

Abby Lodge
Water Crisis

Latin America, with its glaciers and the amazon basin has one of the biggest sources of freshwater in the world, yet drinking water is scarce and for some it is even a luxury. The lack of drinking water together with pollution is having a huge impact on people's health, the economy, and even the war on poverty. Tourism and agriculture are also affected negatively. Lead, mercury, and sulfuric acid are just some of the few contaminants reported in the water in Rio Santiago, Mexico. People irrigate their farms with this water and then take the produce to the market. A few miles from the river a landfill has polluted every well in the surrounding area.

Mexican scientists are tapping into the past, they're using indigenous technology to recapture and recycle. They're creating hydro-ponds, which capture pollutants alongside canals. Then the microorganisms on the ground break down the organic material and metals in the water. There are also renewed efforts to conserve water, and Chile has come up with some innovated ways: installing clocks in showers to track time and save money on water and energy. I think some people in America need this as well. In addition to possibly changing our perceptions of "clean" a little too because I know a few people that take two showers a day every day and that to me, is crazy. The president of the Ecuadorian citizens committee for public services, Cesar Cardenas, has been lobbying against privatization of water services – says it allows private companies to trample over human rights and the laws and constitutions of the countries they operate.

Some disadvantages to privatizing water are: that water should be a basic obligation of government and so when you privatize it, suddenly there is a situation in which there are people making profit off water, where poor people are not a profitable group of people to be delivering that service for, and where you have disincentives for exactly the kind of behavior that you need to have to deliver a basic human right. I agree that water should not be privatized because it should be a basic human right. When you force privatization that is not regulated what you have is a disaster – higher rates, lack of good service, environmental damage, illness from cholera and hepatitis and other diseases. There are the same problems in the U.S. with privatization because the private companies usually cut staff to achieve their efficiency.

We need to deal with problems of corruption and lack of funding, not privatize these systems. People around the world are stunned to hear that the United States has a public water system because the United States is imposing an ideological privatization system abroad where in America there is a strong public system. (Can someone say hypocrite?) Guayaquil, Ecuador is an example of a failure of privatization, where there is a contract that the World Bank and inter-American Development bank. They forced the country to privatize, they were supposed to give a billion dollars and investment and add 55,000 new customers to connected water services, but Bechtel is completely unable to live up to the contract – 5% of sewage goes into local waterways, 150 children in the vicinity get hepatitis from the water, and none of the investment were made.