

Report of GWA Chair's Participation* in 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit (APWS) Beppu, Japan, December 3-4th, 2007

The 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit[‡] held in Beppu, Japan on December 3-4, 2007 was an unprecedented opportunity to secure political commitment at the highest level for regional collaboration on ensuring access to water and sanitation for all. 700 million people in the region still lack access to clean, affordable water while another 2 billion do not have access to sanitation. Needless to say, such macro figures mask regional/national disparities in ecosystems, political institutions and socio-economic conditions, including rural-urban disparities and inequalities at the level of communities and households differentiated by class, caste, ethnicity, faith and gender relations.

The APWS was organized by the Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF), an inclusive multi-stakeholder network launched in 2006, with secretarial support provided by the Japan Water Forum (JWF).

Led by various international organizations, it was structured around *three priority themes*:

1. Water Financing (ADB)
2. Water-related Disaster Management (ICHARM)
3. Water for Development and Ecosystems (IUCN / FAO)

and,

Five cross-cutting key result areas (KRAs):

1. Developing Knowledge and Lessons (Public Utilities Board, Singapore / UNESCO)
2. Increasing Local Capacity (Streams of Knowledge / UN-Habitat)
3. Increasing Public Outreach (ADB)
4. Monitoring Investments and Results (UNESCAP)
5. Supporting Forum and Summit (JWF)

On Monday 3/12/07, at the opening plenary, Prof. Koh, the Chair of the APWF Governing Council and Ambassador-at-Large of Singapore, outlined some of the key challenges confronting the region:

Water Financing and Capacity Development

- Understanding that 'soft' issues (capacities, attitudes) are more difficult to address than implementing the right technology.
- Prerequisite for more monetary investment and political commitment of about 8 billion dollars a year is needed, if the region is to meet Target 10 of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals).

Water-related Disaster Management

- Need to integrate water-related Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in national development plans.

* For GWA's Chair interview with Terra Viva about women participation in water management issues visit: (<http://ipsterraviva.net/tv/Beppu2007/CurrentExtraltem.aspx?new=15>)

‡ For more information on the Summit, visit: <http://www.apwf.org>

- Establishment of clear linkages between IWRM (Integrated Water Resource Management) and DRR.
- Setting national / local goals or targets for water-related DRR.
- Establishing a preparedness index for water-related DRR (as opposed to just a vulnerability index).
- Developing water-related disaster warning systems and human capacities to address the same.

To address such issues and challenges the requisite guiding principles for the region were outlined as:

- Empowering local authorities
- Promoting partnerships approach
- Providing resources for capacity development

The Prince of Orange, Willem Alexander, (**Chairman of the UN Task Force on Water and Sanitation**) in his opening remarks commented that according to the UNDP Human Development Report 2007 (<http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/>), climate change is the defining human development challenge for the 21st century. He called for better governance and transparency in water management, larger investment flows and more efforts at capacity building at all levels. Targets and goals for coping with water related disasters need to be set and a focus on delivering emergency water and sanitation services (post-disasters – to reach all) is critical, he stressed. It is proposed that a high level panel on water and disasters will be part of the G-8 Summit to be hosted by Tokyo in 2008. There is also a need for better and coordinated monitoring of water and sanitation delivery services and IWRM should be seen as a flexible tool.

At the afternoon parallel session on **Climate Change, Glaciers and Water Resources in the Himalayan Region** organized by ICIMOD (the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu), ministers from India, China and Nepal pointed out the serious consequences of climate change on water-related ecosystem services and livelihood for the more than 1.5 billion people who live in the Himalayan region. Retreating glaciers and the expected increase in the frequency and magnitude of glacier lake outbursts floods (GLOFs) and flood related disasters on the one hand, and sea-level rise and saline water intrusion in low-lying, densely populated deltas on the other, point out the urgent need for collaboration on regional adaptation priorities. However, limited and credible scientific data or systematic organizational systems as well as structural constraints in information sharing have hindered progress on regional cooperation.

Day 2 (Tuesday 4/12/07), began with the regional launch of the **International Year of Sanitation** (IYS) 2008 with a host of speeches reiterating the urgent need to build solidarity on meeting MDG commitments and learning from the diversity of successful approaches, e.g. the Total Sanitation Campaign, India, described by the Prince of Orange as an example of social innovation led by the state. He further maintained that like the debate on HIV-AIDS we need to remove the sanitation stigma by encouraging open discussion on hygiene and safe disposal of human excreta, menstrual waste, etc. However, for most of us in our nice clean environments, who are not directly affected by

the lack of sanitation (seen as more than just toilets), this issue may not get its due attention or be less identifiable – just like many of us do not think about HIV-AIDS or feel the need to practice safe sex till someone we know, suffers or dies from this affliction.

Ms Clarissa Brocklehurst, Coordinator, UN Taskforce on Water and Sanitation (Chief UNICEF-WES) argued that we need to look at innovative approaches, mobilize communities as well as the private sector to meet the challenge of providing 96 million people in the region with access to safe water annually.

To facilitate regional cooperation on sanitation, Mr. Yoshiro Mori (former PM of Japan and Chair of the Summit Steering Committee), launched a GIS-enabled database, “The Water Web project”- (http://www.waterforum.jp/cgi-bin/web_gis/).

Barbara Evans, an international consultant on sanitation issues inquired if the argument of public financing for sanitation was valid, especially when, the most effective investments were made by households themselves. Eventually, sanitation is about politics- she highlighted, and mentioned the example of urban areas where the whole politics of land encroachment determines who has adequate shelter or space for toilets, sewerage etc. Further, she called for collective community commitment and for public funding to leverage private resources.

Other speakers pointed out the need to see the 2.6 billion people who need sanitation as a potential market – albeit a dysfunctional market. Good and innovative marketing for toilets was therefore emphasized so they become objects of desire, for households. Further, a call was made to develop national standards for public sanitation facilities. For example in Thailand, accessibility, safety, cleanliness, etc. of public toilets at hotels, restaurants, shopping malls and gas stations has been set and such standards are being adhered to, in cooperation with the private sector.

The representative from ADB pointed out the need for institutional accountability, particularly at the local level. It was mentioned that there is a tariff policy *for water* but *not for sanitation* and the demand for sanitation by the poor is largely not articulated. But we need to look at the entire value chain from water quality, disposal and waste treatment/ management to toilets, particularly as many of these aspects fall into the informal economy. A need for total solutions in the field of sanitation and not just incremental ones was emphasized.

In the afternoon, the Chair of the GWA was invited to participate in a panel discussion, in a session jointly organized by UN-Habitat / Streams of Knowledge on ***Increasing Capacity for Local Actions***. The session was opened by Andre Dzikus, Chief WSS-II, WSIB, UN-Habitat and included a range of speakers from local government (Mayor of Shizuoka City, Japan, former Mayor of Manila) to ministers (Minister for Water Resources, India) and senior professionals from development organizations (Wateraid, GWA, SoK, GWP). Sara Ahmed, GWA Chair outlined the GWA’s mandate: What does mainstreaming Gender in Water Policy and Practice mean for GWA?, How does GWA

facilitate capacity building at different institutional levels (e.g. Training for Trainers (ToTs) with NGOs, training programs for rural women and men, members of water committees; in partnerships with different agencies such as UN-Habitat's Water for African Cities initiative and through emerging collaborations with academic institutions such as the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok. Finally, Sara outlined the challenges faced, that range from, monitoring impacts of our ToTs, looking at gender mainstreaming as an empowering process (and not simply 'a toolkit approach') and assessing the quality of participation of poor women and men in community-level water management.

All in all, this first Asia-Pacific Water Summit was viewed as a great success with rich discourses over two days and a strong focus on securing political commitment for the water and sanitation challenges facing the region. In the closing summary, Ravi Narayan (Vice Chair, APWF Governing Council), pointed out that investing in water, means investing in knowledge, capacity and technical development. In the 'Message from Beppu', Ms Erna Witoelar (UN Special Ambassador for MDGs in Asia and the Pacific, and the Vice Chair APWF) emphasized that not only are women vulnerable in water-related disasters, they are also resilient and entrepreneurial – hence, they should be empowered to participate in all water-related activities and decision making.

Dr. Sara Ahmed,
Chair, Gender and Water Alliance
Submitted on, 21-12-07, Ahmadabad