



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
FRESHWATER CONFERENCE
THURSDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2001**

Delegates met in Plenary to consider integrating gender perspectives and hear reports from working groups in the morning, and to review the draft Recommendations for Action (RFA) in afternoon and evening sessions.

INTEGRATING GENDER CONCERNS

Chair Bärbel Dieckmann, Mayor of Bonn, with co-chairs Dianne Quarless, Jamaica, and Jon Lane, UK, and Facilitator Jennifer Francis, Gender and Water Alliance, opened the morning Plenary on gender issues.

Stressing that "water flows to those with power," keynote speaker Barbara Schreiner, South Africa, suggested that addressing gender inequity requires measures to redress historical imbalances in decision making and access, and called for secure rights and entitlements, non-discriminatory conflict resolution, as well as clear indicators, targets and programs of action. Concluding, she urged mainstreaming gender in development.

In the ensuing discussions, SOUTH AFRICA, MADAGASCAR and ZIMBABWE described national policies and programs to promote equity, and JAMAICA suggested decentralized decision making. FINLAND proposed seeking gender balance in World Water Forum delegations and water service provision contracts. SWEDEN urged gathering gender-specific data, and SWITZERLAND, with DENMARK, stressed using existing legal instruments. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO called for governments to reassess policies, MALAYSIA recommended learning from other professions, and UGANDA elaborated on its affirmative action statutes.

WMO elaborated on gender policies within 23 UN agencies, UN water projects described gender representation requirements in its committees, and UNEP proposed that this Conference call governments to present gender-sensitive policies in Johannesburg. Others urged incorporation of gender perspectives in ecosystem management, equitable sharing of benefits and risks equitably, and reduction of time spent by women collecting water.

Sial Saleem, Nepal, summarized the recommendations for water management, *inter alia*: disaggregating data; analyzing gender impacts of technologies and policies; revising inequitable land tenure; ensuring equitable representation in decision making; building women's agricultural, scientific, professional and financial capacity; integrating water issues into the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; and reporting on progress to the WSSD and Third World Water Forum in 2003.

In the subsequent discussion, participants noted that women "bear the load of water," and urged educating and organizing women to facilitate their empowerment. They called for "strong language" supporting the RFA. Chair Dieckmann closed the session, thanking participants for focusing on results.

REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Participants reconvened in a Plenary, co-chaired by Fritz Holzwarth, and Hans-Peter Schipulle, Germany, and facilitated by Margaret Catley-Carlson, Global Water Partnership, to hear reports from the Working Groups. Preceding the Reports, Masaaki Nakayasu, Japan, highlighted Japan's commitment to water issues and

upcoming milestones before the Third World Water Forum. Facilitator Catley-Carlson presented the conference outputs and their inter-relationships: the Ministerial Declaration; Plenary Session Record; Working Group Reports; Bonn Recommendations for Action; and "Bonn Keys," a précis for decision makers.

REPORT ON GOVERNANCE, INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT, AND NEW PARTNERSHIPS: Rapporteur Aizaz Chaudry, Pakistan, noted that in protecting water resources and ecosystems, this Working Group urged: increasing efficiency; mobilizing social capital; and decentralizing management. Participants stressed targets and plans of action and noted the UK/Sweden proposal to halve by 2015 the number of river basins without management plans. Challenges identified included: attracting investment; fostering community and cross-sectoral participation; interfacing between national and local governments, local communities, and the private sector; and providing general recommendations to complex challenges. Improving water allocation requires, *inter alia*, treating water as an economic and social good, managing demand, valuing water, and harnessing multi-sectoral approaches, whereas better management of transboundary waters requires sharing benefits, coordinating better between existing mechanisms, managing international waters, involving local communities, and educating decision makers.

REPORT ON MOBILIZING FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Jennifer Moore, Canada, reviewed crosscutting goals, including: alleviating poverty; addressing international trade; incorporating other development issues; achieving gender balance; and preserving biodiversity. Calling for innovative approaches, she suggested: a multi-stakeholder review of private sector involvement; a network for sharing regulator experiences; a "code of conduct"; a fair allocation of risk between public and private sectors; and a safety net for the poor. She reported that the Group distinguished urban from rural and willingness-to-pay from affordability, calling for strengthened public regulatory and negotiation capacity, and for more transparent finances. They agreed that cost recovery is necessary, but should not prevent the poor from accessing water services, concluding that ODA should catalyze good governance and attract private capital to water.

REPORT ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: Alison Drayton, UNDP, highlighted the need for flexibility, adaptability and partnerships. Noting that developing countries often receive rigid training, she stressed adaptive capacity building for all, in particular women and children. Regarding knowledge-sharing, she noted a call for: full community participation; education of policymakers; development of young professionals; and inclusion of gender perspectives. The Group urged integrating information systems, and collecting and sharing local and NGO knowledge. They recognized the importance of technology transfer over aid, agreed that technology should be appropriate, and encouraged entrepreneurial partnerships. The ability to forecast was considered critical for coping with extreme events, while transparency, anti-corruption measures, integrated decision making and flexible policies were deemed necessary for good governance. On selecting indicators, the Group emphasized balanced approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Co-chair Schipulle reported that the RFA had been updated to reflect input from all previous sessions. He said this session was an opportunity to discuss the main concepts and clarify, strengthen or de-emphasize concerns and issues. Presenting the Recommendations, Facilitator Catley-Carlson outlined the participatory process that resulted in the Draft. She urged delegates not to negotiate text, as the aim was to communicate the Conference deliberations to the outside world.

Delegates conducted a paragraph-by-paragraph reading of the document using a non-chronological thematic approach that concluded with the introduction.

Entitled "Water – A Key to Sustainable Development," the RFA serves as the conference's contribution to the WSSD and addresses recent international decisions related to water, seeking to close the implementation gap and provide an opportunity to manage water resources sustainably. The RFA is prioritized under four sections: governance; mobilizing financial resources; capacity building and sharing knowledge; and roles. In the introduction the RFA provides an overview of the conference.

The first section addresses: securing equitable access to water for all people; ensuring that water infrastructure and services deliver to the poor; promoting gender equality; allocating water among competing demands; sharing benefits from international waters; ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from large projects; improving water management through trade in goods; protecting water quality and ecosystems; coping with variability and climate change; encouraging more efficient service provision; managing water at the lowest appropriate level; and combating corruption effectively. The second section on mobilizing financial resources addresses: ensuring significant increase in funding levels for water; strengthening public funding capabilities; designing water tariffs to sustain operations and investment; making water attractive for private investment; and increasing development assistance to water. The third section on capacity building and technology transfer addresses: education and training on water wisdom; research and information management on problem solving; enhancing the effectiveness of water institutions more effective; and sharing knowledge and innovative technologies. The fourth section describes roles for governments, local communities, NGOs, the private sector and the international community

INTRODUCTION: In this section: SWITZERLAND, opposed by NGOs, contested the reference to "water is a human right," stating it was untrue, but the language was retained. Concerns emerged regarding an apparent focus on empowering the poor, rather than on guaranteeing access to water for the poor. There was also a proposal to refer to past conferences.

ACTION IN THE FIELD OF GOVERNANCE: Discussion on these actions generated lengthy debate on sharing benefits from international waters. Agreement was reached that given the limited mandate of this Conference and the need to promote international cooperation, a geographically-based definition should be followed, and reference to both "transboundary" and "international" water-course avoided. The concept of cooperation instead of benefit sharing was retained.

Concerns were raised regarding, *inter alia*: the imminent 2005 target to prepare water resource management plans; the lack of reference to the primary role of states as water providers; the reference to men and women having equal involvement and voice in managing water resources; the unattainable 2015 target to improve sanitation; and a proposal for farmers in water-scarce regions to grow crops with low water requirements.

New proposals included: linking sectoral themes to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; reflecting the growing urban dimension; referring to "all" water uses; including the polluter pays principle; linking water to health issues; addressing payments for adaptation costs; minimizing flood damage and managing risks from climate change.

Others included: joint responsibility for corruption; codes of practice covering all relevant stakeholders; roles for IFIs and bilateral agencies in addressing corruption; and special recognition of developing countries that lack private water companies.

Proposals were also made to delete the reference to the precautionary principle and amend "commercially viable" to efficient, effective and accountable water provisions.

ACTION IN THE FIELD OF MOBILIZING FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Delegates addressed investment needs for water infrastructure, debating reduction of harmful subsidies and recovery of costs through tariffs, but contention arose over implications for irrigation, and over promotion of cost recovery while ensuring access for the poor. FARMERS called for subsidies to increase water productivity, while UZBEKISTAN urged attention to water associations in transition economies.

On conditions for attracting private sector investment, participants debated the apparent bias toward 'partnerships,' while some noted that such conditions would benefit both public and private investment. Participants urged capacity building for regulators and service providers.

Delegates diverged over the 0.7 percent of GNP development assistance target and over prioritization of aid for water. DENMARK called for an end to donor and IFI conditionalities mandating privatization, and consensus emerged that donors should target aid to mobilize other financial sources.

ACTION IN THE FIELD OF CAPACITY BUILDING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE: In focusing education and training, suggestions were made to include references to: traditional media; the media role in hygiene and sanitation; and the role of workers and trade unions. Regarding research and information management, delegates added a provision for data sharing, and replaced "international targets" with the "Millennium Assessment goals." The World Water Assessment Programme requested that it take "a," and not "the," lead in developing indicators. Contention arose over the term "international river basins," with many countries preferring "transboundary waters," the language of Agenda 21.

Differences emerged on moving to the governance section the paragraph on making water institutions more effective. Amendments to this paragraph include incorporating ethical perspectives, and removing language on "changing policies and laws" and on specifying the mandate of water institutions. The provision on competitive pay was deemed too prescriptive and deleted. Debate surrounded the action on knowledge sharing and innovative technologies, as delegates sought clarification of the types and recipients of technologies. References to: cooperation of donor agencies and industry, and to the dissemination of technologies based on market processes, were also removed.

ROLES: Participants also deliberated on actions and roles of people and organizations in relation to these three themes. Regarding government's role, controversy centered on questions of sovereignty, public participation and information. Text on compliance with international principles was rendered less prescriptive, and agreement emerged that NGOs and communities need additional capacity to carry out their roles. FARMERS expressed their interest in taking on responsibility, noting they consume 70 percent of freshwater but are not assigned a role in the Recommendations. On the private sector role, discussion focused on the compatibility between profit, environmental and ethical concerns. BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY noted general acceptance of these responsibilities compatible with economic viability, and urged a code-of-conduct for all stakeholders, not solely companies. On the role of the international community, participants limited recommendations to those in the Ministerial Declaration, which urges coordination of water issues within the UN system.

Co-Chair Schipulle closed the session, informing participants that the drafting team would submit an updated RFA for consideration on Friday, 7 December.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary will convene in the Plenary Hall from 9:30 – 10:30 am to hear the highlights of all five conference documents, and a presentation of an African ministerial declaration, and to conduct a final reading of the RFA. The 11:00 am – 12:00 noon closing session will adopt the Conference recommendations.