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CAPEARGUS OPINION

Water is key for peace and stability



Thabile Mange writes that when water is scarce or polluted, or when people have unequal or no access, tensions can arise between communities and countries. File picture

By Letter to the Editor | Published Mar 30, 2024

Water is life, and we all need water for our existence and survival.

As much as humans need water for survival, animals and the entire environment also need water for their existence. Without water there is basically no life and the world would perish. That is why people go to extremes and do anything to get water.

As we celebrated World Water Day on March 22, under the theme “Water for Peace”, we were reminded of the importance of water in fostering peace and stability among communities and nations.



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Thus, the theme entails that water can be a tool for peace when communities and countries co-operate over this precious shared resource, but water can also spark and intensify conflict when access is denied and usage unfairly shared.

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When water is scarce or polluted, or when people have unequal or no access, tensions can arise between communities and countries.

In South Africa, World Water Day is more than significant as it comes immediately after the celebration of Human Rights Day. World Water Day is significant because access to water is a basic human right, and this calls for the government to ensure that communities have reliable access to it.

More than 3 billion people worldwide depend on water that crosses national borders. Rivers know no boundaries. Yet only 24 countries have co-operation agreements for all their shared water, and the good thing is that South Africa is one of those countries and it's living peacefully with its neighbours which share the watercourses.

Co-operation agreements also ensure that the countries sharing a watercourse have equitable access to quality water, which calls for the parties to the agreement to prevent the pollution of the water resources.

Without co-operation, water can also spark and intensify conflict when access is denied and usage unfairly shared. Currently there is conflict on the Nile River between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia – mainly because there is no agreement on sharing the river's water.

It is therefore critical for countries to have co-operation agreements to ensure an equitable share of the cross-boundary watercourses. Polluted water can also



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Access to water ensures stability, peace and harmony within communities and countries.

Lack of water is the main cause of conflict and unrest in communities as water is life and people cannot live without it.

We all have a role to ensure stability and peaceful co-existence between communities, nations and regions.

We also need to protect the water resources from pollution to ensure that everyone has access to clean, quality and healthy water.

Let us all contribute to peaceful relations between communities and nations by protecting and preventing the pollution of water resources to ensure the sharing of quality water among communities and nations.

* Themba Khoza, Mpumalanga Department of Water and Sanitation.

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