

# Access to Water

Rights, Obligations and  
the Bangalore Situation



Jenny T. Grönwall

Competition for safe drinking water is intensifying. Over a billion people worldwide are estimated to lack access to it. Urbanisation and other demographic trends, along with globalisation and climate change, are adding to the changing patterns of water scarcity.

The crucial role of **rights** in attaining and improving access to water is often referred to when people talk water management. The notion as analysed here has three inter-linked dimensions: the right to water as a human right, water in terms of property rights, and 'water rights'. Law treats these rights, and thereby water, differently. Groundwater, for instance, has traditionally been thought of as invisible and unpredictable. Partly for this reason, it is still largely unregulated in many parts of the world. In India, "the landlord is a water lord". How does this reconcile with the claim for water as a human right?

Jenny Grönwall's dissertation is based on a year of field studies in Bangalore in southern India. The area is undergoing rapid urbanisation and administrative transition. Its growth puts pressure on the available water sources – mainly the disputed inter-State Cauvery River and the hard-rock aquifers – with ensuing problems of access. These aspects affect how rights to and over water are fulfilled and perceived. Ms. Grönwall concludes that we cannot talk in terms of water and rights until we are aware of how complex rights apply simultaneously, and how they correspond to obligations.



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