



ISSN 2582 - 211X

# LEX RESEARCH HUB JOURNAL

On Law & Multidisciplinary Issues

Email - [journal@lexresearchhub.com](mailto:journal@lexresearchhub.com)

**VOLUME III, ISSUE II**  
**APRIL - JUNE, 2022**

<https://journal.lexresearchhub.com>

**Lex Research Hub  
Publications**

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# **THE EMERGING DISASTER OF THE THIRSTY, SINKING CITY- MEXICO**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The city build on the water today is running out of water. Yes, on one hand, Mexico City is sinking, and on another hand, it is going through a tremendous shortage of freshwater. The rapid climate change has been a threat to the city and resulting in a yearlong persistent drought. Every drop of water that flows through Mexico City tells a heroic, tragic, and unfinished story of urban development and human development. The demand for fresh water is doubled with the increase in a population where the supply of it is decreasing. The problem of sanitation is affecting mostly women and they become prone to many dangerous diseases. Mexico City not only faces environmental issues but also political issues resulting in economic crisis. The lives are at stake as the city cannot provide adequate water to the people. One of the major areas of conflict among the people is the privatization of water. The government for the maximization of profit in their business is hiding the truth and fooling people about the addiction to Coca-Cola and they made such business strategies that the people are left with no option except to buy Coca-Cola instead of water. The graph of sugar diabetes in the city is increasing at an alarming rate. Reports say about eighty percent of the population is suffering from the problem of sugar diabetes. This evolving problem in Mexico is becoming a lifelong threat to both the environment and the population. The paper will discuss the reasons for the water crisis, the human right to water in Mexico, the government's role, the political games, and how capitalists are benefited rather than the normal citizens of the city.

**Keywords-** *Env- Environment, Gov- Government, Pol- politics*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mexico City is North America's southern most city, sharing a border with South America. The city is currently experiencing a severe water shortage. The water crisis in Mexico has many faces. Many impoverished communities not only lack regular service but also lack access to safe drinking water. The environmental consequences of water policies, which have put the entire metropolitan area at risk, are exacerbating the problem. These policies have depleted the ecosystem, endangering the delicate balance and determining the rate at which the city sinks into the lakebed below. The city has an interesting history. Mexico City was built on Texcoco Lake. Lake Texcoco is a shallow water lakebed where the city was built, and today the situation has deteriorated to the point where the area, which had plenty of water on all sides, is facing a water crisis. Historical neglect, political venality, and ignorance have all contributed to the crisis, allowing for systematic deforestation of the surrounding mountains and the construction of communities in ravines and along lakebeds where water flows during the rainy season.

Water has always been a basic need and necessity and it impacts sanitation, hygiene, education, and health in life. The impending crisis has received little attention. People lack access to clean drinking water. Most of the taps almost all the year remain dry. The city continues to draw large amounts of water from neighboring states and discharges virtually all of its wastewater into nearby state rivers, where forage and food crops are grown for the Mexico City market, via an expensive drainage system. The problem of Aquifer is a concerning problem in the present day. The city runs mostly on aquifers but now due to groundwater depletion water shortage is experienced and different types of problems are arising. Mexico City is at risk of running out of water due to unsustainable water management practices. The vast majority of the city's water supply is derived from an underground aquifer that is being depleted faster than it can be replenished. Because the ground is covered in concrete, rain water runs off rather than seeping through the soil and returning to the aquifer. Pesticides and pollutants are collected, contaminating other water sources such as rivers and lakes. Mexico City is sinking an estimated 1 meter per year due to the rapidly depleting aquifer. In 2020 Mexico had a total population of more than 12.89 crores, and more than half of the total population faced a water crisis. The demand for water has increased but the supply has decreased. Water scarcity has resulted in frequent water shut-offs in Mexico City's central business district. However, people are most vulnerable in the mountainous outskirts. People in these areas



live off-grid and do not have access to water because there are no city pipes delivering water to people's taps. Residents in these areas rely on government-supplied water trucks known as las pipas to deliver water. There is frequently insufficient water for sanitation and hygiene, which can lead to health problems. Furthermore, when the water trucks do not arrive, women and children are frequently forced to travel long distances to obtain water for their families. This prevents them from putting time and effort into their careers and education.

### **FACTORS LEADING TO THE WATER CRISIS IN MEXICO**

With days the water crisis is increasing in the city and it is leading to different types of problems. There are many reasons why today the city is facing such serious issues. Not only environmental issues but adding to it there are political issues leading to the economic crisis. The main issues are stated below-

- **Aquifers-** Eighty percent of the city's freshwater comes from aquifers. The ground is embedded with aquifers but presently Ground water overdraft is a major issue in Mexico. The water table is decreasing. One hundred of Mexico's 188 most important aquifers for agriculture and human consumption are over-exploited, and 32 are affected by sea water intrusion in coastal areas. Over exploitation of ground water refers to withdrawals that exceed the annual average recharge. Expansion of irrigated agriculture, population growth, changes in consumption habits, and urbanization are the primary drivers of increased water use, resulting in water scarcity, which is becoming a threat to Mexico's sustainable development. That is why due to overexploitation the groundwater recharge has decreased and the aquifers could not pump enough water to feed the population. The land is fully concrete. The planning made before building the city was for the short term. They have not thought of the long term that there may be a problem that can arise due to the concrete land. Due to solid land, the rainwater is not permeable. Instead of going inside the ground and making the groundwater table stable most of the rainwater leaves the city by runoff process. The infiltration is minimum and the runoff is maximum. Due to the concretization of land and due to lack of percolation of water the groundwater is being depleted and the aquifers are running out of water.

Mexico City wastes the same amount of water as some of the world's largest cities. When it comes to drinking water quality, the massive leaks are a part of a vicious cycle. When sewage from leaking sewers permeates the soil, it is obvious that leaky pipelines will become infiltrated with contaminated water, especially when pressure is low. The city has over 1000 kilometers of main pipes and over 12,000 kilometers of secondary pipes. However, when it comes to leaks, the core issue is not at all difficult to diagnose and detect. The pipes became old and there are numerous leaks. Mexico City is losing 1,000 liters of water per second due to an outdated water system that is being crushed by the falling city and is punctuated by thousands of small leaks.

**Water leakage project (2000)-** This is not to say that the powers that be are unaware of the financial and social costs of massive leaks. The Mexico City Council (via the Mexico City Water System) launched a major sectoring project in the drinking water network in 2000. The goal was to improve its poor track record of water leakage control and to reduce water losses in the water supply system. The project's goal was to divide the network into sectors and sub-sectors by installing segmentation valves at one or two inlet points for each sector. This, it was hoped, would allow for the identification and control of losses in each sector.

- **Overpopulation-** Presently Mexico has a population of more than 12.89 crores. This huge population is creating a problem of the water crisis. The demand for water has doubled but the resource is limited. Mexico City is in the grip of a water crisis, with one in every five residents lacking access to safe drinking water. Many people only receive water once a week from a truck that they must pay to deliver to the designated area, and even then, they must wait in line for hours, sometimes overnight, for fear that the truck will run out of water. Access to clean drinking water is not available. The tap water is unavailable most of the time. A local said, “We have not got water for a week. This creates a mess and problem in our daily life like washing clothes, sanitation. We have to store water in drums for future use”. Approximately 5 million Mexicans currently lack access to safe drinking water.

Women and children face a huge problem during this crisis. Due to the shortage of water, the local women have to travel to very far places in search of water. They carry big buckets in their hand and it is a regulation routine for them for carrying water. Carrying heavy buckets every day causes problems in their health. They become prone to arthritis, osteoporosis, and other bone problems. Sanitation problems take place due to a lack of water during the menstrual cycle. The children are getting ill due to a lack of fresh water. They are forced to drink the water that is contaminated and mixed with sewage and thus go through diseases like tuberculosis, diarrhea, etc.

- **Climate change and drought** – Climate change, unlike traffic or crime, is not something that most people can easily feel or see. It is not something that Mexicans discuss on a daily basis. But it's like a looming storm, straining an already frail social fabric and threatening to bring a great city to its knees. Drought was common in Mexico and it used to happen in the hottest month of the year i.e. April. In recent years global warming is affecting the whole world in some or other ways. Global warming resulted in a tremendous increase in climate change. The temperature all over the world is subsequently rising. The rise in temperature made Mexico's land warm and dry. In recent years due to the anomalous rise in temperature drought became persistent and occur almost every month of the year. The rainfall became so scanty that drought became a common thing in Mexico. More heat and drought mean more evaporation and even more demand for water, increasing pressure to tap distant reservoirs at exorbitant costs or further drain underground aquifers, hastening the city's demise. The population could not even get fresh water to drink. Thirty percent of people die every year due to a lack of water. According to one study, 10% of Mexicans aged 15 to 65 will attempt to emigrate north as a result of rising temperatures, drought, and floods, potentially scattering millions of people and escalating already extreme political tensions over immigration.

#### **Effects of drought-**

- i. Acute shortage of water all over the year.
- ii. Problems of women as they use to face the greatest difficulty like sanitation. They have to travel a long way to fetch water and store water.

- iii. Financial problems take place due to drought as agricultural crops were not produced during the time of drought. Thus it halts the education of the children.

Climate change has many vulnerabilities. Many people lose both life and property. The main thing is they have to go through many complexities and it is difficult for them to lead a normal life.

### **THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER IN MEXICO:**

The 19th of April, 2012, was a water-related historic day in Mexico. Four women from Colonia Ampliación Tres de Mayo in the municipality of Xochitepec, Morelos, near the resort city of Cuernavaca, won a legal victory when a federal tribunal of judges invoked the country's new constitutional reform – which guaranteed the human right to water – to require the municipality to provide water service to the Colonia (neighborhood) of 100 low-income families (Wilder and Ingram, 2016). This Colonia is just one of the thousands of people living with chronic water insecurity across Mexico's uneven social landscape. Although Mexico has made significant progress in improving water service over the last three decades, approximately five million people do not have regular access to clean water and sanitation, and there are significant disparities in access between the more affluent north and the low-income central and southern regions, as well as between urban and rural areas. The notable judicial victory of four courageous women leaders in Morelos was a notable and heralded event; it called attention to the enormous task of implementing Mexico's guarantee of its water right, which was adopted as a reform of *Article 4* of the Constitution in February 2012. The reform was supposed to be followed by a General Water Law (GWL) within one year to implement the human right to water, but Mexico has been mired in a lack of consensus for eight years and no law has been passed. The constitutional amendment (*Article 4*) only provides broad guidelines for what is included in the "human right to water" – equitable and sustainable use and access, involvement of all three levels of government, and citizen participation. The new law is intended to govern water resource use and management at the state, regional, and municipal levels, with social ramifications and consequences. Given Mexico's uneven economic development and diverse cultural makeup, the national law attempts to articulate a universal standard that can be applied across a diverse landscape. The new national law will not stand alone but will be part of a complex set of laws governing water use and management,

including *Article 115* of the Constitution, which specifically delegated water services to municipalities. This article examines Mexico's constitutional guarantee of the human right to water, which has a limited scope (Barlow, 2012; Sultana and Loftus, 2020). In 2015, two opposing proposals received widespread public support but were not enacted into law: one was a technocratic, neoliberal approach supported at the time by the powerful central water authority, the National Water Commission (CONAGUA), and the other was a Citizens Initiative (CI), a socially inclusive approach developed by activists, academics, and civil society groups. A new process to develop a consensus proposal is underway under the administration of Mexico's current president.

**In Mexico, the implementation of the human right to water faces two major challenges:** 1) different sectors envision the human right to water in different ways based on broad constitutional language, resulting in incompatible visions;

2) The legal and institutional framework within which the human right to water is to be implemented is complex, fragmented, and under-resourced, creating structural barriers to progress. Proposed water legislation, which was criticized by a social coalition of civic, academic, and environmental sectors, highlighted fundamental differences in perspective, emphasizing the ethical and social importance of constitutional reform while also highlighting the significant obstacles to the implementation of the human right to water in Mexico.

From the colonial period in 1821 to the twentieth century, Mexico's water rights underwent significant changes; water resources were still abundant relative to the population during this period, and the primary concern was to increase their use. The first water governance milestone occurred in the 1917 Constitution *Article 27*, which stated that "ownership of the land and waters within the boundaries of the national territory is originally vested in the Nation." The president then amended the **1917 Water Law**, recognizing that "it is urgent to establish fast and practical systems so that municipalities can carry out water extractions with which they attend to public and domestic services." With the establishment of the National Water Commission (known as CONAGUA) in 1988, the emphasis shifted from construction to management. The provision of water and sanitation services, including the treatment of household wastewater, became the responsibility of municipal governments with the 1983 adoption of revisions to *Article 115* of the

Constitution; this established that "the municipalities, with the cooperation of the State as necessary and as determined by law, will have responsibility for the following public services: potable water and sanitation both." A national water law passed in 1992 Ley De Aguas Nacionales or known as LAN closely followed the market-based technique of the World Bank's water policies. The LAN included elements of securitized water rights and privatization associated with neoliberal water treatments.

### **HIDDEN REALITY OF THE CITY**

Privatization of water is a major political issue that is going on in Mexico. Most people associate water privatization with the private management of water systems. This can take many forms, ranging from full privatization to service contracts for municipal and city systems. Water privatization, on the other hand, takes many forms: bottled water, water pollution, water grabbing, and private companies lobbying for water policies that favor their agenda. Water privatization takes many forms in Mexico. In fact, the Mexican water authority (CONAGUA) has always been content to be a part of the mainstream international elite that develops and implements global water policies. Mexico was chosen to host the World Water Forum in recognition of the country's outstanding performance in promoting water privatization and commercialization. According to the Beverage Marketing Corporation, Mexico now ranks first in bottled water consumption per capita. This is undoubtedly due to aggressive marketing by bottling companies, but it is also due to the lack of information Mexicans have about water quality at home. In some cases, we know that drinking tap water directly poses a serious health risk. In others, we simply don't know, and people buy bottled water when in doubt.

Privatization of water is good for one class of the population who is rich because they do not have any problem affording it. The capitalists always aim for profit maximization and they sell one bottle of drinking water at a very expensive price which is impossible for the poor or middle-class section of the society. They are unable to afford a bottle of water at such a huge price. \$9.60 per gallon is the price which is quite huge. The government also supports this act and thus help the capitalist to set up their business and continue corruption and black marketing. Two consecutive businesses are going on in Mexico which is affecting people in two different ways. One is the

privatization of water and charging a lot of money. The rich buy gallons of water at huge prices and the companies gain maximum profit from it and boom in their own fields. The poor people could not afford to buy it and there causes an economic crisis and they look for an alternative to it.

The alternative is choosing Coca-Cola over water. Mexico is the home industry of manufacturing Coca-Cola. Around 1921, the Coca-Cola Company established its first bottling franchise in Mexico with Grupo Tampico, followed by Grupo ARMA. FEMSA, based in Monterrey, is the largest Coca-Cola bottler in Mexico and most of Latin America. Coca-Cola gained popularity in Mexico beginning in the 1960s, thanks to former Mexican President Vicente Fox, who began his career driving around making deliveries for the company. Soda has become ingrained in Mexican culture, even intersecting with politics and religion in some areas. It is called “in town with little water, Coca-Cola is everywhere.” Mexico is the number one consumer of the deadly Coca-Cola. The price of coke is much less than a bottle of water. The people drink this as a substitute for water because it is not possible for them to afford to buy water at high prices. To fulfill their thirst they prefer coke. It is reported eighty percent of the population suffers from sugar diabetes due to this Coca-Cola addiction and continuous consumption. The country's sugar addiction is causing a diabetes emergency, according to health officials. Guillermo Galdos, a reporter for Unreported World, traveled to Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state, where people consume two liters of sugary drinks per day on average, and Coca-Cola reigns supreme. He met families in the grip of a diabetes crisis, as well as people who believe Coca-Cola has special healing powers and use it to treat illnesses.

## **HISTORY OF HOW COKA COLA BECAME A FAMOUS PART OF MEXICO'S CULTURE-**

People of Mexico on average consume over 700 cups of Coca-Cola each year. However, Coca-Cola was not always such an important part of Mexican culture. Its popularity grew gradually as one of its delivery drivers, Vicente Fox, rose through the ranks to become president of Coca-Cola Mexico and, eventually, president of the entire country. Coca-Cola had been in Mexico for decades before it became popular. An international advertising campaign for the drink swept across Mexico

in the early 1970s. Coca-Cola also sponsored the Olympics and World Cup in Mexico City at the same time. Coke was so popular that then-President Luis Echeverria attempted to obtain the recipe and nationalize it in 1970. Though his attempt failed, it demonstrated how closely Coca-Cola and Mexican culture are intertwined. The story begins in the 1960s, long before Vicente Fox became Mexico's president. Fox was a salesman for Coca-Cola at the time, delivering Coke to local businesses. Fox stated that he would incentivize local businesses to switch to Coca-Cola rather than Pepsi. In 1971, an iconic Coca-Cola advertising campaign became popular in Mexico. Coca-Cola also sponsored the Olympics in Mexico City and, later, the World Cup. Coca-Cola advertising was all over Mexico. After ten years, Coca-Cola had a larger market share. Fox was thus promoted. Fox was enraged by the government's anti-business stance. However, climbing the corporate ladder meant dealing with politics. Fox claimed he was summoned to the White House one day. Then-President Luis Echeverria desired the Coke recipe as well as the nationalization of Coca-Cola and its bottlers. Fox said he and his team decided to show off the brand-new Coca-Cola shrimp farm to distract the president from his demand for the Coke formula. They were successful in diverting Echeverria's attention away from the formula. Fox was soon appointed President of Coca-Cola Mexico. But he wasn't happy with his job. He returned to his family farm in 1979. Several decades later, he made the decision to work for the general public instead. In 2000, he was elected as Mexico's president. Coca-Cola, according to Fox, provided some of his first campaign donations. Despite the fact that Fox's presidency disappointed many Mexicans, Coca-business Cola's grew during his tenure. The North American Free Trade Agreement played a role in the explosive growth of Coke in Mexico during Fox's presidency. When Mexico joined NAFTA in 1994, Coca-Cola became significantly cheaper in Mexico. It was also made more accessible. Coca-Cola was cheaper and easier to find in some parts of Mexico than clean drinking water. Because many malnourished communities required the calories, they began drinking more Coke. However, there was a drawback to Coke's sudden popularity: the diabetes rate in Mexico more than doubled between 2000 and 2007.



## **WHY THE CITY WHICH IS RUNNING OUT OF WATER IS SINKING TODAY?**

The problem stems from Mexico City's poor foundation. Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, was built on an island in Lake Texcoco, which is nestled in a basin surrounded by mountains. When the Spaniards arrived and destroyed Tenochtitlan, slaughtering its people, they began draining the lake and building on top of it. The metropolis that became modern-day Mexico City grew bit by bit until the lake vanished. And this started the physical changes that led to the city sinking. When the lake sediment beneath Mexico City was still wet, its component clay particles were disorganized. Consider throwing plates into a sink at random—the random orientations allow a lot of liquid to flow between them. When the water is removed, as Mexico City's planners did when they drained the lake in the first place, and as the city has done since then by tapping the ground as an aquifer, the particles rearrange themselves to stack neatly, like plates in a cupboard. The sediment compacts as the space between the particles decreases. Consider it similar to applying a clay face mask. You can feel the mask tightening against your skin as it dries. It is losing volume and water. It is caused by a geological phenomenon known as **subsidence**, which occurs when too much water is drawn from underground and the land above begins to compact. As most of the groundwater has depleted and the water table has decreased thus subsidence is taking place. The buildings have already started tilting. The rate of subsidence is different in different places. The effect shown is more where the level of water has decreased substantially and less where the water table is still becoming low. Officials in Mexico City first noticed the subsidence problem in the late 1800s, when they noticed buildings sinking and began taking measurements. The researchers calculated that it will take another 150 years for the sediment in Mexico City to be completely compact, though their new modeling shows that subsidence rates will vary from block to block. The faster clay sinks in a given area, the thicker the clay. Other areas, particularly on the outskirts of the city, may not sink much at all because they are built on rock rather than sediment.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the long run, however, adding wells, trucking in water, and reducing reservoir flows are only band-aid solutions to the larger problem: the depleting aquifer. By the end of its term in 2024, the government hoped to reduce aquifer over-extraction while also providing water to all homes every day of the week. The goal is to use the aquifer sustainably by 2040. In the short term, reducing leaks, which cause up to 40% of the water supply to be lost, is critical to increasing supply. Repairing leaks is the cheapest thing that can be done. In 2019, the city government spent 300 million pesos (\$15 million) responding to over 12,000 leaks, and it is dividing the network into sections to help regulate pressure and stem losses. Rainwater capture was also being increased, and the plan was to increase the use of treated wastewater for activities such as car washing and plant watering. The people are taking some steps and adopting some ways by which the water crisis can be reduced. Several projects have been proposed to address this issue. Parks have been built in strategic locations to allow rainwater to seep into the ground and replenish the aquifer while reducing flood risk. Other initiatives aim to reduce the impact of development and improve wastewater management in order to increase local water availability. Some roads built on top of what were once river beds, for example, have been modified to include linear parks aimed at treating runoff. Such projects are becoming more common as the future of water availability becomes a greater concern. To truly address Mexico City's water crisis, however, the government will need to invest significantly in new infrastructure aimed at collecting rainwater and recycling wastewater. Relying on a depleted aquifer and water imported from distant sources is not a long-term solution, and residents will continue to face the paradox of Mexico's water crisis. Due to Mexico's strategic location, there is a process like desalination but it is very costly and is not easily affordable by the government as it requires huge finance and it is not easy for a developing city.

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