



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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**Workshop 2: „Is an optimistic or rather  
a pessimistic approach required to  
solve  
water problems?“**

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Dramatic changes in weather behaviour are being caused by global warming. These changes will concern us all, but the awareness of people differs a lot, depending on region, education and culture.

In order to make people aware of a problem and increase their willingness to change something, they need to feel concerned. However, a view which is too pessimistic often leads to apathy and resignation. If there is no hope for the future, people will not put much effort in changing something but rather lie down in resignation.

From that point of view, optimism seems to be a better approach, especially in terms of the belief that one can make a difference. However, a view which is too optimistic may prevent people from taking action; the same situation that occurs when there is insufficient awareness of prevalent problems.

## **High trust in science**

In general, people seem to be rather optimistic that water problems can be solved. They see a very high likelihood of this happening especially in terms of technical aspects.

Agriculture is one of the key issues in the water debate. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, there is a huge waste of water in agriculture. Roughly 50% of the water that is used for agriculture gets lost on the way to the plants. Secondly, agriculture quite simply needs an enormous amount of water. It is a fact that irrigated agriculture is more than twice as productive as non-irrigated agriculture. As a result, in California, 85% of the water imported into the state is used for agriculture. In case of a drought, the cities would be cut off first, not agriculture – quite a worrying thought.

Nevertheless, people don't worry too much, as this huge waste of water also represents a chance to save huge amounts of water just by reducing the water lost in agriculture. In addition, they trust that a technical solution will be found. "Science will find a way." However, science is based on education and money. Here lies a main reason for the difference in perspective depending on the area.

## **Positive perspectives in Asia wake interests in investors, pessimistic views of Africa scare them away**



Africa and Asia are two areas in the world where poverty is hugely prevalent. However, the perspectives differ greatly.

Perspectives for Asia seem to look pretty bright. One reason is cultural. People in Asia are often educated and brought up to work hard in order to gain benefits for themselves, but also in order to bring benefits to the community. There is huge social pressure to work hard for their country - their nation. The general consensus is that the 21st century is assumed to be the Asian century. This positive perspective gets carried outside and huge investments are being made by foreign companies who are trying to secure a piece of the pie.

In Africa, it looks very different. The general perspectives look pretty bleak there. In lots of places, there is a lack of everything - of money, of education but also of political stability. For a huge number of people, the water problem is just one part of the basic survival problem they have to cope with.

If there were better sanitary infrastructures and better housing, a lot of the drinking water problem would already be solved. The negative perspectives scare potential investors away or, much too often, if there are investments made by foreign companies, they are made to secure resources for the factories and not for the local public.

No wonder that African people, rather than trying to change things where they live, migrate to another place out of desperation, hoping to find a place where the future looks brighter.