

- [The Economist](#)

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Good science constitutes being able to discriminate between spheres to which a specific theory applies and spheres to which it does not.

Applying the principles of Newtonian physics to the quantum world is inappropriate, as is applying the principles of mechanistic science to complex self-organising living systems. Applying the principles of the market economy of trade in commodities to the ecological and social world of our living and precious water resources is similarly inappropriate. Blind adherence to false assumptions is ideological. In fact this is what makes for various hues of fundamentalism. And Steve Hoffmann exposes himself as a market fundamentalist by repeating the false assumptions that market principles can be applied to how water is managed and distributed, without causing harm to people and their human right to water or to ecosystems and their ability to provide ecosystem services in perpetuity.

Market fundamentalists do not recognise that there are not one, but three economies: nature's economy, people's sustenance economy and the market economy. The first two can survive without the third, but market economics are dependent on nature's ability to provide ecological services and societies support systems—the invisible work of women, of third-world people, the human relationships beyond markets which support markets and market transactions. One could not bring up a child on market principles, just as much as one cannot conserve water resources or share them equitably on the basis of market values set by the greed of water corporations or the willingness to pay of the privileged in society.

Market fundamentalism applied to seed has given us terminator technologies to create sterile seeds, seed monopolies and seed famine. It has driven 200,000 farmers to suicide due to debt.

Market fundamentalism applied to water will create water monopolies and water famine. It will aggravate water scarcity for fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities.

Water privatisation cannot respond to the diversity of water systems needed to adapt to the diversity of ecosystems to ensure sustainability. Markets support and are supported by uniformity and the one-size-fits all mentality. Markets are also built on resource extraction, not on returning water to ecosystems. They are linear not cyclical.

And the drivers of markets are corporations, not people or nature. Mr Hoffmann confirms this when he says: "If the market value of water is not charged to end users what incentive does Badger Meter have for developing automatic meterreading technology to measure real-time consumption demands, what incentive does ITT have for developing efficient water pumps, what incentive does IDE Technologies have for engineering integrated watershed management programmes? Mr Hoffmann's water world is companies, water meters, pumps, engineering. My water world is women, children, rivers, lakes, snowflakes and raindrops.

In India 25 different water conservation and management systems have been built to provide water. The *eri, keri, kunta, kulani, ahars, bandh, bandha, khadins, bundhies, sailata, kuthi, bandharas, low khongs, thodu, dongs, tanks, johad, nade, peta, kasht, paithu, bil, jheel* and lakes are only a few of them. To this day, these ancient systems are the mainstay of survival in ecologically fragile zones.

In the desert of Rajasthan, human care and efforts have provided water through the *huin, kuan, kundi, kund* and *tanka*. Since every drop of rain has to be conserved, the indigenous knowledge is based on the sensitive observation of rainfall and its patterns. The first drop of rain is called *hari*. Rain is also called *meghphusp* (cloud flower), *vrishiti* or *birkha*; water drops are called *bula* and *sikhar*. It is not markets but sophisticated knowledge and sensitive care which have made Rajasthan the most vibrant desert of the world. People invest their labour and care to provide water. Thus investment is not based on the market value of water but on its pricelessness. It is not based on profits but on the gift economy. Our communities are water keepers, not water privateers. If markets define the "relationship between mankind and the environment", as Mr Hoffmann states, mankind is not humanity. It

does not include women, children or the vulnerable members of society. It is the sub-sect of humanity that defines the world through the lens of Wall Street, because Wall Street is their world.

Mr Hoffmann also explains the current financial crisis as stemming from the public policy directive that home ownership is tantamount to a right and that everyone, even if unable to afford it, should be able to buy a home. This is totally false. Market fundamentalism led to public systems withdrawing from providing affordable housing, on the assumption that the poor can be left to predatory banks to meet their housing needs. Wall Streets created the subprime crisis. The human right to housing would have ensured affordable housing for all, just as the human right to water is the only way to ensure water for all. The predatory market has left thousands homeless and it will leave millions waterless.

That is why I work with our communities to keep water and other vital resources beyond the greed of the market. In the 1970s women in my region started the Chipko movement because commercial logging was leading to deforestation, and deforestation was leading to floods and droughts. They fought against the rule of the market over their forest. They hugged trees so that the greed of the market forces would not dry up their springs and streams and they would not have to walk miles to water. Women are not walking additional miles to water because of the absence of the market, as Mr Hoffmann suggests. It is the women who walk long miles for water who are leading the movement against the privatisation and commodification of water. They are building the movement for defending water as a public good and a human right. They know their water security lies in protecting, conserving and sharing our common and precious gift of water.