

Plenary: Views on progress, best practices and lessons learnt during the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015

Session Summary Report, 15 January 2015

During this wrap up sessions, a closing panel gave an overview of the results and lessons learnt during the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015.

The panel was moderated by Adriano García Loygorri, who highlighted the importance of this last year of the decade to look backwards for lessons learnt and to look forward to a new period of opportunities to apply those lessons to improve the water and sanitation sector. Looking backwards, the results of the Decade cannot be looked at with pessimism, as the water access target has been achieved improving the situation of thousands of people and communities and 200 million people have obtained access to basic sanitation; nor with optimism, as 800 million people still lack access to water and 2,500 million to sanitation, with important urban-rural and rich-poor disparities. He also highlighted the important role of United Nations during the 2005-2015 Decade in introducing the water and sanitation challenges and targets within the national political agendas, and particularly the role of the Zaragoza UNW-DPAC office in supporting and communicating progress during the process.

The session panel was composed by the following distinguished participants:

- Barbara Anton, Coordinator of Sustainable Resources, Climate and Resilience at ICLEI European Secretariat, on progress, best practices and lessons learnt by local authorities during the decade
- Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Chair at Global Water Partnership, on progress on stakeholder engagement during the decade
- Gavin Power, CEO Water Mandate, on progress and lessons learnt on business engagement during the decade
- Alice Bouman-Dentener, President of the Women for Water Partnership, on progress and lessons learnt on women engagement



Session panel: from left to right Barbara Anton, Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Adriano García Loygorri, Gavin Power and Alice Bouman-Dentener.

The Decade Views

The view from the Global Water Partnership

This Water Decade has led to tangible progress in a variety of aspects related to accelerating the achievements of the MDGs in the water area. GWP with its partners have been tirelessly driving a worldwide movement towards Integrated Water Resources Management leading to encouraging progress, as reported by the UN-Water Status Report on the Application of Integrated Approaches to the Development, Management and Use of Water Resources presented at Rio+20 and the results from the 2012 UN survey.

From this standpoint, GWP has perceived some remarkable achievements during this Decade:

- **A growing recognition** towards the importance of integrated approaches to water management.
- **Emergence of new and modified paradigms.** The Green Economy/Growth and the Water-Energy –food nexus have become subjects of international debate, reinforcing the need for an integrated approach. But the conceptual attractiveness of paradigms is not enough. They must be applicable in a fast-changing world.
- **Growing recognition that water is at the core of sustainable development** as it is closely linked to a number of key global challenges. We are at a critical moment where countries are negotiating a dedicated water goal in the post-2015 development agenda. This stands to be a game-changer for our efforts and it is essential we work in partnership to support countries in these negotiations.
- **Increasing steps towards water cooperation.** Especially remarkable were the efforts of the government of Tajikistan to raise water cooperation as a global concern through initiating the UNGA Resolution declaring 2013 the international year of water cooperation. Dealing with water problems requires genuine cooperation at all levels where shared goals motivate diverse stakeholders to pull in the same direction. The Dushanbe and the Budapest Summits underscored the fact that much is intellectually and technically within our grasp. What is often missing is the political will and skill to achieve global and regional cooperation.

However, despite tangible progress many issues addressed in this decade remain unsolved and need further work in the future. Some of the most important include the following:

- **Further stakeholder engagement**, especially including women and youth.
- **Major shifts in both policies and conceptual approaches to water** in order to reach a more desirable future and limit calamities that can otherwise be foreseen.
- **A match of short and long-term action.** In the context of climate change, rapid urbanization, and growing disparities, the scale and complexity of water challenges require investing in the long term as well as the short term. Many complex processes are involved and long term commitment is needed in order to succeed.
- **Encouragement of partnerships.** No single set of actors holds the key to effectively addressing the challenge of effective management of water resources and all of them have a role to play in the game. Working together is not optional: it is essential if we are to achieve our vision of a water secure world. We can and must achieve that vision! This requires fundamental changes in values, beliefs, perceptions and political positions among all stakeholders.

- **Systematic sharing of knowledge.** To bring about change, people need knowledge to understand the state of water resources and the tools needed to sustainably develop and manage them. Knowledge can stimulate behavioral change towards a new 'water culture'. Only engagement in a learning process and continuous monitoring will lead to a real evolution in thinking, not just a change in emphasis of current activities.
- **Recognition of the importance of international cooperation,** including South-South cooperation. Effective implementation of the Dushanbe and Budapest Summits recommendations is urgent and essential.

GWP is actively involved in all the elements of this challenging agenda with its vast network of partners.

The views from ICLEI

ICLEI was founded shortly before the Rio Conference in 1992 to represent and give a voice to local governments. They successfully achieved the advocacy for a global mandate for local governments to embark on a 'Local Agenda 21', which was reinvigorated at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit/Rio +10 by the launch of a Local Action 21 movement to emphasize the shift from planning to action. While being essentially a city network, ICLEI stands for and promote innovative forms of local governance, including bottom-up mechanisms, as long as being part of a coordinated action respecting the interest of all key players. Local sustainable water management has been early in ICLEI's programmes.

Based on the global review on progress in local action for global sustainability for the period 1992 – 2012 undertaken by ICLEI in 2013, Barbara Anton presented the most important achievements of local governments during this Water Decade.

- **Increasing recognition of local governments across sectors:** getting stakeholders on board to realize the importance of local governments in the achievement of sustainable development was an enterprise with a hard beginning. Nowadays, their potential is acknowledged and they are called upon and asked for collaboration by multiple organizations.
- **Role/achievements of local governments:** In general local governments have had key responsibilities in the urban water sector for a long time, in particular with regards to providing water and sanitation services to their citizens. In developed countries, many cities have embarked on comprehensive/holistic/participatory approaches to managing their urban water systems and more can be gained by using smart technologies/new ICTs etc. In developing countries while decentralisation has increased opportunities for tailoring water management approaches to local needs and interests, the required capacities including the financing for turning plans into action were often - and are still - lagging behind. More support for local level actors is needed.
- **Awareness on benefits of multistakeholder coordination:** Water is a delicate issue, concerning virtually all strands of life, and thus a matter of competing uses and interests. The necessity for working with all relevant stakeholders has trickled down in most places, but making it work is still a different story. Again, the need for building the capacity of local governments to act as the convener and coordinator of local stakeholder processes still needs more effort. However, it can be said that the Local Agenda 21/Local Action 21 movement also led to a cornucopia of new set-ups/mechanisms in local governance, often initiated from bottom-up. There has been tremendous creativity/social innovation from which also new, more participatory forms of water management can be expected to benefit.

- **Multigovernmental coordination:** There cannot be effective/efficient/sustainable water management without all levels of government being on the same page.
- **North-south and south-south solidarity actions:** Increasingly local governments set out to enter into partnerships with other local governments to support each other. Innovative financing mechanisms are being developed and local communities are educated well enough to accept their local government's engagement outside local boundaries.
- **Local governments managing water in an increasingly deregulated global economy:** There is a tension between exploring, testing and applying more decentralised solutions in the water sector, as well as an economy which increasingly allows a pure business spirit to take over functions and services of local government which have previously been managed in better recognition of social concerns and better link to other urban sectors. A global trend of re-municipalisation can be observed in the last years and truly working models of collaboration between the public and private sector which yield win-win situations on both sides still need to be better explored, communicated and upscaled.
- **Local government as a 'nexus manager':** water-energy-food-climate change links are being intensively researched and lots of tools to facilitate an integrated management are being developed. A local government can be seen as an institution that has 'perfect' conditions for making these linkages work as it takes over management of an array of sectors under the same roof. This requires a conscious and strategic approach and will not just happen by the given institutional framework. Meanwhile, cross-departmental collaboration is often still lagging behind, and awareness raising and training are still required.
- **Technological progress vs. political will:** There is a tension between what is possible from a technological standpoint and what is happening on the ground. Political will to put water at the highest priority is still not a given, especially in political environments with lots of competing priorities or insufficient social empowerment. A nexus approach can partly help by matching water with other priorities which might appear even more urgent eg., working for poverty alleviation/equity by improving water and sanitation services in informal settlements.

As a final reflection, *“it appears as if sustainable urban water management has benefited from social innovation spurred by Local Action 21 in the last decade: more decentralised/localised approaches, more grassroots engagement, more recognition of smaller-scale solutions. There are also promising developments that the understanding of the strengths of an integrated approach, rooted in a good governance environment, works best. It will be the decade of implementing the water-related SDGs to proof whether these observations hold true.”*

The views from the CEO Water Mandate

The UN Global Compact's CEO Water Mandate was launched in 2007 with just five endorsing companies. Today, the CEO Water Mandate includes more than 125 highly committed companies, working to advance policies and practices in terms of water and sanitation. During this decade, CEO Water Mandate has joined a number of organizations including Alliance for Water Stewardship, Aquafed, CDP-Water, Water Footprinting Network and the World Resources Institute in the efforts to work closely with the private sector for more sustainable water management initiatives, and several achievements can be perceived.

- **Evolution and adoption of the new concept of 'corporate water stewardship'**, a holistic approach that takes companies beyond just water management in direct operations, and into

areas such as the supply chain, watersheds and river basins, with an emphasis on collaboration.

- **Higher transparency and disclosure.** More and more companies are showing the willingness to commit to action, backed up by accountability and disclosure. The UN Global Compact and CEO Water Mandate initiatives both require annual progress reports by endorsers, expelling companies that fail to communicate progress.
- **Interest, respect and support for the human right to water and sanitation.** These were declared human rights by both the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council in 2010. Companies are beginning to see an opportunity space in going beyond respect to actually contributing positively to supporting human rights, on a voluntary basis. This is an especially exciting space in relation to partnership projects. An example is the CEO Water Mandate's Water Action Hub, the world's first on-line platform to match-make companies and other stakeholders on projects on specific watersheds and river basins around the world.
- Under the **Protect, Respect, Remedy framework** put forth by Special Advisor John Ruggie and adopted by the United Nations, there is increased interest in exploring the policy and operational aspects of respecting the human right to water and sanitation. This largely entails a focus on do-no-harm and proper due diligence. CEO Water Mandate is officially launching its Guide to Respecting the Human Right to Water and Sanitation in this line.

In this final stage of the Decade, business is showing interest and involvement in relation to the Post-2015 agenda and the development of Sustainable Development Goals. The CEO Water Mandate has oriented much of its recent work around the Post-2015 agenda, and companies have actively promoted the idea of a dedicated goal on water and sanitation.

The views from Women for Water Partnership

The UN General Assembly has agreed to do a comprehensive review of the Decade that will be a very positive opportunity not only to evaluate progress, but also to identify the restraining factors that have led to certain challenges remaining unsolved. In this Post 2015 continuation process we all have common but differentiated responsibilities in line with the Rio Principles.

The Water Decade has done a remarkable work in promoting participation and debate as well as in fostering the designing, debating and implementing of tools. This is important because the solution of water challenges very much relies in cooperation, not only transboundary cooperation among states, but also cooperation among stakeholders.

WfWP was founded to unite exiting women's network on the gender-water development network and now wants to give an overview on what women have gained and achieved during this Water Decade.

Some remarkable points on the gains for women during this decade include the following:

- WfWP's main goal is to promote and strengthen the potential of women as a collective of civil society to impel the fulfillment of the human right to water and sanitation. In this sense, **women as a civil society group has strengthen** considerably, and their role in realizing access to water and sanitation has gained **acknowledgement** and is increasingly practiced, both at the national level and, more importantly, at the local level.

- **Gender equality** is a gain that still needs to be further worked upon. There is a significant gap in gender equality and disparities in access to safe water and sanitation.
- Women are no longer perceived solely as a vulnerable and disadvantaged group. Women civil society are increasingly seen as **actors in their own rights** in this development process and as agents of change. They are increasingly included as an equal partner in participation processes, which sometimes does not only mean being invited, but also being given the facilities and means to make participation possible.

Regarding the achievements of women, the following points are worth to be mentioned:

- The **acknowledgement of women's role** and the **strengthening** of women civil society participation is at the same time as a gain a very important achievement. WfWP was founded especially for that purpose, to unite existing women's networks and organizations on the gender-water-development nexus and their untapped connections.
- **Women have got across themes, nations, sectoral and cultural boundaries.** WfWP has been funded to give them a voice and the space to exchange among themselves and others and above all to give them the means to grow to their full extent and capacity.

UN agencies, national governments, local authorities, the water sector and other entities have made valuable contributions in partnering with WfWP to achieve these goals during the Decade.

Regarding the contributions of individual women organizations to the Decade, a variety of activities have deployed ranging from capacity development to awareness on disaster risks, contributions to the development of policies, legal and institutional frameworks at the national and subnational levels, implementation of water and sanitation provision for communities, developing climate resilient agriculture, payment for ecosystem services, etc. Civil society is very diverse and so are their potential contributions. Meanwhile, women organizations have done a very unique contribution in building local ownership and organizing community engagement. Women civil societies have a special capacity to do this due to their intrinsic social capital, a network built upon union, reciprocity and trust. This organization capacity can help assist governments at the national and international levels to undertake implementation.

Finally, the most important challenges and lessons learnt for women civil society include the following:

- **Traditional gender roles and stereotypes.** The best way to change this is changing the mindset of those who hold the power at the various levels by showing them the added value of women participation. This requires women civil society groups to be strong enough to break the resistance. The UNW-DPAC has had an important role in reinforcing this strength by recognizing, stating and validating these aspects from a neutral and fact-based standpoint.
- **Adequate financing for social empowerment.** Women civil society groups are usually not considered and recognized as an equal partner and gender roles often constrain their participation. To overcome this, investing in social empowerment processes is essential: there is need to finance participation to make it happen at a full extent.
- **Information sharing** as a catalyzer of stakeholder participation.

Final conclusions and messages

In a general overview, considerable progress has been done in engaging all actors to act on water issues. However, it was also recognized that there is still work to do to increase women's presence and means within the water management arena and create opportunities for youth through increased funding.

In this critical moment where countries are negotiating for the post-2015 agenda, working in partnerships to reinforce these aspects is considered essential.

Companies were perceived to be moving towards water stewardship, disclosure and transparency, and initiating diverse initiatives and platforms for knowledge sharing. However, further engagement in the international business world needs to be promoted.

The views on local water management showed that continued failures during the decade are leading a trend to retake public water services provision by municipalities and look into each other's experience for valuable lessons and practices. However, the great potential for improvement brought by the great advances in water technology will need of political will and visionary and capacitated leadership to translate into tangible results.