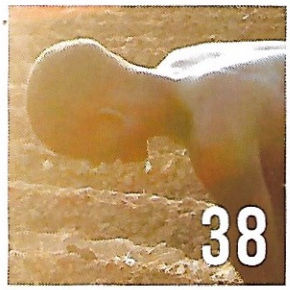

DYING OF THIRST: ADDRESSING WATER SECURITY

Editor-in-chief and second-year Journalism and International Relations student Connor Foley explores how environmental organisations are tackling issues of water security

There is no denying that water shortage is a contemporary global challenge of utmost importance. Water remains our most vital resource and when in short supply can cause various issues such as famine, disease, and war. Only three per cent of the earth's water stores are fresh and due to inefficient use and pollution, significant amounts are either misused or wasted.
However, water security does not relate solely to the consumption of water and can be defined as the ability to access sufficient quantities of clean water to maintain adequate standards of food and goods production, proper sanitation, and sustainable health care.

The severe consequences of a lack of water are already widespread, as an estimated 1.1 billion people don't have access to safe, affordable drinking water. Meanwhile, 2.7 billion people lack access to sanitation and millions die each year from easily preventable waterborne diseases. This typically occurs in the global south where there are higher levels of undeveloped water infrastructure, uneven water distribution and poorer political and economic climates.

States not currently under democratic rule in particular tend to ignore water security issues, as its citizens have far less political influence regarding water and environmental policy and cannot pressure governments into taking necessary action. Environmental protests are also becoming increasingly dangerous with over 200 environmentalists murdered in 2016 alone across 24 different countries. Environmental organisations therefore have a vital role in raising awareness and working in areas where states are not sufficiently providing their citizens with water.

The relationship between environmental organisations and water security is well established due to climate change and mass pollution having substantial negative impacts on the global water supply. Issues such as saltwater moving into freshwater areas and altering water cycles are also becoming increasingly common amongst states and make achieving water security an even more challenging goal.

Most notably, China has experienced this in recent years as a result of large economic growth and their resulting rapid industrial expansion. Their water supplies have become heavily polluted and local environments are often severely damaged. It has also caused less rainfall, more heat waves and droughts, and a greater divide of the distribution of water between the north and south of China.

Delivering freshwater and related supplies is the most common way that organisations such as Greenpeace and water.org offer their support. It typically takes place through transporting large amounts of bottled water to distribute amongst the citizens of the targeted area in need, or water filled tanker trucks to fill empty bottles, wells or any other available water storage facilities.

It can also include small-scale repairs and providing supplies that assist water use such as filters and sanitation equipment.

For states in the most severe circumstances, organisations need to take immediate action to provide water to citizens and don't have the time necessary to invest in long-term, sustainable solutions. Those under such circumstances naturally suffer the most water-related fatalities, which come primarily as a result of limited water access, lack of operating infrastructure and poor water management. Dehydration and water-related disease are not uncommon in these areas as they currently affect two million people worldwide — the majority of which are children under the age of five.

Freshwater delivery is typically adopted by large-scale charities, which can rely on significant donations and funding from the general public and is flexible enough to work in a wide range of scenarios. Their objectives are immediate and straightforward, making it simple for people to understand and therefore, more likely to contribute financially. Despite this, water delivery has received vast criticism for its inability to provide long-term, sustainable solutions to its areas of focus.

Despite millions being spent annually by charity organisations on granting water access, an estimated one trillion dollars is required to solve water problems on a global scale. Furthermore, an estimated total of 200 billion US dollars is spent annually on water access yet it still fails to have a significant effect. If this level of financial backing could be put towards more effective, long-term approaches, organisations could have a far greater impact on improving water security.

A noteworthy example of this can be found in Flint, Michigan, which has experienced a water crisis since 2014. Public outcry and successful social media campaigns originally drew widespread attention to the issue and resulted in large donations of bottled water and lead filters being distributed to the people in need. However, due to environmental organisations failure to grant Flint sovereignty of their water supply, they became reliant on the provided bottled water. When the donations eventually began to decrease in numbers, they found themselves in their original position of crisis despite millions of dollars pouring in from outside investment.

Another primary method for organisations is conducting their own research to identify the primary causes of water issues and provide detailed solutions that can be taken to government and other forms of administration.

This process allows states a far easier pathway for instigating positive change for water security, whether it's through policy, legislation or political protest. It also eliminates the potential for state corruption and ensures governments don't waste or exploit funding as can be common with charity efforts. Studies show that when a considerable amount of money is spent on improving water systems, it typically only benefits the wealthier urban areas and very rarely has a positive impact on the poor who most urgently need the assistance.

One of the best examples of valuable research strategies can be seen through Greenpeace's study of the Chao Phraya River in Thailand. The Chao Phraya River is Thailand's most important river and is home to nearly 13 million people with over 30,000 industrial facilities located along its banks. Its water is vital for agriculture and providing safe drinking water for Thailand's largest city, Bangkok. Extensive industrialisation and poor understanding regarding toxic chemicals resulted in severe pollution of the river and it being classified as 'deteriorated' by the Thailand water quality index.

As part of their 'Hidden Consequences' campaign, Greenpeace undertook a series of analyses which found harmful amounts of various chemicals including copper, lead and more crucially, toxic substances such as phthalate esters.

A study of the river allowed Thailand citizens to gain a detailed understanding into what was causing the contaminations and most importantly, applied the first step towards eliminating hazardous chemicals and minimising water pollution, which the military ruled government was not willing to do. The results of Greenpeace's study was also able to significantly raise global awareness into the issue as one of the largest environmental organisations in the world, sharing the results with its three million members worldwide.

One of the most important factors for organisations to tackle is minimising the amounts of water that don't reach the consumer, whether through pollution or being lost as a result of inefficient water infrastructure.

Agriculture is a significant contributor towards this issue as it makes up for 70 per cent of global freshwater withdrawals (up to 90 per cent in fast growing economies) and while water availability is expected to decrease in many regions globally in the coming years, agricultural water consumption is expected to increase by 19 per cent by 2050.

In developed countries, water infrastructure consistently requires reengineering and repair in order to maximise supply and efficiency, as well as maintaining a high standard of living. Developing countries, meanwhile, are usually still trying to install the necessary levels of water infrastructure required to satisfy all of its citizens' needs. With far less economic stability and researching capabilities, these problems are often left unexplored and solutions cannot be afforded without the assistance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This is particularly relevant under authoritarian rule, where citizens are unable to influence the nation's procedures in regards to water deficiency and water-related environmental degradation.

Therefore, building and repairing infrastructure is a top priority for environmental organisations, its effects best demonstrated by the work of Mercy Corps in Jordan. Due to a large influx of Syrian refugees, Jordan has been experiencing a water crisis and its hospitals, schools and mosques have gone without a sufficient water supply as a result. This is predominately due to poor quality infrastructure as estimates show the amount of water lost nationwide every year could satisfy the basic water needs of 2.6 million people.

As a result, Mercy Corps made major upgrades to various water infrastructure as well as installing rainwater catchments and grey water treatment systems, which heavily reduced local water network demands.

By prioritising long-term solutions that would guarantee Jordan water sovereignty, Mercy Corps has been able to significantly improve Jordan's water condition, as can be seen in various other examples in states such as South Sudan and Lebanon.

Due to the earth's rapidly growing population and depleting water stores worldwide, water issues will undeniably continue to worsen in the future. Environmental organisations have a major influence and their work is pivotal in trying to achieve water security and as a result, prevent death, disease and war.

Due to complex political climates and a negative correlation between dictatorial regimes and water security, they must focus their attention on developing countries in particular, where water security issues are most severe. The three methods most commonly adopted by environmental organisations are: the delivery of water and supplies; research and long term planning; and improving water efficiency.

Despite each having unique purposes and ongoing debate about their long-term effectiveness, all of these approaches will continue to play important roles in continuing to try and improve global water security.