

Sustaining Our Future by Valuing Water and Culture

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Leonardo da Vinci described water as “the driving force of all nature,” yet today, the world is facing a water crisis. If we reflect on the history of development interventions, we can see that people of various cultures have responded to similar hydrological situations by creating structures using what they knew and what they had. Local solutions were efficient, and some continue to be efficient today, because people considered the limits imposed by climate and context, included members of their communities directly in water governance and passed on appropriate intangible social practices down through the generations. And yet today, deforestation, unsustainable land use and poor disposal of industrial waste is polluting rivers and lakes, increasing gaps in access to safe water in many communities in Ghana and across Africa.

Water is directly or indirectly linked to the achievement of the other goals on the UN Agenda 2030. In this Decade of Water Action, we must value the multiple uses of water, from agriculture to power generation, transport, industry, domestic use, ecosystems, fisheries and livelihoods, to help transform this looming crisis into an opportunity to advance sustainable development. On the other hand, acknowledging the cultural values behind water practices and heritage management will help ground development plans in local contexts and conditions. The essence of water binds “people, planet and prosperity.”

Throughout my career including my current position, a common task has been to reunite the threads that bind people’s prosperity with the prosperity of the planet. New tools, technology and investment intended to accelerate progress toward the SDGs should aim to identify and increase SDG-aligned actionable investments for tackling not only socio-economic challenges but also for compensating for disturbances to other-than-human ecosystems.

Blue Papers argues for integrating water-heritage governance and management. It proposes re-thinking common approaches to tackling contemporary challenges that we have ourselves caused and now face. The journal, which highlights the true value of water, prompts us to take action to protect this vital resource and its tangible and intangible qualities. I support this multidisciplinary reflection for action toward a sustainable future and I hope that the journal will commit to the UN’s promise to #leavenoonebehind: from humans to non-humans. Implementation requires stepping out of one’s box to analyze our risks from a broader perspective, including multiple dimensions and sources of knowledge that have been relegated to memory.

