

BWS 2019 Highlights: Thursday, 17 October 2019

The 2019 Budapest Water Summit (BWS 2019) resumed discussions on water crises on Thursday, covering systems for implementation, transboundary water affairs, and the institutional architecture to support transformation.

During a closing session, the BWS 2019 International Programme and Drafting Committee presented the Budapest Appeal, a summary of recommendations on the way forward in water security issues.

Several side events and a Digital and Nature-based Sustainable Solutions Expo continued in parallel.

Session 8: Implementation: Do We Have the Right Systems in Place?

This morning session was moderated by Ravi Narayanan, Asia-Pacific Water Forum.

Tebaldo Vinciguerra, Holy See, presented a message from Pope Francis expressing hope that the deliberations would be guided by recognition of the human right to water consistent with the inalienable dignity of all people, and that the most marginalized should be the first to benefit from improved water supply systems.

In a keynote address, Claudia Pahl-Wostl, University of Osnabrück, highlighted findings from comparative analyses of diverse river basin governance systems, stating the overwhelming evidence shows we do not yet have the right systems in place. Drawing on preliminary conclusions from in-depth case studies on integrated water resources management (IWRM) in Germany, Spain, Mongolia, Iran and South Africa, Pahl-Wostl highlighted: avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions



Moderator **Ravi Narayanan**, Asia-Pacific Water Forum



Claudia Pahl-Wostl, University of Osnabrück, Germany

and focusing on key guiding principles for good governance; identifying leverage points and change agents; conducting more transdisciplinary research; and establishing a global community of practice linked to the sustainable development goal (SDG) implementation process.

High-level Panel Discussion: Introducing the panel, Moderator Narayanan invited panelists to explore the follow-up questions: “The right systems for what, for whom, and for where?”

Mohamed Abdel Aty, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt, shared experience in managing multiple demands for water, noting the construction of the Aswan Dam led to a shift from managing floods to managing water scarcity, requiring a new set of skills and capacities. He said Egypt has one of the highest recycling rates for water resources and has enacted policy requiring all new development projects to be based on desalination, triggering a ten-fold increase in desalinated water output in just a few years. On the governance architecture required to manage this transition, he highlighted: joint management with associations of farmers and other users; enhanced coordination with upstream countries; and transparent and independent monitoring mechanisms to build public trust in recycled water quality.

Discussing France’s experience, Jean Launay, National Water Committee and French Water Partnership, explained that the water management system revolves around decentralized, basin-level masterplans that form the basis for allocating funding to water service providers. He further noted the system had evolved from a focus on delivering quality drinking water to a wider focus on ecosystem and biodiversity conservation. On lessons learned, Launay highlighted the need to: ensure tiered systems for revenue collection that can generate

resources to address challenges such as pollution and access for all users; develop common databases for information and monitoring; and incorporate environmental safeguards.

Stefano Burchi, International Association for Water Law, stressed that the goal of legal frameworks should be to facilitate, not impede, IWRM. He said one of the key challenges is how to account for, and address the needs of marginalized groups, both in regard to their human right to drinking water and livelihoods. On water withdrawals by agriculture, he emphasized the need to build legislative frameworks to ensure a balance between service delivery and resource management.

Vinciguerra posited that moral purpose may be needed to drive good governance for the two billion people who do not have access to drinking water. He reflected that the presence of water in ancient spiritual and religious texts and culture inspire value in water, which could be useful to help transform, strengthen and drive management for future action. Pahl-Wostl added that an ethical argument could inspire a new approach to understanding the human-nature relationship.

On the need for “soft skills” of communication in governance systems, Pahl-Wostl framed participation as a craft, considering these skills as crucial in building trust, along with political will, in order to empower and include stakeholders. Eddy Moors, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, underlined that the complexity of water issues demands both an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to connect sectors and policy makers to water users. Specifically, he outlined that water scarcity requires clear communication and negotiation among food, health and energy sectors.

Other issues highlighted in the discussion included: successful implementation of technology is possible when technical and regulatory skills converge; a good system for

implementation should be inclusive and adaptive; and success relies on engagement, education and awareness raising.

Session 9: Transboundary Water Affairs - How to Move from Risks to Opportunities?

Aaron Wolf, Oregon State University, moderated this session in the morning.

Drawing attention to the fact that 40% of the global population live in transboundary basins, Kire Iljoski, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), said the majority of international water courses lack cooperative arrangements, are not in force, or are not implemented properly. He underlined that transboundary cooperation can generate economic, social and political benefits that can stabilize society and prevent conflict and resolve post-conflict situations, emphasizing that it is essential for addressing water crises caused by climate change. He reported that UNECE has contributed to the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements in almost all transboundary waters in pan-Europe.

Jamal Al-Adly, Minister of Water Resources, Iraq, described the importance of transboundary cooperation to water and energy security, migration trends, a secure economy and international peace. Using the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as examples, he underscored the challenges in water management between up and downstream users, particularly in regions where there is pre-existing weakness in cooperation, and where not all countries are parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). “Rivers were created before borders,” he said, “so people downstream have the same rights as those upstream.”

High-level Panel Discussion: Zaheed Farooque, State Minister, Ministry of Water Resources, Bangladesh, elaborated on the perspective of a small riparian country



L-R: Moderator **Aaron Wolf**, Oregon State University, US; **Kire Iljoski**, UNECE; **Jamal Al-Adly**, Minister of Water Resources, Iraq; **Zaheed Farooque**, State Minister, Ministry of Water Resources, Bangladesh; **Saara Bäck**, Ministry of the Environment, Finland; **Franz Rojas Ortuste**, Development Bank of Latin America; **Péter Kovács**, President, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River; and **Susanne Schmeier**, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education

surrounded by larger upstream countries. Noting 57 of 400 rivers that cross the country are transboundary, he outlined how the 1996 Ganges Treaty to share surface waters with India is helping the country to cope with the alternating challenges of massive inflows of water and sediment during the monsoon season, and water deficits during the dry season.

Susanne Schmeier, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, discussed the role of river basin organizations (RBOs) in moderating transboundary challenges. She noted that RBOs can only be effective if they are given the mandate and means to facilitate joint projects that translate into real benefits for members. She highlighted the Mekong River Commission, the Water Convention, and the Senegal River Basin Development Organization as best practices of how to, respectively: address disputes linked to upstream development projects; translate global water norms for specific transboundary contexts; and consolidate collaboration through the joint ownership of infrastructure. Schmeier acknowledged that a common weakness is that many RBOs do not sufficiently involve non-state actors in decision-making processes, citing the Mekong and Danube RBOs as examples of good practice in this regard.

Péter Kovács, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, introduced the 14-member Danube River Protection Convention as “one of the best cases in the world” for transboundary water cooperation. Discussing the evolution of the 25 year-old treaty, he said the starting point was bilateral technical cooperation to address joint challenges, such as pollution and flooding, that later expanded into a multilateral agreement guided by a EU-supported strategic action plan. Among emerging challenges, he highlighted extreme droughts and floods due to climate change and water scarcity.

Franz Rojas Ortuste, Development Bank of Latin America, shared how asymmetrical distribution of water resources in Latin America can lead to conflict. Framing that transboundary water issues can present opportunities, he referenced the Bank’s strategic objective to work beyond treaties for successful IWRM. He highlighted the need to enhance hydro-meteorological data.

Saara Bäck, Ministry of the Environment, Finland, challenged experts to consider how to change “data into information, and information into action.” She spoke of developing trust among stakeholders and the needs for data, in order to inspire successful transboundary cooperation, noting it is critical to involve stakeholders.

On inspiring the next generation of water champions, panelists concurred on the value of early education. Kovács underscored enhanced public participation to engage stakeholders, while Bäck encouraged peer learning. Ilioski noted that training for future generations should balance technical water expertise with skills in diplomacy.

Ensuing discussions addressed questions raised by participants on learning from past mistakes and finding ways to support responsible behavior by upstream neighbors.

Session 10: Is Our Institutional Architecture Capable of Supporting Transformation?

In the afternoon, session facilitator Maggie White, Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), invited panelists to reflect on what is needed to move from “a paradigm shift to an institutional shift” in IWRM.

In a keynote address, Danilo Türk, Former President of Slovenia, and Chair, High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, emphasized the need for urgency. Noting the IWRM model



L-R: Moderator **Maggie White**, SIWI; **Danilo Türk**, Former President of Slovenia; **Lesha Witmer**, Women for Water Partnership; **Christine Dawson**, Department of State, US; **Joshua Newton**, independent consultant; **Nchedi Sophia Maphokga-Moripe**, Department of Water and Sanitation, South Africa; and **Anthony Slatyer**, Water Policy Group

has been in use for more than four decades, he identified political challenges in multilateral governance as a key barrier to achieving transformation. Türk highlighted the upcoming High-Level Political Forum SDGs review in 2021 and the 2023 midterm review of the UN Water Action Decade 2018-2028 as key moments “to critically think about our global system and how to improve it.”

High-Level Panel Discussion: Lesha Witmer, Women for Water Partnership, recalled that SDG 6 was one of four goals identified by the UN General Assembly as lacking a dedicated “institutional home,” meaning there is no, among others, dedicated intergovernmental negotiating mechanism or science-policy interface for water. Witmer urged for a new cooperation mechanism to address the entire cycle of water management, and to deal with critical issues such as how to value water, including virtual water.

Christine Dawson, US State Department, discussed common denominators in building a transformative global water agenda, including: sharing experiences and expertise to drive action on the ground; reaching across sectors and stakeholders; and engaging with young people. Describing 2020 as a “huge year for terrestrial biodiversity,” she stressed that while challenging, the water sector must be part of the conversation at the World Conservation Congress, and on the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), among other processes.

Nchedi Sophia Maphokga-Moripe, Department of Water and Sanitation, South Africa, discussed lessons from South Africa’s recent drought crisis, noting its severity triggered unprecedented institutional collaboration and resource mobilization across the government. She explained that one of the lessons learned is a need for agile intergovernmental institutions to help countries respond to crises, while also guiding preventive measures such as early warning systems, knowledge sharing and financial support.

Anthony Slatyer, Water Policy Group, lauded the work of the High-Level Panel on Water for mobilizing political leadership in understanding, valuing and managing water. He noted the political difficulty to implement certain measures, such as: re-allocating water to serve changing values in a context of scarcity; factoring environmental costs in water pricing; derisking water investments; and sharing data in contexts of transboundary conflict. He stressed the role of multilateral processes to provide the “political scaffolding” to support governments to take needed actions.

On working towards an institutional shift, Joshua Newton, Independent Consultant, proposed moving forward incrementally, informed by stakeholders, to ensure what is delivered is what is needed by countries. He suggested *inter alia*: integrating water issues into other existing UN processes on sustainable development; and galvanizing government actions through the UN Water Action Decade and its midterm review in 2023. Dawson said no single approach would work and advised thinking globally and acting locally, saying real transformation is going to occur on the ground.

Closing

Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary, stated “either all of us win or all of us lose,” in terms



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of water governance as “water connects us all.” He called for international organizations and governments to allocate financial resources to develop new technologies to address water crises, and highlighted the role of the private sector. Noting that water is extremely important to maintaining peace and security, he added that challenges start out as local, “but impacts become global immediately,” and “neither water nor pollution stops at borders.”

András Szöllősi-Nagy, Chair, BWS 2019 International Programme and Drafting Committee, presented the outcome of the Summit, the Budapest Appeal, describing a set of recommendations on water security. He noted the aim is to recognize the value of water in the fullest sense, create a water-secure future, and build on opportunities presented by technologies. He said the aim in its drafting was to bring together the political and technical community to raise the profile of water with a view to major international events and increasing political will.

Expressing excitement to host the 9th World Water Forum in Senegal, Abdoulaye Sene, Executive Secretary, 2021 World Water Forum, recognized the strong link between the BWS and the Forum, saying that the Budapest Appeal will contribute greatly to discussions of Heads of State in producing resolutions for water security, peace and development.

The 2019 Budapest Water Summit closed at 4:04 pm.

IISD Summary: The summary report of BWS 2019 will be available on Sunday, 20 October 2019, at: <https://enb.iisd.org/water/bws/2019/>



András Szöllősi-Nagy, Chair, International Programme and Drafting Committee of BWS 2019, and Abdoulaye Sene, Executive Secretary, 2021 World Water Forum, at the conclusion of the BWS 2019.