



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 19 MARCH 1998

The International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development began on Thursday, 19 March 1998 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Delegates heard welcome addresses in an opening Plenary and then convened in three expert workshops and a special workshop hosted by the Global Water Partnership and the World Water Council.

OPENING PLENARY

Dominique Voynet, French Minister of Regional Planning and Environment, welcomed participants and thanked the conference organizers. She highlighted lack of access, wasteful use and pollution of water resources as pressing problems that the international community must heed. She emphasized several prerequisites for addressing these problems, including: improved knowledge of water resources; regulatory tools and institutional organization for sustainable management; and financial resources for sustainable management.

Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, President of the World Water Council, said the finite volume of freshwater is in a state of crisis. He emphasized: increasing water scarcity; lack of accessibility to clean drinking water and sanitation; water quality deterioration; the fragmentation of water management; decline of financial resource allocation; and lack of awareness by decision-makers and the public.

EXPERT WORKSHOPS

WATER RESOURCES AND USES: J. Szyszko (Poland) chaired Workshop One. Keynote speaker Derek Osborne (European Environment Agency) called for a high priority to be assigned to: sanitation and reuse of water; broader administrative structures taking into account complete catchment areas; proper pricing allocation; and partnerships and cooperation.

Burkina Faso called for a more proactive approach, taking into consideration the specific needs of developing countries, and emphasized the importance of adequate funding. The Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel said the adequacy of water in arid zones in Africa will be a major problem in the future and called for improved management, particularly joint management, of non-renewable resources. Spain focused on water reutilization as a sustainable option for integrated water resources management, particularly for agriculture, landscape irrigation and industrial uses. The World Health Organization highlighted the linkage between health, water and sanitation, and noted the absence of health issues in the draft recommendations. The World Meteorological Organization highlighted the disparity among regions in integrated information management systems and noted that only in South America has the number of monitoring stations increased, while in Africa it

has decreased. He also highlighted the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System as a global supplement to other information management systems. Italy highlighted the Euro-Mediterranean Information System on Know-How in the Water Sector, comprising 27 countries, as an example of regional cooperation and information management.

RAMSAR noted the key role of wetlands in addressing the global water crisis and said greater focus should be given to an ecosystem approach instead of a user-based approach. Niger, Cameroon, Germany, Brazil and Cote d'Ivoire shared their experiences in water resources management. Japan detailed the development of its nationwide hydrological and water quality database network on the Internet. Romania highlighted a feasibility study conducted on the drinking water supply of the Constanta region. A representative of Eurowaternet showcased its information gathering and reporting service, which samples information from national databases to provide a complete picture of the environment for the European Environment Agency.

Cross-cutting themes emerging from the discussion included linkages between water and health, poverty alleviation, food security and natural disasters. Consensus emerged concerning the quality and reliability of data and the need for proper assessment and evaluation of such data so that projects and their results are not jeopardized. Participants stressed that people must know how to use information provided to them; technology as a quick fix will not work. The importance of cooperative research, community stakeholder involvement, information and technology sharing, information management systems and data gathering centers, and financial support for such centers by the international community, were also highlighted.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Workshop Two, on the development of regulatory tools and institutional capacity building, was chaired by Antonio A. Dayrell de Lima (Brazil), who outlined deficits in water resource management. The World Bank made a presentation on institutional fragmentation, participatory approaches and subsidiarity, equity, private sector financing, and best practices. In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted: the development aspects of water (Ethiopia); partnerships (Egypt and Cote d'Ivoire); nomadic people (Mauritania); indigenous people (Mexico and Japan); and women and underprivileged people (US). South Africa qualified a reference to subsidiarity and Sudan called for information exchange between riparian States.

Presentations were also made on: national transition from top-down water management systems (Czech Republic); background to national legislation (Mexico); water basin management and the Mediterranean water crisis (Morocco); "barefoot" solutions and rainfall harvesting (India); irrigation and rational use of water resources (Jordan); natural water purification (Vietnam); Mediterranean regional cooperation (the Blue Plan); and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Italy).

The Chair summarized several written amendments to the workshop's draft recommendations and invited discussion on those referring to the polluter pays principle, transboundary water systems and economic information. Regarding the polluter pays principle, Ethiopia called for its application nationally. The Chair welcomed another amendment stating that polluters' capacity to pay should be considered.

Regarding transboundary water systems, the Chair, supported by Egypt and Haiti, agreed that "transboundary" should replace a reference to "international" water bodies. He reassured the two countries proposing deletion of the paragraph that no mandatory regime was being proposed in the draft recommendation. Supported by Mauritania, he urged countries not to delete the reference to transboundary systems. China said the reference should be deleted or replaced with non-specific text encouraging cooperation. The Secretariat said it is understood that the issue is essentially political. The draft ministerial declaration will encourage States to promote dialogue at the basin level, involving civil society, government authorities, and, to the extent possible, riparian States where international water bodies are concerned. Regarding a reference to the GEF, Australia expressed concern that any proposed expansion in the priority action programme to accommodate freshwater initiatives could call the incremental costs principle into question. Regarding its proposal to delete a paragraph on the collection and dissemination of economic information, China explained that data collection should be at the discretion of the country concerned. Ethiopia said monitoring systems should be "national."

MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

Workshop Three, chaired by S. Toure (Cote D'Ivoire), began with a keynote address from A. Poullieute of the French Development Fund (CDF). He said investment policies should be guided by three principles: rehabilitating rather than creating new investment when possible; selecting cost-saving technologies suited to particular conditions; and developing a participatory approach. He underscored that users must pay a price for water close to its actual cost. He stressed the need to reduce costs through professional and efficient management within a clear institutional framework and said ODA should maximize leveraging of local finance and be set aside for less profitable priorities such as training and institutional strengthening.

Delegates commented on the workshop's draft recommendations. Colombia said the recommendations overemphasize fundraising at the national and local levels and downplay the importance of international fundraising. He called for establishing a mechanism to channel new and additional international financing to developing countries. China proposed noting that priorities and conditions of countries differ and underscoring that new and additional financial resources must be made available to developing countries. Switzerland suggested emphasizing measures for ecosystem and watershed protection. Australia stressed that bilateral assistance must be based on recipient countries' priorities and highlighted innovative financial mechanisms to leverage private sector capital based on the user pays principle. Ethiopia proposed highlighting food production and hydropower development as important for poverty alleviation.

Regarding priorities for ODA, the EU proposed support for creating an enabling environment and for research and disaster preparedness. He called for more openness to public-private financing. Turkey recommended greater emphasis on private sector involvement, the use of market mechanisms and a specific reference to underprivileged groups and women. Senegal and Peru highlighted the importance of maintenance of water supply systems. Mauritania and Burkina Faso emphasized the continuing need for international assistance in financing water supply.

Several developing countries highlighted difficulties with implementing "user pays" pricing systems in developing countries. Cape Verde said pricing schedules must reflect consumption levels. The US underscored the importance of: participation of women and

poor people in determining funding priorities; cost recovery to improve investment efficiency; coordination of funding efforts for water at the national level and among donors; and adequate protection of intellectual property rights in access to and transfer of technology. Argentina stressed the need to include the polluter pays principle. Ghana proposed focusing on public education on health and economic aspects of water and the link between population growth and water resource depletion.

The Netherlands proposed noting that water should be used as a catalyst for regional cooperation rather than conflict. Nigeria said recommendations on finance mobilization should indicate the need for basin resource management. To a list of basic needs that must be met, Spain added flood and drought control and Peru added food security. A Water Club representative called for greater stakeholder involvement in the design stage of projects. A civil society representative of Dakar emphasized mobilization of human resources and local knowledge.

Case studies were presented on: water and sanitation provision in low-income settlements in Buenos Aires; watershed agencies in France; the Asian Technical and Research Network; water management, performance and challenges in OECD countries; World Bank financing strategies in water supply and sanitation; European Community water policies in the context of development cooperation; GEF efforts to address international waters problems; and public-private collaboration on water supply in Gdansk.

GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP/WORLD WATER COUNCIL SPECIAL WORKSHOP

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) and the World Water Council (WWC) held a workshop, chaired by Ismael Serageldin (World Bank), to exchange experiences in water management and development networks. An overview was provided of the World Water Council, a new membership organization set up as an advocacy water policy think-tank comprised of public, private, inter-governmental, international and non-governmental organizations. The GWP was described as a comprehensive global framework that builds on past lessons and fosters global cooperation. Members of regional partnerships under the GWP made statements about ongoing capacity building, awareness raising and information exchange activities in their regions. Discussions highlighted the complexity of water problems and the limitations of existing measures and underscored the importance of policy frameworks to support technological solutions. It was noted that incorporation of research in similar water partnerships and programmes is essential and the use of future scenarios to guide present actions should be considered. Concerns were raised about tendencies to focus on scarcity as the main water crisis while neglecting problems of poor water management and about the proliferation of regional coordination activities. Participants reiterated that the water problem could only be managed once societies learn to live with existing resources and plan better for the future. WWC and GWP were called upon to give attention to aspects of efficient use of existing resources and linkages between water and energy as well as other sectors. The Chair closed the workshop with a call for a shift of paradigms governing short- and long-term practices.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

WORKSHOPS: The three experts' workshops and a special workshop by the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) will meet from 8:30-9:50 and from 10:25-13:00: workshop 1 in Salle IV; workshop 2 in Salle II, workshop 3 in Salle XI and INBO in Salle X.

MINISTERIAL SESSION: The Ministerial session will commence at 10:00 with addresses by Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO and Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, and will continue throughout the day and into the evening.