

Wholly Water: Time to Act

Over 2200 participants from 140 countries gathered in the Swedish capital for the 2006 World Water Week in Stockholm, August 20-26, and an exciting series of plenary sessions, workshops, seminars and side events. The week, hosted by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), featured more than 100 collaborating organisations. The issues addressed were many, such as corruption in the water sector, the role of gender in water distribution, environmental flows, partnerships for improved sanitation, impacts of population growth on water demand, climate change, dietary changes and water use, biotechnology, agriculture, land degradation and water pollution.

The record number of participants for the Stockholm events heard that a growing global population (some two to three billion more by 2050), with changing global economics, is putting pressure on the planet's natural water resource base to the point where a radical transformation is needed in water resources management, water supply and sanitation delivery, and water for agricultural production. A number of new reports and initiatives were launched during the week (see article) and echoed the sentiments but also offered insight into how such a radical transformation could or should take place.

A challenging opening session

With the overarching theme of "Beyond the River – Sharing Benefits and Responsibilities," the World Water Week attempted to help facilitate such a transformation by promoting the "benefit-sharing" approach: looking at water from the perspective of what can be derived from it, for whom and by whom, and not the water *per se*. Many discussions during the week, for example those focusing on water-scarce regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, examined how benefits which improve livelihoods could be materialised from hydropower, improved environmental stewardship, regional integration and increased trade. In this context, possibilities for development, stability and peace were also cited, as were increased production, jobs and incomes.

The Opening General Session enabled a number of leading experts to set the tone for

the week, and to challenge participants to not make the Water Week just another meeting on a global meeting agenda.

"How benefits from water are generated, distributed and shared will help determine the overall welfare of both people and the planet in this century," said Mr. Berntell in a welcoming address on Monday, August 21.

Citing the elegant words of W.H. Auden, "Thousands have lived without love, not one without water," H.R.H. The Prince of Orange recounted the successes in water and development in recent years. But he also challenged the Week's participants to show "vision and genuine leadership" and



Photo: SIWI

Ms. Doris Ombara, Project Officer, World Wide Fund for Nature, East Africa

achieve more.

Stockholm Water Prize Laureate Asit Biswas provoked much thought: there is no water crisis; urbanisation is the problem; and mega-forums on water issues must not re-hash the "same old stuff." Ms. Doris Ombara of WWF in East Africa also echoed this theme and proposed that participants show examples of real progress from 2006 at the 2007 World Water Week in Stockholm.

In the afternoon session, the benefit-sharing theme was addressed in more depth by a high-level panel which focused on sharing in transboundary water systems, where more than 50 % of the available surface water in the world is located. The panellists examined if the concept is useful as a tool for increas-

ing co-operation and development in shared river basins. They concluded, in general, that benefit sharing approaches won't solve all problems in river basin management; basins are unique, as are solutions and benefit-sharing approaches. Further, in river basins dominated by security concerns, the prospect for sharing of benefits is limited, they said.

Water for food, anti-corruption in focus

The presentation of the long-anticipated results of the five-year long Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture, and the launch of the anti-corrup-



Photo: SIWI

H.R.H. The Prince of Orange

tion Water Integrity Network (WIN), were among the many highlights of the 2006 World Water Week.

The Comprehensive Assessment was carried out by 700 experts from around the world over the last five years and set out to examine the policies and practices of water use and development in the agricultural sector over the last 50 years.

Says Mr. David Molden of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), "To feed the growing population and reduce malnourishment, the world has three choices: expand irrigation by diverting more water to agriculture and building more dams, at a major cost to the environment; expand the area under rain-fed agriculture at



Photo: SIWI

the expense of natural areas through massive deforestation and other habitat destruction; or do more with the water we already use. We must grow more crop per drop, more meat and milk per drop, and more fish per drop.”

The week also saw concern expressed over the “pervasiveness of corruption” in the management of water supply, services and resources. A new coalition of six international non-governmental organisations launched a global anti-corruption watchdog body: the Water Integrity Network (WIN). Greater global access to clean water and safe sanitation for the poor, better quality of service to citizen-consumers, and increased confidence by tax-paying publics are among the broad goals set out by WIN.

Keywords to take home

In her observations of the week presented during the Closing Session on August 25, SIWI Professor Malin Falkenmark noted that three interesting threads ran through much of the discussions in the more research- and science-oriented workshops.

One, she said, is that water is a “landscape

integrator” in among other contexts its interaction with forests and other activities on the land. Two, that humans need to prepare for living with change, i.e. a growing population with increasing expectations; social changes bringing about increased purchasing power (with ramifications for changing diets), environmental change, and more. And, finally, that there is a “need to reach reasonable control” to manage everything from water storage in places with monsoon climates to securing land/water/ecosystem compatibility.

“Flexibility, integrated approaches, education, communication and the intergenerational conservation of knowledge” are keywords we should take with us, she said.

Measuring progress

According to Mr. Berntell, the 2006 World Water Week fulfilled its role as an annual forum where partnerships can be promoted, capacity is built and the status of ongoing international processes, commitments and promises related to water, the environment, livelihoods and poverty reduction are re-

viewed. In addition to the formal events, corridors witnessed innumerable informal meetings and discussions.

“The record number of participating individuals and countries indicates that there is both a continuing interest in the issues and a strong need for an annual forum such as the Water Week,” said Mr. Berntell. “The goal in Stockholm is not to be the biggest meeting, but to be the most forward-looking, inclusive and results-oriented event in the water and development field.” To that end he said SIWI is continuing its examination of how promises, commitments and processes brought up in Stockholm can be monitored and tracked in years to come.

The official 2006 World Water Week Synthesis Report will be published in November. This document will represent the World Water Week’s ultimate contribution to the broader global water and development agenda. It will contain summaries of all seminars and workshops, an analysis of the week from the science, policy, non-governmental and business perspectives, and recommendations coming out of the week.



Photo: SIWI

The Stockholm Junior Water Prize exhibit was popular with Water Week attendees.

August 12-18, 2007

Progress and Perspectives on Water: Striving for Sustainability in a Changing World

August 12-18, 2007, is the date for the 2007 World Water Week in Stockholm. The First Announcement and Call for Papers will be available at www.worldwaterweek.org beginning in mid-November, with the printed announcement being mailed at the end of that month. The theme of the week is “Progress and Perspectives on Water: Striving for Sustainability in a Changing World”. **The deadline for workshop paper proposals is February 1, 2007.**

To make sure you receive the announcement in printed or electronic form, add your name (or update your record) to the mailing list via the links at either www.worldwaterweek.org or www.siwi.org.

WORLD
in Stockholm,
August 12-18, 2007
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