

WORLD WATER DAY 2021 TO BE CELEBRATED WITH THEME “VALUING WATER’ TODAY

22 MARCH 2021



Today is a special day when the whole world celebrates World Water Day. As the only “True” water NGO in Malaysia (Water Watch Penang works on water issues only and nothing else), we join all other organisations in the world to celebrate International World Water Day with this year’s theme “Valuing Water”. Water is life, without which there is no life! Yet water is the most undervalued, abused, wasted and “taken for granted” resource by humans! The *Paradox of Value*, also known as the *Diamond–Water Paradox* is the apparent contradiction that, although WATER is on the whole more useful, in terms of survival, than diamonds, DIAMONDS command a much higher price in the market.

Malaysia is “rich in water” with an annual rainfall of 973 billion m³, surface runoff of 496 Billion m³ and groundwater storage 5000 Billion m³. Malaysia’s annual per capita renewable water of nearly 20,000 m³ is 8.5 times more than the international water stress line of 1,700 m³, but we are far from achieving water security. Despite our rich water resources, we are periodically plagued by water crises, water rationing, water pollution etc. All of these problems confirm that our water problems are largely “human-caused and mostly due to the low value given to water by almost all of water consumers”. Because of the low value given to water, many problems exacerbate water crises such as deforestation and destruction of water catchments, river and water pollution, water wastage, high non-revenue water, low tariffs, lack of incentives for conservation, poor management and public apathy. Forests that are water catchments must be gazetted as such in order to protect them. The values of the forest are much more than just the value of logs. In Malaysia, politics also exacerbate water problems. State governments are in favour of giving water subsidies rather than increasing tariffs. State governments are also squabbling over water resources. Water resources in the country should be fairly shared, and not fought over. Poor awareness, poor understanding, lack of water education, poor ethics and

public apathy result in lack of appreciation and love for river and water and low priority/commitment for water saving. Furthermore, over-reliance on Water Supply Management (WSM) is a root problem that needs to be addressed to increase the Water's Value as addressing only the supply (technical) side of the problem without addressing the demand (human) side is futile. The authorities need to engage water consumers as it is absolutely necessary to educate them, generate greater awareness and sensitivity to rivers and water, and bring consumers aboard to control their water demands. When consumers (Industry & Domestic) are not sensitised, their water demands will quickly out-pace water supply leading to severe stress on the water supply system.

People need to realise that the value of water is not the same as the price of water, and saving water is not about saving money. It's about putting a high social, environmental and economic value on water. Still, in Malaysia, hitting consumers in the pocket is necessary to increase the value of water. This is because most Malaysians will put in a conscious effort to save petrol, electricity, phone bills and other expensive utilities, except water because of the low water tariffs across the country. It is therefore absolutely necessary to restructure water tariffs across the country, at least to bring tariffs to the level of "Cost Recovery" and to wean consumers off the government subsidies.

This year, World Water Day highlights a specific aspect of freshwater, viz. Valuing Water. Consumers need to value water beyond its price. When we value water holistically, it determines how water is managed, how it is allocated and shared, how it is supplied and used, and how it is being charged. A holistic value of water encompasses the significance of water's value to the households, culture, health, education, agriculture, industry and the health and sustainability of our natural environment and ecosystems. Water should be valued in terms of all of these in a holistic manner. If humans overlook any of these values, we risk destroying this vital resource that is finite and irreplaceable resource (we cannot make/create water). Water is under extreme threat from a growing population, increasing demands of agriculture and industry, and the worsening impacts of climate change. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly online events will be held to celebrate the World Water Day this year.

“Save water and use it wisely. Make every drop count.”

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