

Reports and Information

Summary report of the 2nd World Water Forum:
from vision to action[☆]

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Introduction

The 2nd World Water Forum was organised as the concluding meeting for the World Water Vision process, a stock-taking moment for the Framework for Action project, and an opportunity to initiate a process leading to action on the ground. Many of the Forum participants prepared for the 2nd World Water Forum for as much as two years. Through the development of the World Water Vision hundreds of preparatory meetings took place in which some fifteen thousand people participated. Some 40 sector, regional and special subject Visions and Frameworks for Action were prepared. All these have value in their own right and as contributions to the World Water Vision and Framework for Action.

A new beginning is clearly needed to avert crises in the century that lies ahead. The 2nd World Water Forum, and the parallel Ministerial Conference, were intended as a new beginning. It was intended to be the birthplace of a *water movement*. It will be the task of the new generation of water users and water managers to work hand in hand with their older colleagues in this field. The Forum was unique in that it offered an opportunity for debate for all. Nobody was kept out — everybody was invited in. The organisers wanted to convey the spirit of the meeting as one in which everyone's opinion is respected; a forum in which everyone felt free to express their opinion. This culminated in the direct interaction between stakeholders and representatives of major groups and the 120 ministers with responsibility for water who participated in the Ministerial Conference.

[☆]Based largely on the speeches of the Forum Chairman at the opening and closing of the Conference and the summary reports prepared by the Forum Rapporteur and presented by the Forum Chairman to the Ministerial Conference and Forum closing session.

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The Forum Chairman called on all participants to maintain the spirit of the preparation of the World Water Vision: *open, transparent and participatory*. At the Forum it was recognised that there are many visions on water in the next century. And even though there were a record number of participants at the Forum, and many more were involved in the preparation, there also was an awareness that many more people need to be involved in the development of visions and their implementation. This was a start to make water management more participatory, to make water everybody's business. Even though that goal has not yet been achieved, a big stride forward has been made. Water is no longer just the business of the water experts.

To make sure that what happened at the Forum was shared as much as possible with people outside The Hague, brief reports of all sessions were made and were edited. Most of these were put on the Forum website immediately. These session reports also provided the inputs for the report prepared by the Forum Rapporteur and presented by the Forum Chairman to the Ministerial Conference and the closing session of the Forum. The session reports are available on the Forum website www.waterforum.org and will be published.

There was some confusion during the Forum concerning the real or perceived differences between the report of the World Water Commission (WWC, 2000) versus the report of the World Water Vision process (Cosgrove & Rijsberman, 2000). The Chairman of the Forum concluded during the Forum on several occasions that where he was referring to “the Vision report”, or “the Vision” for short, he meant the latter. This is the synthesis of the participatory process in which fifteen thousand people participated and was discussed at the 2nd World Water Forum. The Commission report is independent and remains the responsibility of the World Water Commission. The conclusion of the Forum Chair was that the confusion on the two reports shows clearly how important it is for all concerned that once a process has been started on an open, transparent and participatory basis, that the same approach should then be continued consistently to the very end.

Responding to world water challenges

5500 Forum participants, 600 journalists and over 600 delegates to the Ministerial Conference, including 120 Ministers, met because the world faces a water crisis. Too many people in the World do not have access to clean water. Millions of children are dying each year of diarrhoea. There are threats of water running out to produce food and sustainable livelihoods. Half of our wetlands were destroyed during the last century. Half the world's rivers are polluted, many dying and not reaching the sea. This is simply not acceptable. The dimensions of the current and future water crises are painted in the World Water Vision (Cosgrove & Rijsberman, 2000).

At the start of the meeting the Forum Chair called on the participants to make a difference. Even though the Forum cannot help the victims of the floods in Mozambique, it can make a difference to water management there and in other countries to make sure there are fewer victims in the future.

The Ministerial Conference adopted a Ministerial Declaration. Such a Declaration by itself will not solve the water crisis. Governments are important actors, however, and they have a major responsibility. It was encouraging to see governments open a dialogue on water with the major groups in society represented in the Forum and hear many of them make a commitment.

A water movement

Governments are important, but not the only actors in the sector. Water needs to be made everybody's business to achieve a water secure world. According to a number of groups present at the Forum, governments do not solve water problems — people in local communities do. Representatives of such people were attending the conference in probably record numbers.

Critics of conferences like the ones in the Forum hold that millions of guilders or Euros should not be spent on bringing people together just to talk. This money could have brought water to people who need it desperately — and would then have been better spent, they argue. Are they right? We will try to address this question at the end of this brief report, following a discussion of the results and impacts as we can see these now, immediately after the Forum has ended. Whether the Vision, Framework for Action, Forum and Ministerial Conference really have made a difference towards making water everybody's business will have to be reevaluated some years in the future.

In this summary report of the Forum we first discuss the key points that the Forum participants highlighted in their discussions, in the form and format in which they were reported to the Ministerial Conference. In the final section, we reflect on the results of the Forum and the possible way forward.

The Forum report to the Ministerial Conference achieving water security: everybody's business

The Forum Chair reported to the Ministerial Conference on the active participation in the 2nd World Water Forum by groups that are traditionally not well-represented in the water sector, particularly women and young people. The children — the generation whose future hangs in the balance — sang at the Forum in their youth session: *Let us be part of the work! Let us join! You can count on us!* They remind us that sustainable water management requires solutions with time horizons well beyond what we are used to in government plans.

The Forum participants called the urgent attention of the Ministerial Conference to the water crisis that the world is experiencing now. This crisis affects us all, but particularly the poor and the vulnerable in society — a majority of whom are women and children in the South — and the environment.

The Chair of the Forum reported to the Ministerial Conference what he perceived to be the key issues brought up by the Forum participants. These came to him through the reports made of the sessions and syntheses prepared by the Forum Rapporteur, as well as his personal observations in many sessions. His report remained his personal responsibility, however, since the participants did not have a chance to discuss or approve it beforehand. Similarly, this report reflects the results of the Forum, but has not been approved by the participants either. It remains the responsibility of the authors only.

During the Forum opening ceremony six participants chose to express their opposition to dams in a rather dominant manner — disrupting the opening ceremony. Thereafter, however, participants of all persuasions engaged in constructive and fruitful debates. Dams were debated in

several sessions. The Vice-minister of Public Works of Mozambique — in response to the recent floods in his country — requested assistance to build dams for flood control during one of the sessions and at a press conference. The Forum participants look forward to the report of the World Commission on Dams and hope that this will enhance the constructive debate on a very clearly controversial topic.

Working Group on Water Resources of the Middle East Peace Process

The Forum Chair gave the Ministerial Conference one personal impression which he considered as representative of the spirit of the Forum. In the session of the Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources of the Middle East Peace Process, representatives from Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority presented and discussed their achievements and future plans in a very open and constructive manner. By concentrating on the common problem of regional water scarcity, the participants in the process have been able to transcend the realm of competing interests and create a situation in which all parties share benefits. The central focus is placed on creating a positive dynamic that has already led to tangible results involving common water problems. The success of the multilateral working group approach should serve as a beacon to the rest of the world showing what can be accomplished by working cooperatively on a regional level. Water can and should be a source of cooperation, not conflict.

Key issues raised by the Forum participants

The key issues the Forum participants wanted to raise with the participants in the Ministerial Conference are described hereafter. That other issues are not raised is not because they lack importance, but because it was perceived that the participants generally support the Vision and Framework for Action on the many other issues. The issues are listed in order of their importance for the participants:

- privatisation,
- charging the full-cost price for water services,
- rights to access, and
- participation.

Privatisation

To achieve water security, water must be made everybody's business. That is the essence of the Vision. Even the critics of the Vision process generally acknowledge its contribution to ending the dominant perception that water is the exclusive business of governments and water professionals. That is definitely a first and major step towards achieving our Vision. Much less agreement is evident on the model that should replace this government monopoly. It should be absolutely clear, however, that nobody, not the World Water Commission, not the many, many others that prepared the Vision and Framework for Action, nor the participants in the Forum, proposed that

the government monopoly should be replaced by a private monopoly. Nor that water resources should be privatized.

Quite the contrary, the Vision proposes — and the Forum participants endorsed — that water resources are a common heritage and should be treated as a common property resource. When we determine water rights we establish use rights — not ownership.

Charging the full-cost price for water services

That water resources are a common property resource does not imply, however, that water services — that is providing water, treating it, cleaning it before and after use and returning it back to the environment or other users — should be free of charge. The Vision emphasises the need for sustainable infrastructure and service provisions, servicing the needs of users, through managers accountable to users — or managed directly by the users themselves. This does require resources — be it money or direct user inputs in kind. Users should in fact be charged the full cost of the services — with appropriate subsidies made available to the poor and with recognition of the resources the poor do have: their labour. This is a key recommendation in the Vision. It is supported by many, although certainly not all, participants in the Forum. In the session on a Vision for West-Africa, for example, the participants agreed that the unreliability of supplies is a greater problem than the price of the service. Users are generally willing to pay the price for water services, if they can, because they do recognise the vital importance water has for them.

Rights to access

Crucial for many, many participants in the Forum is the need to recognise explicitly access to drinking water and sanitation as a basic human right. For many participants the recognition of water as a basic human need is insufficient. It can be argued that this right is already implicit in other declarations of human rights, since water is essential to life. But precisely for this reason the overwhelming majority of the participants in the 2nd World Water Forum urged the Ministerial Conference to recognise explicitly, in their declaration or in individual country pledges, the human right to access to drinking water and sanitation. In fact, water is not only considered essential for human health, it is also desperately needed by millions of poor women and men in rural areas for productive reasons: to grow the family's food or to generate income.

Rights to land and use of water are key determinants for people's potential to break out of the poverty trap. When rights get redistributed or new rights are assigned, these rights must be distributed on an equitable and individual basis, recognising the rights of women and men. Along those lines, women and men should have individual voting rights in water user associations and generally be equitably and democratically represented in water management bodies.

Participation

Users not only have a right to access to water services, but should also participate actively in the management of water resources. Support for "participation" has become an accepted principle for many countries and organisations. The user representatives in the Forum are pointing out that

this should not be limited to asking users to participate in government programmes. Participation implies sharing power: democratic participation of citizens in elaborating or implementing water policies and projects and in managing water resources. This should include the right by communities to develop their own water projects, if they can do so without government intervention and without harming the rights to water services of others' downstream or the environment.

Additional issues raised by the Forum participants

Quantitative targets and indicators of progress

On behalf of the Forum participants the Forum Chair urged the Ministerial Conference delegates — collectively or individually — not only to support the development of targets and indicators of progress in a general sense, but to commit to adopting targets at their own national or regional levels. Adopted targets should be reported to the Dublin + 10 meeting in 2002 for monitoring through an international mechanism.

Action on sanitation

The number one priority action that arises from the discussion on the Framework for Action (GWP, 2000) is a major drive in sanitation and hygiene education. An immediate and revolutionary programme of action is required, say the Forum participants, focusing on environmental sanitation. The old ways leave us struggling to keep up with the growing needs. Women consistently state the importance of sanitation and their views must be acted upon. Sanitation and hygiene education can be an active force in promoting women's influence and involvement in development in general.

Supplement to the Framework for Action

GWP committed during the Forum to produce a supplement to the Framework for Action. This is intended to reflect the discussions at the Forum and embrace a broader cross-section of stakeholder views, through consultations involving NGOs, trade unions and sector Vision representatives. It will focus on actions required at regional and national levels.

Globalisation and the many faces of the private sector

One issue that came up regularly in the Forum relates to “globalisation” and concerns the true nature of private sector involvement. A careful evaluation of all options, ranging from public, to public–private partnership to privatized service provision should determine which option is most attractive given the local circumstances. Considerations will include participatory and transparent management and an appropriate representation of local communities. A factor in this evaluation is also where the funds for the necessary doubling of investments in the water sector will come from.

Development aid will not go up drastically. Government funding is not likely to double either. Additional resources can — and have to — come from the private sector. The large majority of these private sector activities and investments will be local, community action and small to medium scale national companies involvement — not international capital. Remember that villagers investing in treadle pumps that cost US\$ 10 also are part of the private sector. There is a role for multinational corporations. Their involvement is likely to be limited to really large projects and investments such as providing water services to megacities. In the Vision this last component is estimated to be about a third of the total private sector investment in the water sector. The role of governments remains crucial in any case — especially in countries where water services have been partly privatised — through provision of a strong regulating and enabling environment. Governments remain responsible for making sure that poor people have access to water services at affordable rates. This will certainly require targeted subsidies for the poor. It should not lead, however, to water priced at rates much below the value of water for the users that can afford to pay full cost.

Results of the 2nd World Water Forum

Five and a half thousand people participated in the largest international water policy gathering in history. Has the Forum made a difference? Was it worth spending millions? Has it advanced the water movement? Let us reflect on that for a moment.

The NGO platform recommended that the Ministerial Conference — in essence — reject the Vision and Framework for Action reports and the draft Ministerial Declaration. They found the process insufficiently participatory and the content not acceptable. Had the World Water Vision been prepared by experts only, without any user participation then there probably would not have been protests from groups that felt left out. Would that have been useful, however? We conclude that such an expert Vision would have had little or no impact. It would have simply joined the many other reports that have been prepared on the subject in the last 10-odd years.

In a way, therefore, the protests by the NGO community that they felt insufficiently represented were a step forward. Hundreds of organisations and thousands of individuals have actively participated, but even more have not. As a result, hundreds of others feel left out — and now wish they had been involved. This strong signal of interest of a broad spectrum of civil society organisations in international water policy is very encouraging. We interpret this as an indicator that the Vision process and Forum have succeeded, with others, in putting water on the agenda for many non-water organisations. Some NGOs have indicated that they were insufficiently involved in the design of the Vision exercise in an early stage. That is true, indeed, and should be an important difference with the next stage. Now that the interest has been awakened, it should lead to effective participation. Water is becoming everybody's business.

We conclude that a good start has been made to involve many non-traditional groups. In addition, the participation that *did* take place was taken seriously and had an impact on the deliberations in the Ministerial Conference, both directly and indirectly. Participants from regions where water is scarce — such as the Middle East, the Nile Basin and Southern Africa —

demonstrated in the Forum how they managed to turn water into a source for increased cooperation, rather than conflict. The session organised by the World Commission on Dams brought together participants from across the spectrum, including both the International Rivers Network — possibly the most vocal anti-dam NGO — as well as the organisations that promote dam construction. It is very encouraging that the report of this session states that the participants expressed their appreciation of the open and inclusive process of the World Commission on Dams. We conclude that there is hope — even for such a controversial issue.

So, has the 2nd World Water Forum had an impact? Have we put water on the political agenda? Have we increased the public awareness of the water crisis? We answer all three questions affirmatively. Five and a half thousand people found the time and resources to come and participate. Six hundred journalists broadcast the messages to a large audience. One hundred and twenty ministers chose to come to debate water issues with stakeholders. These simple facts are a good indication that water is indeed becoming everybody's business. This was not a meeting of experts, telling each other once more about the water crisis. This was a historic meeting of waters users, water decision makers, and — as well, certainly — water experts: jointly affirming the importance of water for everybody and announcing their widely shared intention to make a difference.

The real, long-term impact of the World Water Vision and the Forum can be measured only five or ten years from now, but there were already some clear commitments during the Forum. Many other individuals and organisations announced that they are going home to prepare their commitments. The latter will have to be recorded at the next occasion. The former included:

- The Netherlands government committed to doubling the investments in the water sector through international cooperation — an increase of 100 million guilders per year; to support a major initiative related to water for food; and establish a UNESCO Institute for Water Education in Delft.
- The UK government pledged to increase its focus on water in the next three years.
- The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Global Environment Facility announced a doubling of the freshwater-related budget.
- The local government session pledged to set up a water-cities network and report their progress to the Third Water Forum.
- Seven CEOs of major international companies pledged that they are ready to take their responsibility to make water use sustainable.
- A group of organisations pledged to form a Water and Gender Alliance.
- Through the campaign of getting individuals to fill out their personal pledges on “make a wave” forms — a start was made to get people to think about their own contributions as well as those of governments.

A noted environmentalist from India stated in a Panel discussion: “*You certainly have not reached everybody yet. Making water everybody's business will be long and hard work. But the Vision has certainly ended the notion that water is the business of governments and water professionals alone. That is an important accomplishment.*”

The World Water Vision was a stone in the pond that created little ripples. More and more water users are now ready to start making a wave! As the Forum Chair stated in the closing session: “*I call on all of you, when you go home after this exciting Forum, to become ambassadors. To make water everybody’s business! As my personal contribution to making the wave I pledge to be one of those ambassadors!*”

References

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