

November 2012
Updated August 2013



Documentary film "Bottled Life"

Message of Mr. Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, Chairman of the Board of Directors Nestlé S.A.

In early of 2012, the documentary film called "Bottled Life" by the Swiss filmmakers Urs Schnell and Res Gehrig was released. Its purpose was to use the example of Nestlé's bottled water business to demonstrate that the privatization of water leads to the exhaustion of the most vital and scarcest of natural resources - water. The film is ideological, one-sided and large sections of it are factually false. It is not a film about bottled water, and certainly not about the water problem, -- it is 90 minutes of anti-Nestlé.

For example, it suggests that Nestlé is pumping away the groundwater of Pakistani farmers in the Punjab. The fact is, that we operate two of the approximately 680,000 wells in the region, and this under regular monitoring by the government, while the vast majority of wells are used for agriculture without any monitoring. It is also a fact that in the village where our factory is located, Nestlé has built two water filtration plants which provide pure water to 10,000 persons, and that a third plant is under construction.

In general, it would not be in our interest to ravage water resources and destroy the basis of our own business!

The film has numerous other sequences in the same vein. Unfortunately the film completely missed the opportunity - and this is my most serious reproach against it -, to address the grave problem of the global availability of water. Already today mankind massively overuses available fresh water resources. 70% of the water withdrawal is used by agriculture, 20% by industry, 10% by households. If humanity continues its current use of water, in 15 to 20 years we will have harvest losses, due to lack of water, on the order of the combined total harvest yields of the United States and India. The water crisis already in existence today will assuredly bring about a food crisis as a consequence, unless our joint efforts to bring about global, sustainable water management succeed. Unfortunately not a word of this in the film.

Just look at the facts: in its worldwide bottled water business, Nestlé uses a total of 0.0009% of the global water withdrawal. The message of the film however is that Nestlé should not be in this business at all. I would like to pose to those who think that 0.0009% is too much, because water is a human right and must not be "privatized" and sold, the following consideration:

Water required for drinking and basic hygiene is [without question a human right](#); i.e., a minimum of 25 L per day per person, or 1.5% of global water withdrawal. It is the fundamental responsibility of governments to ensure that the population is supplied with this amount of water, and it is unacceptable that today this is still not the case for more than 800 million people. On the other hand, I am not of the opinion that the other 98.5% of fresh water used -- including the watering of golf courses and carwashes -- is a human right. We need to act more respectfully when dealing with our most precious resource; wasting water will not cease as long as water has no value.

The so-called "privatization" of water is another point which is unfortunately treated only superficially and polemically in the film. Water as such -- rain, rivers, groundwater -- cannot be "privatized". The groundwater of Henniez, Vittel or the Indus basin is not "private". What can be privatized however is the use of water or the delivery of water to the user by pipe systems or in bottles. It should be added that in our opinion, our bottled water is not in competition with safe tap water - from public or private pipe systems -, but with other drinks, e.g., soft drinks. Yet it is a healthier alternative. Many critics would spare us the rod if we would add sugar and coloring to our bottled water.

The biggest disappointment of the film however, as we said, is that because of its ideological intent, it fails entirely to take up what is to my mind the greatest and most pressing demand of mankind -- the future availability of scarce water, and nowhere presents even a single attempt at a solution. Bringing this problem to public attention should be in the interest of each and every one of us. With my blog, www.water-challenge.com, I am trying to do this and would like to invite you all to participate in the discussion.