Chapter 3

Emerging International Dialogue on Freshwater at Non-UN Forums
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As discussed in the previous chapter, the freshwater issue was unresolved, under appreciated and under addressed by the national or international institutions, business houses and water managers until mid-1990s. Barring one exclusive global water conference- Mar del Plata Conference and dozens of General Assembly resolutions, there has been no serious attempt by the UN to put freshwater issue on the global political agenda. The freshwater has simply disappeared from the international political agenda or simply no longer considered important. The evidences can be found in the lack of review of freshwater status even after Mar del Plata Conference up to the UN sponsored Rio Summit. To denounce the seriousness of 1992 Rio Summit’s agenda on freshwater issue (Chapter 18 of Agenda 21), critics argue that very few water professionals from developing countries participated at the Rio Conference or its preparatory process, which were almost exclusively dominated by the officials from the Environment ministries and also the Heads of States rarely referred to water as an important environmental issue. The critics argue that in all probability, developments in the water sector would not have been very different at present, even if the Rio Conference had not taken place.

After being dejected by the UN’s cold response on the gloomy arithmetic of freshwater, few but highly influential water professionals had started a dialogue on global freshwater and its related issues outside the UN in mid 1990s. Since then there has been a flood of large-high profile ‘international conferences’ or ‘mega-conference’ or ‘global conference’ or ‘global water initiatives’ organised on freshwater.¹

¹ These terms are not strictly or technically different at all to each other. However, the authors have used interchangeably and some also try to define the terms to substantiate their respective hypothesis. Asit K Biswas and Cecilia Tortajada define mega-conference on the capacity of participants (more than 2000) from most countries of the world (Biswas and Tortajada 2005). Gleick and Lane do not exclusively define international meeting but includes all professional institutions meetings, UN or its agency sponsored meetings or world water forum meetings in international meeting category (Gleick and Lane 2005). Similarly, Salman uses large water meetings as ‘global conference’ (Salman 2003). Global water initiatives (GWIs) are not confined to only large meetings but water-related associations, programmes, and organizations, institutions whose fundamental purpose is to advance the knowledge base regarding the world’s inland water and its management (Varady and Iles-Shih 2005).
Role of Professional Freshwater Institutions on Freshwater Agenda

The origin of professional societies or institutions deal with freshwater can be traced to the 1880s of the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses (PIANC). Between two World Wars numbers of scientific organisations emerged like International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) and the International Council for Science (first called the International Council of Scientific Unions, or ICSU), International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS; formerly IASH) and the International Association for Hydraulic Research (IAHR). Since 1928 the Water Environment Federation (WEF), an educational and technical non-profit organisation has been working for water quality professionals. It fosters communication and cooperation throughout the global water community with a strong history and reputation as a definitive resource in water quality. Increased significance of water led to the birth of numerous professional institutions to advocate one or another of its aspects another of its aspects. These professional institutions had been front line of this advocacy. Since 1970, the WEF has been meeting annually to discuss global water policy decisions. During early to mid-1950s, water scientists continued forming new professional societies such as the International Union of Technical Associations and Organizations (UA TI), the triennial World Irrigation and Drainage Congresses, and the International Association of Hydro-geologists (IAH).

Going back to 1970s and sometime earlier, the freshwater issue had been the domain of professional organisations such as the International Water Association (IWA), the WEF, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), the International Water Resources Association (IWRA), and Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), who have held regular water conferences. Presently, there are number of such type of water initiatives like the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and two of the research institutes under the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) – the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) – are also involved in water policy dialogue.
As the largest internationally focused association of water professionals, the strength of International Water Association (IWA) lies in the professional and geographic diversity of its membership. IWA is strategically positioned not only to represent water professionals’ voices, but to contribute their collective experience, expertise and knowledge in a focused manner on a wide variety of topics on water management throughout the world. Since 1970, its biennial World Water Congress convenes and accommodates approximately 2,500 delegates from different parts of the world to discuss the freshwater problems. With the Biennial Water Congress, IWA also supports ‘Leading-Edge Conferences’ and Regional Conferences.

New Delhi-based international non-governmental organisation, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) is dedicated to enhance the worldwide supply of food and fibre for all people by improving water and land management and the productivity of irrigated and drained lands through appropriate management of water, environment and application of irrigation, drainage and flood management techniques. Starting with 11 founding member countries in 1950, 104 countries have so far joined ICID to pool in their efforts. The ICID organises triennially World Irrigation and Drainage Congresses and annually, by rotation, one of the four regional conferences, namely, African Regional Conference, Asian Regional Conference, European Regional Conference, and Pan American Regional Conference to address and discuss important current, regional and global issues.

Similarly, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) is a policy institute that contributes to international efforts to find solutions to the world’s escalating water crisis (SIWI). It advocates future-oriented, knowledge-integrated water views in decision making, nationally and internationally, that lead to sustainable use of the world’s water resources and sustainable development of societies. By creating

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2 The specialist groups within IWA are self-managed and include groups covering all-important topics in the water management sector. Spread across IWA’s membership in more than 130 countries, IWA’s specialist groups are an exceptionally effective means of international networking, sharing information and skills and making good professional and business contacts (IWA).

3 In recognition of its significant contribution to the programs and objectives of International Year of Peace proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, on 15 September 1987 the UN Secretary General designated ICID as a Peace Messenger (ICID 1987).

4 Three special WatSave Awards for Technology, Management and for Young Professionals have been established to recognise work of irrigation professionals who have made an outstanding contribution to the conservation of water in irrigation.
opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between water experts and decision makers, SIWI creates opportunities for the development of innovative policies and scientifically based solutions to water-related problems in accordance with international accepted targets enshrined in Rio Summit, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Its annual Stockholm Water Symposium with World Water Week, which began in 1991, hosts the major international academic and professional water community in association with the awarding of the Stockholm Water Prize. Every annual meeting convenes with a theme of greatest but varied importance. It has recently expanded beyond purely academic forums to encompass policy debates also.

The International Water Resource Association (IWRA) was set up in 1972 with a view of advancing water resources planning, management, education and technology through dialogue and research. IWRA has actively promoted the sustainable management of water resources around the globe. The basic objectives of IWRA are as follows: a) advancing water resources and related environmental research; b) promoting water resources education; c) improving exchanges of information and expertise; d) networking with other organisations who share common interests and goals; and e) providing an international forum on water resource issues (IWRA). In a nutshell, IWRA’s goal is to build and strengthen partnerships and mechanisms to facilitate the sustainable use of water resources worldwide. The IWRA organises ‘World Water Congresses’ every three years, as a multi-disciplinary forum for engineers, planners, administrators, managers, scientists, educators and other organizations involved in the management of the water resources in the world. Besides discussion on water issues, the triennial meeting of IWRA has a unique role of serving as a bridge in networking people, information, and organizations.

The Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which offer assistance for, and advice on, water resources

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5 The Stockholm Water Prize is a global award presented annually to an individual, organisation or institution for outstanding water-related activities. The activities can be within the fields of aid, awareness building and education, technology, management or science. The Center for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi based non governmental organisation was honoured with the 2005 Stockholm Water prize for its leadership work in rain water harvesting and conservation on traditional water harvesting.
management have also been dominating this sector in early 1990s. Similarly, bilateral development agencies (such as the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Swedish International Development Agency) are also involved largely in water issues in developing countries. In addition, a number of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Green Cross International (Russian Federation) and International Rivers Network are also active in this field.

Besides, the above mentioned international organisations having wide geographical reach, international membership, and global structure to address issues related to water, there are innumerable regional and local organisations contributing substantially on this debate. However, a concerted effort to consolidate and strengthen the international endeavour in addressing water issues was seen during the second half of 1990s. One pointer in that direction was the establishment of two new global institutions to deal with exclusive water resource issues: the World Water Council (WWC) and the Global Water Partnership (GWP). Senior renowned water specialists and international organisations, in response to an increasing concern about world water issues from the global community people, created these two new organisations. In theory these two organisations seem neutral to facilitate dialogue between the various stakeholders, water experts argue that these organisations promote the privatisation, export of water as commodity partner with water corporations and international financial institutions (Barlow & Clarke 2002: 157-158). After their establishment these two organisations began to dominate global water discussions. These two institutions have gradually taken the lead in the field from the different UN agencies that had hitherto been active in this area in the 1970s and 1980s.
Table 4: Water meetings since 1970s

World Water Council: The Parallel Water Dialogue

Some traces the foundation of WWC in the International Conference on Water and the Environment (ICWE) in Dublin and the Rio Summit in 1992 (Barlow and Clarke 2002). However, in response to the decision of the Ministerial and Officials’ Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation, held on March 19-23, 1994 in Noordwijk, the Netherlands, which endorsed by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and the UNGA, a special session convened in IWRA’s Eighth World Water Congress held in Cairo, Egypt in November 1994 resulted in a resolution to create the WWC. A consensus was established around the need for the creation of a common umbrella organisation to unite the disparate, fragmented, and ineffectual efforts in global water management. The WWC got mandate under the leadership of the UNESCO, the World Bank, and other organisations to carry out water-related research and other activities (Anon 2002). A Founding Committee was formed to accomplish the preparatory work for the establishment of WWC.

The Committee deliberated and agreed on the mission statement, objectives, and structure of the WWC (Anon 1995). The two meetings of the Committee in 1995
defined the mission and objectives of the WWC. As stated by the Executive Director of the World Water Council, “At the 1994 IWRA World Water Congress in Cairo, the WWC, previously no more than a subject of discussion and debate, was transformed into action through the decision of the IWRA to establish the Interim Founding Committee, the catalyst for the Council’s Creation in 1996” (IWRA). The Council was subsequently established officially in Marseilles, France on 22 March 1996 as an association under domestic French law.

While UNESCO describes the WWC as ‘an organisation devoted to the critical issues of long-term global water policy and to advocating solutions to problems of water resource management’ (UNESCO), the WWC itself claims to be ‘dedicated to strengthening the world water movement for an improved management of the world’s water resources’ (WWC). In essence, as the WWC claims, the Council is an international multi-stakeholder water policy think tank that is not limited to intellectual efforts alone but an active participant in strategic areas of the international water policy debate. On the contrary, the critics including national or international NGOs accept that it is a lobby group heavily weighted with engineering and construction companies, dam-building state agencies, and water supply corporations (IRN 2003).

However, membership to the Council is open to any organisation with an interest in the area of water, ranging from ministries and regional or local government departments, professional associations, research institutes and universities, private sector and industry, UN agencies, developmental agencies and financial institutions, non-governmental organisations and media. Its members include a wide cross-section of individuals and organizations concerned with the various aspects of international water policy. Till 2003, the Council brought together 298 members from more than 50 different countries. India is represented by the Ministry of Water Resources. However, the critic says that the WWC has an industry-bias and advocates pro-privatization water policies and the paramount organization in the ‘water mafia’. It operates as a think-tank promoting ‘neo-liberal solutions’ to the water crisis. CSOs say that speaking of ‘public-private partnerships’ instead of ‘privatisation’, the WWC continues to promote

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6 Various campaigns and right-based non-governmental organizations are very critical of the WWC’s board members and its structure and objectives. Author had several personal communications with Wilfred DeCosta, Convener, INSAF, New Delhi, who leads the anti-water privatization campaign in India since 2000.
the illusion that leaving water supply to multinational corporations is the only way forward (Corporate Europe Observatory 2003).

**Objectives of World Water Council**

The overall objective of the Council is to act as a think tank on water resource matters. Specifically, the Council is entrusted with five objectives: to identify critical water issues at all levels on the basis of ongoing assessments; to raise awareness about critical water issues; to provide a forum for arriving at a common strategic vision on integrated water resources management; to provide advice and relevant information to institutions and decision-makers on the development and implementation of policies and strategies for sustainable water resources management; and to contribute to the resolution of trans-boundary water issues.

The mission of WWC is ‘to promote awareness, build political commitment and trigger action on critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level, to facilitate the efficient conservation, protection, development, planning, management and use of water in all its dimensions on an environmentally sustainable basis for the benefit of all life on earth’ (WWC). The Council also claims that by providing a platform to encourage debates and exchanges of experience, it aims to reach a common strategic vision on water resources and water services management amongst all stakeholders in the water community. In the process, the Council also catalyses initiatives and think-tank activities, whose results converge toward its flagship product, the World Water Forum.

**Global Water Partnership**

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) was formally established in August 1996 with the joint support of a number of international financial institutions, with a mandate to support integrated water resource management (IWRM) in developing countries. The GWP was established as a working partnership among all entities – government agencies, public institutions, private companies, professional organisations, and
multilateral development agencies – involved in water resources management. The mission of the GWP is to support countries in the integrated water resources management for the sustainable use of such water resources. It has spawned a number of regional and national ‘partnerships’ which contain similar interests and push similar policies to their global parent.

The partnership is funded by development agencies such as World Bank as indicated to focus on water issues in developing countries. The mandate of GWP as follows:

- Support integrated water resources management by collaborating with governments and existing networks, and by forging new collaborative arrangements;
- Encourage governments, aid agencies and other stakeholders to adopt consistent and complementary policies and programmes;
- Build and reinforce mechanisms for sharing information and experience;
- Develop innovative and effective solutions to problems common to integrated water resources management;
- Suggest practical policies and good practices based on these solutions; and
- Help match needs to available resources.

By providing for a mechanism through which donors, the private sector, and water resources professionals can exchange information and needs, investments towards improved water infrastructure and management of water. The GWP has identified two specific tools toward this end. A Financial Support Group (FSG) of donor agencies is being formed so that the donor community may work together to rationalise their financial support to the international priorities for water resources management, as identified by the GWP’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The FSG exists to provide a forum for debate among the donors about the criteria for their support to other (bilateral) water resource programmes. The FSG meets annually, and their meetings are

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7 GWP has four arms of governance: the Consultative Group, the Steering Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee, and the Secretariat. The GWP is funded by both government aid agencies like Canada, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and International Financial Institutions like the World Bank Group and development agency like UNDP and Ford Foundation.
open to all; however only the donor agencies may actively participate. Another major tool for professional exchange is the GWP Water Forum.

The line of demarcation of responsibilities between the WWC and GWP may be clear in theory. However, in practice there are areas of overlapping responsibilities, particularly with the expanding work of the TAC and its regional offices, including the work on the strategic vision for integrated water resources management. In addition to the TAC which is part of the Partnership Secretariat, there are seven regional TAC for the following region: Southern Africa, West Africa, South Asia, South-Eastern Asia, South America, Mediterranean, and Central and Eastern Europe. Since 1998 the TAC started publishing its series ‘TAC Background Papers’ which present the GWP more as a think tank than as a working partnership.

According to the critic, the WWC and GWP, with such similar mandates and memberships (and Egyptian chairs), were established in the same year is due more to individual egos and turf wars between funding agencies than to significant differences in ideology, interests or functions (IRN 2003). The GWP is also criticised for its operational principle of ‘water as an economic good’ and has an ‘economic value in all its competing uses’ (Barlow and Clarke 2003).

Unlike the WWC, the GWP was initially established as a network, hosted by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) in Stockholm, with no formal legal status. However, by 2002, the GWP was able to attain such a status by establishing itself as an inter-governmental organization and had, by then, signed a headquarters agreement with the Swedish government. Since 2002, the GWP attained its administrative independence from the SIDA has emerged as an independent legal entity. The annual Stockholm Water Symposium that was started in 1991, which attracts a large number of participants, has become an important meeting point for the WWC and the GWP. A number of issues concerning the two institutions, as well as water resources management in general, are discussed and decisions based on these discussions are taken during this annual symposium. The GWP, in turn, will translate the global consensus on water management, as well as the options as presented by the WWC, into field-based services to developing countries while developing a strategic action plan that would demonstrate the special role of the WWC.
These two institutions have clearly begun to dominate the global work on water resources issues, and have gradually taken the lead in this field from the different UN agencies. The relationships between the WWC and the GWP, on the one hand, and the other different agencies working in this field including the United Nations agencies, on the other, seems to increasingly edge on competition, perhaps inevitably so, despite the apparent efforts of cooperation in some fields.

The Ninth World Water Congresses of IWRA titled ‘Water Resources Outlook for the 21st Century: Conflicts and Opportunities’ was held in Canada between 1-6 September, 1997 together with the First Assembly of the WWC in conjunction with the scientific and technical program of the Congress. The Congress discussed themes on water sharing, sustainable water use and practices, protecting the resources and river basin management.

The Assembly decided that the Council has to take a lead role in the first World Water Forum, a major awareness-raising event. The Council was also launching two ambitious long-term projects. The first was a ‘Long-Term Vision for Water, Life and the Environment’, a process that will recommend solutions. The other is a Global Water Assessment, an effort to develop for the first time a satisfactory inventory of the world’s fresh water resources. The Council’s other activities include conferences, awareness-raising events, and the publishing of a review entitled Water Policy and a Yearbook.

World Water Forums: Conference of Stakeholders (COS) on Freshwater

The World Water Forum (WWF) is organised in every three years by the WWC in close collaboration with the respective host countries. Since 1997 the Forums have become the most important events for promoting sustainable water management policies worldwide. As the WWF has been meeting in regular interval, the WWF can be termed as Conference of Stakeholders (COS) on freshwater similar to Conference of Parties (COP) under the UN.\(^8\) The advocate of WWF argues that each Forum has been unique in its preparatory process, format, thematic content, and outputs and it provides

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\(^8\) In international multilateral environmental negotiations, Conference of the Parties (COP) meets periodically (often once a year) to review the Convention implementation, to take decisions on how to improve the implementation process and to device new innovative process to resolve the issue.
a unique platform for exchanging ideas and approaches at a global scale, with the participation of the public and private sectors and the interaction of professionals and government officials of the water sector (WWC). However, after the 3rd WWF in Kyoto, Japan, several evaluations have been attempted to review the Forums activities and its output to address the global freshwater problems.

**First World Water Forum**

Less than a year after its establishment, the WWC in collaboration with the Government of Morocco and several UN agencies organised first WWF in Marrakech, Morocco, on March 21-22, 1997. The theme of the Forum was ‘Water: the World’s Common Heritage’. The objectives of the Forum were to raise the awareness of world leaders and decision makers with respect to global freshwater issues and to define for water management in the 21st century (Ait-Kadi et al. 1997: 23-74.).

More than 500 participants attended this WWF, and papers on different issues related to water resources were presented and discussed. The principal aim of the Forum had been to raise the awareness on the water challenges immediately and at a high political level in the next century. The Forum recommended action to recognise the basic human needs to have access to clean water and sanitation, to establish an effective mechanism for management of shared waters and to encourage partnership between the members of the civil society and governments. The Forum called on governments, international organisations, NGOs and the people of the world to work together in a renewed partnership to put into practice the Mar del Plata and Dublin Principles and Chapter 18 of the Rio Summit (the milestones on freshwater) to initiate a ‘Blue Revolution’ to ensure sustainability of the Earth’s water resources. The Marrakech WWF was a high visibility event, with an impressive list of speakers that included the heads of three UN agencies (FAO, UNESCO, WMO), high-level representatives of the UN Secretary General and UNDP, the President and Vice President of the African and Asian Development Banks, several ministers, and NGOs, including IUCN (Ramsar Convention 1997).
One of the outcomes of the Forum was the adoption of the ‘Declaration of Marrakech’ that firmly established the leadership of the Council in world water affairs as well as mandating the Council to prepare a ‘long term Vision for Water, Life and the Environment in the 21st century’. It also prescribed a mandate for WWC to launch three-year initiative of study consultations and analysis in order to evolve the global vision on water. At the conclusion of the process, the vision would offer policy relevant conclusions and recommendations for actions to be taken by the world leaders to meet the needs of future generations.

Thus, the Marrakech meeting paved the way for an international conference to be held every three years where water professionals from the different regions of the globe, as well as organizations, agencies and institutions, would meet to discuss and try to agree on ways for dealing with the pressing problems facing the world community in the water resources sector.

The Forum issued the ‘Declaration of Marrakech’, which recognised and noted the urgent need for a better understanding of all the complex issues – quantitative and qualitative, political and economic, legal and institutional, social and financial, educational and environmental – that must go into shaping a water policy for the next millennium. The resolution issued at the Marrakech WWF urged respective governments and organisations to adopt the language and the principles of the Declaration of Marrakech as official policy. The Forum also requested the Morocco government to table the Declaration on the occasion of the UNGA meeting to be held in June 1997.

The 1997 forum marked the genesis of a new competition among international institutions including the UN. The competition over debating on water policy had not only started between WWC and UN but also between WWC and IWRA’s Water Congress. The First WWF was seen to be in direct competition with the triennial IWRA congress (Gleick and Lane 2005). In parallel to the efforts of the WWC, the UNGA adopted on May 21, 1997, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. The UN also called for a Special Session of the General Assembly to Review and Appraise the Implementation of Agenda 21’ (UNGASS) in New York, 23-27 June 1997 as a follow up meeting on
Earth Summit to review the environmental issues where water was also a part. However, the real competition was started not until the Second WWF in 2000.

**World Commission on Water: Vision for 21st Century**

At a brainstorming meeting held in Washington, DC, in July 1998, the idea of forming a World Commission on Water in the 21st Century was born. As per the Marrakech mandate, a 'World Commission on Water for the 21st Century' was established by the WWC in cooperation with FAO, UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, WMO and the World Bank on 11 August 1998 in Stockholm to guide the development of the 'Long Term Vision on Water, Life and the Environment for the 21st Century' (World Water Vision Commission 2000). There are also some views that since the work of the WWC and the GWP have not been entirely satisfactory (not least because of their lack of coordination); the Commission was set up to generate some urgency in arriving at that much-hyped 'global vision' (Petrella 2000). Simultaneously, the Commission instructed the GWP to accompany this 'vision' with an operational scheme entitled 'A Framework for Action'. The 'vision' and the 'framework' in question were to be presented at the Second World Water Forum in March 2000 in The Hague, the Netherlands.

The Commission was formed under the Chairmanship of Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Chairman of Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research and GWP, Governor of the World Water Council and Vice-President of the World Bank. The Chairman assembled a 'very distinguished group' of 21 individuals in the Commission (Biswas 2003). Water Vision was designed to build a consensus among professionals and stakeholders to design management plans that avert further water crises.

The Marrakech declaration identified the process to develop the Vision as "building on past international efforts and relying on the collective wisdom and resources of the global community" (Cosgrove and Rijsberman 2000: 68). The process leading to the Vision would include research, consultations, workshops, print and electronic publications, and many other means for absorbing, synthesising, and disseminating knowledge. At the conclusion of this process, fully aware of the pitfalls along the way,
the Vision would offer relevant policy and region- and country-specific conclusions and
recommendations for action to be taken by the world's leaders to meet the needs of
future generations.

The process involved a unique and difficult exercise, and never before in the entire
history of water management, was such an exercise ever attempted, let alone be
implemented (Biswas 2003). The exercise involved a participatory approach, as
prescribed at the time of constitution of the commission, on study, consultation and
promotion with special inclusion of woman in the process. Within two years, over
15,000 women and men at local, district, national, regional and international levels
shared their aspirations and developed strategies for practical action towards the
sustainable use and management of water resources. First time, the usefulness of
Internet in the consultation process was acknowledged by any commission. Further,
Water Vision included contributions from professionals and stakeholders who
developed integrated regional Visions in more than 15 geographic regions. As the
Vision evolved, more networks of civil society groups, NGOs, women, and
environmental groups joined the consultations that influenced the Vision Report. The
diverse backgrounds of participants—authorities and ordinary people, water experts
and environmentalists, government officials and private sector participants, academics
and NGOs—offered a wide range of views. Thus, the Commission, as WWC claims,
took Water Vision beyond an academic exercise to the foundation of a movement.

The Commission reviewed the results of all the consultations and discussions to
produce a final report entitled: 'A Water Secure World: Vision for Water, Life and
Environment'. The concise Commission report, being an independent body, made a
number of recommendations, which would not have been possible in any
intergovernmental forums. The main recommendations of the report could be
summarised as follows: a) holistic, systemic approaches based on integrated water
resource management; b) participatory institutional mechanisms; c) full-cost pricing of
water services, with targeted subsidies for the poor; d) institutional, technological, and
financial innovations; and e) governments as enablers, providing effective and
transparent regulatory frameworks for private action (World Water Commission Vision
2000).
The Commission also believed that there was a necessity of mobilisation of political will and behavioural change by all to achieve the objectives of secure water for all. Despite the laudable efforts undertaken by many groups in the preparation of this Vision, the Commission recognised that more needs to be done at the country and basin level to get more precise figures for water quantity and quality, identify financial resources and investment needs and to install the adequate incentives to make this investment happen.

Within the long historical participatory process, the Commission Report was not immune to criticism by civil society groups. Categorizing Commission’s report as ‘old water in a new bottle’, civil society organisations from all over the world, in a letter, called for rejection of the report out rightly (IRN 2000). The unprecedented participatory effort put in the report was questioned as the process had been controlled from the start by a small group of aid-agency and water multinational officials, mainly from the GWP, WWC, World Bank and Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux (large water private companies). The recommendations or conclusions of the Commission report was criticised as predetermined by the aid agencies (donors) and World Bank as their investment policies on water strongly believes in private investment.

**World Commission on Dams: Parallel Forum**

The global water debate continued in another forum in parallel to the work of the World Commission for Water in the 21st Century. Though the World Commission on Dam (WCD) was established in 1998, the origin of the WCD lies in the many struggles waged by dam-affected communities and civil society organisations around the world, in particular those targeting World Bank funded project. In June 1994, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the World Bank, more than 2,000 organisations signed the ‘Manibeli Declaration’, calling the World Bank to establish an ‘independent comprehensive review of all Bank funded large dam projects’. Anti-dam activists believed that an independent review of the projected and actual performance and impacts of dams would confirm many of their arguments if carried out in an honest and rigorous manner, and would help to promote more appropriate investments.

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9 Most of the peoples movement in India especially Narmada Bachao Andolan has started protest against World Bank funded Sardar Sarovar Project during 1980s.
At the end of 1994, the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department (OED) announced that it would undertake a review of large dams the Bank had funded. The review was completed in 1996, but never publicly released. Although it contains some criticisms of the World Bank's record, on the whole it sided with the Bank and the dam industry, concluding that 'overall, most large dams were justified' (McCully 1997). The Bank's own evaluation argued that the OED had seriously exaggerated the benefits of the dams under review, underplayed their impacts, and displayed a deep ignorance of the social and ecological effects of dams.

Critics then stepped up pressure on the Bank to commission an independent dam review. In March 1997, participants at the first international conference of dam-affected people, held in Curitiba, Brazil, called for an immediate moratorium on all dam building until a number of conditions were met. One of these conditions was that an international, independent commission be established 'to conduct a comprehensive review of all large dams financed or otherwise supported by international aid and credit agencies, and its policy conclusions implemented' (IRN 1997).

In response to the growing opposition to large dams that culminated at Curitiba, the WCD was established by the World Bank and International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN), now World Conservation Union, in 1998. Shortly after the Curitiba conference, the World Bank and IUCN invited around 37 participants, seven were from the World Bank, six from government agencies, seven from NGOs, five from IUCN, eight from private dam construction and consulting companies and industry organizations, and four from academia to discuss a second phase of the OED's 50-dam review at Gland, headquarter of IUCN.10

The Gland Workshop agreed, after a thorough discussion of the Report, on the establishment of a two-year World Commission on Dams by November 1997. The independent commission would review large dams in general, and not just those funded by the World Bank. The Commission would look into 'backward development

10 Before the Gland workshop, 49 NGOs from 21 countries wrote to World Bank President James Wolfensohn to demand the World Bank reject the conclusions of its OED review and to commission 'a comprehensive, unbiased and authoritative review' of World Bank lending for dams. The Gland workshop, although organised by IUCN and World Bank, most of the anti-dam advocates preferred a venue out of reach of World Bank's influence.
effectiveness' of existing dams and to develop alternatives for water resources and energy development and to develop internationally acceptable criteria, guidelines, and standards for planning, design, appraisal, construction, operation, monitoring, and decommissioning of dams (WCD 2000). Some representatives of the dam industry agreed because they thought it would confirm their strongly held beliefs about the great benefits of dams. Others realised that their industry was in crisis and believed that they needed to learn from past mistakes if they wanted to win public acceptance and funds for future dams. However, the process was highly contentious and several times NGOs, the World Bank, and industry representatives came close to withdrawing from the negotiations. The main disagreement was in the selection of commissioners, in particular because of the reluctance of the World Bank and IUCN to appoint representatives of dam-affected people’s movements.

The Commission started its work in May 1998, and launched its report “Dams and Development – A New Framework for Decision-Making” in November 2000 in London, about two months after the United Nations issued its Millennium Declaration. The 12 member WCD found that while “dams have made an important and significant contribution to human development, and benefits derived from them have been considerable... in too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment” (WCD 2000). The WCD’s final report provides ample evidence that large dams have failed to produce as much electricity, provide as much water, or control as much flood damage as their supporters originally predicted.

The WCD identified five core values of equity, efficiency, participatory decision-making, sustainability, and accountability (WCD 2000). The Commission also recognised seven strategic priorities for guiding decision making with regard to dams, covering economic, finance, technical, legal, environmental, social, and international water law issues. Those seven priorities comprise: gaining public acceptance; comprehensive options assessment; addressing existing dams; sustaining rivers and livelihoods; recognising entitlements and sharing benefits; ensuring compliance; and sharing rivers for peace, development and security. The Commission recommended 26
guidelines, derived from those seven priorities, which if applied would lead, in the opinion of the Commission, to a more equitable and sustainable outcome in the future.

Some argue that the outcome of the work of the Commission should not come as a surprise given the significant representation of the NGO and academic community in the Commission (Salman 2003). While the World Commission on Water’s recommendations are criticised by the NGOs as lenient to private investors and IFIs, the WCD’s outcome are branded as more supportive to NGOs claims. The Report of the WCD has generated a wide and far-reaching debate over water resources management and development in general, and over dams in particular. The Report is seen by the large NGO community, and some academic circles, as vindicating their point of view with regard to the negative impacts of dams (Bradlow 2001 and Bird 2000).11

Second World Water Forum: Vision to Action

The agenda of the next international water meetings were set by the two Commission’s report for further debate on freshwater policies. As per the mandate, the report of the World Commission on Water was the centrepiece of the Second WWF held in 17-22 March 2000 in The Hague, Netherlands. A parallel Ministerial Conference gathered 120 ministers and officials from 130 countries and resulted in the ‘Ministerial Declaration of The Hague on Water Security in the 21st Century’ (WWC 2000: 25-28).

The Hague Forum was attended by 5,700 participants, more than ten times the number of attendees at the Marrakech Forum. While the Marrakech Forum was attended largely by elites whose views on the various aspects related to water management are by and large similar, the Hague Forum drew large segments of water professionals, including NGOs, civil society organisations, academics, professional groups, in addition to the UN and the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, and government representatives. The Marrakech Forum was meant to establish the institutional and procedural mechanisms

11 Although the Commission disbanded itself after completion of its mandate, the Report remains a major reference document in the debate on dams and development. In this regard, the legacy of the WCD far outlives that of the World Commission for Water in the 21st Century, which was also disbanded after submission of its report at the Second World Water Forum at The Hague. The UNEP’s Dams and Development Project (DPP) are now handling the process initiated by the World Commission on Dams.
for the water professionals to meet and discuss at a global level the critical issues and problems related to water resources. Subsequently, the Hague Forum’s emphasis was on the vision for dealing with those critical issues and problems. Even, international water law community congratulated organisers for successfully focussing the international community’s attention on the world’s water problems (Wouters et al. 2002).

The Chairman of the Forum and honorary member of the World Commission on Water in the 21st Century and Patron of the Global Water Partnership, His Royal Highness Prince Willem-Alexander, the Prince of Orange set the tone of the Forum in his opening remarks as, “we recognise that there are many different visions on water in the twenty-first century… This Forum is unique because it gives everyone an opportunity to join in the debate… This is no ordinary conference. This Forum, and the Ministerial Conference, marks a new beginning” (WWF 2000: 49). Thus, The Hague meeting provided an opportunity for all sides to debate the different views on the various aspects related to water resources management, development, and protection.

At the Forum, the WWC announced its new initiatives. The President of WWC, Dr. Abu-Zeid declared the new initiative as “Building on the successful results of the unprecedented exercise to prepare the Vision for World Water, Life and Environment, the Council is now developing the policies that will put that Vision into action. This will be our roadmap. We call on and count on the assistance, cooperation and collaboration of all organizations, institutions and ordinary citizens to adopt and put into practice the spirit of the World Water Vision’ (WWF 2000). The WWC announced new initiatives for putting the world water vision into action. The road map includes: (a) establishing Monitoring Systems for the World Water Vision in Action, (b) stimulating policies for the financing of water development and protection and (c) creation of World Commission on Water, Peace and Security.

Polarisation in the Second World Water Forum
The Forum also witnessed a polarisation of the contrasting views on aspects related to water resources management, development, and protection. Dams and the role of the private sector became the dividing lines and the most hotly debated, and indeed,
divisive issues. To begin with, a number of NGOs and Trade Unions at the Forum called for rejecting the report of the World Commission for Water and WWC's Vision Document for the 21st Century, challenging the process of preparing it as not participatory and lacking transparency (Anon 2000). In a parallel meeting to the ministerial conference being held at the Forum, NGOs issued a statement that "the process is dominated by technocratic and top-down thinking, resulting in documents which emphasise a corporate vision of privatisation, large scale investments and biotechnology as the key answers". The NGO alleged that the process gives insufficient emphasis and recognition of the rights, knowledge and experience of local people and communities and the need to manage water in ways that protect natural ecosystems, the source of all water. The NGOs also called for transparency and accountability in the functioning of the WWC and the GWP forged by the council members. They demanded that the WWC and the GWP work should be regularly reviewed by the UN, through the Commission for Sustainable Development, and by the stakeholders themselves.

The NGOs' Statement went on to criticise the building of dams as having deprived countless number of people of their rights over water and to attack the proposed role for the private sector in water resources management (WWF 2000; Morley 2000). The session on water and energy, which was specially organised by the WWC to review the linkages between water and energy policies, was hijacked by a small group of activists interested only in a single issue (Biswas 2003). The Hague session was specifically organised to review this and other critical water-energy linkages. However, some NGOs ensured that this issue could not be discussed by focusing their entire attention to another issue that was the subject of discussion at other sessions, but which had absolutely no relevance to the objective of the water and energy session. Similarly, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) challenged the GWP Framework for Action, claiming that the Framework 'continues the misguided notion that ecosystems are in competition with people for water, rather than recognising that ecosystems provide and restore the water that humanity requires' (IUCN 2000).

Extensive and elaborate reports, which were the result of the consultation process of World Commission on Water, were presented and discussed at the Forum. In addition to the regional studies, a series of reports prepared by the WWC, GWP and World Commission on Water were presented and discussed at the Forum. Such reports


Actions are necessary to implement the required changes in the water security. For this reason the Dutch government organised a separate Ministerial conference, parallel to the Forum, to raise much needed political support. The ministers convened to discuss regional and thematic issues in separate groups and major issues in plenary session. The Forum culminated in the “Ministerial Declaration of The Hague on Water Security in the 21st Century” that was issued at the end of the Forum on March 22, 2000 (Second World Water Forum 2000).

Ministers and government representatives discussed the seven challenges to achieve water security in seven thematic sessions for a compromised declaration as follows: meeting basic needs, securing food supply, protecting ecosystems, sharing water resources, managing risks, valuing water and governing water wisely (World Water Forum 2000: 49). Under the shared water resources for securing water, Ministers and officials presented their respective positions on political/legal frame works; hydrological information sharing and promoting investment in water sector were discussed. The outcome of the discussion was to identify principles of regional water sharing agreements, consideration of ‘equitable’ than ‘equal’ distribution among various sectors and involvement of various water users; develop, strengthen and enforce agreements from bilateral to global.

The officials also discussed the regional water security in parallel regional sessions although priority issues differ at country level. Under the Asia-Pacific regional session, the issue of full cost recovery of water, donor agencies priorities, water sector reform, and maintenance of water infrastructure were discussed. However, the South Asian government representatives presented in these discussions agreed on the hydropower potential of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna River (Ibid: 60-61). For achieving this potential, international financing and regional or bilateral cooperation in shared rivers among the South Asian countries was sought.

The Declaration stated that the actions advocated by the Ministers and Heads of Delegations were based on integrated water resources management (IWRM) that includes the planning and management of water resources, both conventional and non-conventional, and land (WWF 2000: 25-28). The Declaration went on to set a number of actions, including the agreement to establish targets and strategies to meet the challenges of achieving water security. It included a statement in support of the UN system periodic reassessment of the state of water resources and related eco-systems, and on working together to develop a stronger water culture, and increase the effectiveness of pollution control measures. The Declaration called upon the Secretary General of the UN to further strengthen cooperation within the UN system, and upon the Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to expand its activities in relation to freshwater resources.

Although the Declaration welcomed “the contribution of the World Water Council in relation to the Vision, and of the Global Water Partnership with respect to the development of the Framework of Action,” it stopped short of endorsing either of them (Salman 2003). It only “welcomed follow-up actions by all relevant actors in an open, participatory and transparent manner that draws upon all major groups in society.” And although it noted the importance of the range of issues raised, it only promised to “raise them for further consideration in relevant forums including the meeting in Bonn in 2001 and WSSD in 2002 in the future, and to consider their implications for our individual national situations.”

The Ministerial Declaration was clearly a political statement devoid of any commitment or specific actions or plans that could be monitored or measured. The Ministers and
Heads of Delegations claimed that they lacked the authority to make any commitment on behalf of their governments, including authority to endorse the vision and plan of action of the World Commission for Water, the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership.

From Mar del Plata to The Hague: the declining of the UN
After categorising it as a success, The Hague Forum supporters compelled to compare and review not only its predecessor Marrakech Forum but the Mar Del Plata Conference. It was a far bigger meeting, at least in terms of the number of participants, than the Mar del Plata. However, unlike Mar del Plata, the Forum was sponsored by the WWC, and not by an intergovernmental body like the UN, who normally organised similar high-profile forums in the past. The success of the Forum confirmed the new global trend of the 1990s for the water sector: the major roles played by the UN system in the past have started to decline, and these are now being taken over by new institutions like the WWC, GWP, and SIWI.

The Hague Forum was different from the Mar del Plata Conference at least in three important ways. First, unlike the continuous speech-making in the UN-sponsored mega-conferences by Ministers and the heads of the intergovernmental organisations, the Hague Forum constituted over 100 special sessions on a variety of topics, which included issues like water and energy, next generation of water leaders, water vision for Mexico, senior women water leaders, water and religion, and business community panel. Second, participation to the Forum was open to all in contrast to Mar del Plata, where participation was very strictly restricted only to the official representatives of the governments and international organisations. Third, the Mar del Plata Conference resulted in an Action Plan, which was accepted by all governments. The Ministerial Conference at the Forum, which was also strictly restricted, issued a declaration that was very general, and it broke no new grounds.

However, the Forum ended with caustic criticism from some participants, who alleged that international institutions and corporations deliberately sidelined underdeveloped and developing countries (Charkasi, 2000). While some participants praised the conference as a unique opportunity to bring together the various stakeholders involved
in the field of water issues, many others criticised that the event was sponsored by multinational water management companies, such as Suez Lyonnaise Des Eaux, irrigation lobbies and corporations and multinational agencies trying to promote business.

Some participants were disappointed that not all regions (Latin America) of the world were equally represented and that developing countries were marginalised by an under-representation of speakers to the forum. Also, English became the language barrier to most of the participants who alleged that voices of the Third World were not welcome, when someone from the developing world spoke; they were marginalized, spoken down and treated badly. Representatives of developing countries said they felt targeted by large corporations at the international conference, where debate raged on the utility and morality of water pricing.

Thus, no concrete agreement on any of the issues presented at the Forum was recorded. In reality, the Forum resulted in the sharp polarisation of the views of the different groups of the water professional organizations on the issues of dams and private sector participation and in the widening of the gap on those issues. The only concrete agreement was that the Third World Water Forum would be held in Kyoto, Japan, in March 2003. It was in line with the practice that was apparently established by now that the Forum would be held in every three years, and also in confirmation with the United Nations Resolution declaring March 22 as the World Water Day.

**Kyoto Forum: Third World Water Forum**

During the period that preceded the Kyoto Third World Water Forum witnessed a larger number of meetings and conferences and the issuance of more declarations and resolutions than the period between the Marrakech and Hague Water Forums. Less than six months after The Hague Forum, the UNGA held its 55th session as United Nations Millennium Summit to issue MDGs. In December, UNGA, perhaps with the upcoming Kyoto Water Forum in mind, adopted a resolution proclaiming the year 2003 as the “International Year of Freshwater”. There was also UN sponsored as well as Non-UN organised large international meetings occurred on water up to Kyoto Forum.
All those events, with their resolutions and declarations, have paved the road to the preparations for, and have provided the main elements of the debate during the Third Forum. The third World Water Forum met between 16-23 March 2003 in Kyoto, Osaka and Shiga in Japan, and was organised jointly by the WWC and the Government of Japan (IISD 2003). The Ministerial Conference organised by the Government of Japan, took place from 22-23 March in Kyoto. The third forum attracted more than twice the number of participants of the Hague Forum, and had nearly three times the number of sessions. Representatives from over 170 countries as well as participants from UN agencies, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and NGOs, academia, business and industry, youth organizations and media outlets attended the eight-day meeting in Kyoto. As the number of participants in the Forum was 24,000, the events had to be spread over the cities (Ibid).

On the first five days of the forum (March 16-21), the participants met in 351 sessions organised around 38 themes (including five Regional Days). Theme issues covered a range of topics related to water which included, climate, supply, sanitation, hygiene and water pollution; cultural diversity; nature and environment; cities; governance; floods; integrated water resources management and basin management; peace; agriculture and food; poverty; financing water infrastructure; and dams and sustainable development. During the five Regional Days, sessions were held on water issues related specifically to Africa, Asia and Pacific, the Americas, the Middle East and Mediterranean, and Europe.

**Financing Water Infrastructure: Private- Public Controversy**

The Forum also witnessed release of the much-awaited three reports. The UN released its report- 'World Water Development Report', which was prepared by the World Water Assessment Program, a combination of efforts of twenty-three UN agencies and conventions secretariat, under the coordination of UNESCO (UN/WWAP 2003). The second report was the WWC's World Water Actions 'Making Water Flow for All'

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13The World Water Development Report (WWDR) is a periodic, comprehensive review giving an authoritative picture of the state of the world's freshwater resources, and aiming to provide decision-makers with the tools for sustainable use of our water. The Report offers a comprehensive assessment of the state of freshwater resources in the world today. It also addresses eleven global challenges to water resources, ranging from population growth and the need for food and energy to the issue of water governance that involves the aspects of recognizing and valuing the many faces of water, as well as collective responsibility thereon.
(Guerquin et al. 2003). The report includes an analysis of the actions and commitments by both governments and organizations in the water sector since The Hague Forum. This report was meant as an input to the Ministerial Conference of the Kyoto Forum. These two reports did not generate any controversy among the participants.

However, the Report of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure, ‘Financing Water for All’ was quite controversial especially strong criticism came from NGOs (WWC 2003). The Panel was sponsored by the WWC, the Third World Water Forum, and the GWP. The Panel consisted of its Chairman Mr. Michel Camdessus (a former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund – IMF), and nineteen other members, mainly from the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and the private sector. Its mandate was to suggest ‘ways of identifying the financial resources for addressing the needs of the states in the water sector, thus helping achieve the MDGs with regard to access to water.’

The Report contains 85 proposals on action to attract financing for water infrastructure and offers specific proposals on how this can be achieved by governments, donors, regions, civil society, the private sector, MDBs and small-scale providers. The Panel’s main recommendation was that financial flows need at least to double (from an annual figure of $75 billion today, to $180 billion) and would have to come from financial markets, from water authorities themselves through tariffs, from multilateral financial institutions, from governments, and from public development aid. The Panel’s report went on to make eleven recommendations for dealing with the water problems, including: reforming of the sector institutions, delegation of responsibility for water resources to local bodies with enough power to make decisions, making cost recovery sustainable, and addressing the issue of sovereign risk on projects, including foreign exchange risks so as to attract international loans and equity (Ibid).

However, the Panel’s main recommendation relating to a major role for the private sector has attracted a lot of criticism by those who opposed such a role. Like the World Commission for Water in the 21st Century and the World Commission on Dams, the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure was disbanded after it presented its report at Kyoto. The legacy of the Panel will likely end up falling somewhere between
that of the World Commission for Water, and the World Commission on Dams; not totally forgotten, but not fully remembered (Salman 2004).

In addition to the highlighted role of the private sector, the issues of dams, and the related issues of the concept of a human right to water and international trade in water, were the main source of contention at Kyoto. However, this was not the first time that a debate on these issues took place. Such a debate did take place in The Hague in 2000 and has been taking place, to a limited extent, in the annual Stockholm Symposium and in the many regional and academic workshops and conferences on water since the mid-1990s. During the sessions, many participants underscored that the growing global population necessitates the building of more dams to meet agricultural, domestic, industrial, energy and flood-control needs. Several participants also stressed the need to consider how dams affect livelihoods, the environment and existing rights and access to water (IISD 2003). The value of the WCD 27 guidelines was emphasized by many participants, particularly regarding: comprehensive needs and options assessments; public acceptance and benefit sharing; impact minimisation; and existing dams.

The Forum also distributed a draft of the ‘Preliminary Summary Forum Statement’, which contains the main outcomes of the Forum. The Preliminary Summary Forum Statement commits participants to meeting the goals and targets identified in the Millennium Declaration, the International Freshwater Conference in Bonn and the WSSD. It notes that freshwater is a precious and finite resource that is central to sustainable development, economic growth, social stability and poverty alleviation. It identifies key water issues including safe and clean water for all, governance, capacity building, financing, participation, regional priorities, global awareness, political support and local action (Ibid). With regard to institutions and legislation, the Preliminary Summary Forum Statement recommends that governments start or continue reforms of public water institutions, and emphasizes good governance, cost-efficiency, transparency and accountability, stakeholder participation and public-private partnerships.
Kyoto Ministerial Declaration: Too General

Prior to the Ministerial Conference, a senior official’s meeting, the Minister’s Meeting on ‘Water, Food and Agriculture’ and the dialogue between Forum Participants and Ministers meeting were held as a link between the Forum and Ministerial Conference. These three stages led to Ministerial Declaration at Kyoto.

Stage I- Senior Official Meeting
During the Official Meeting, the delegates from 130 countries met in a session open to Forum participants and several closed-door sessions. The meeting negotiated the Ministerial Declaration, which was presented to the final plenary of the Ministerial Conference for adoption. During the closed session, some delegates proposed the inclusion and prioritisation of the following issues in the Ministerial Declaration: water as a human right; the recognition of water as being indispensable for human security; subsidiarity; gender empowerment; household and community neighbourhood strategies; regional water management strategies; the impacts of population growth on freshwater resources; national adaptation coalitions and mechanisms to cope with climate vulnerability; best practice guidelines for water service delivery; and the Report of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure (Ibid). During the negotiations, several countries tabled new proposals, including: ensuring that cost-recovery approaches do not prevent the poor from securing access to water and sanitation; identifying water priorities in national strategies for sustainable development; emphasizing the valuation and payment of environmental services; intensifying global efforts to protect inland fisheries; and strengthening water-related issues within the CSD.

Stage II- Dialogue between Ministers and Forum participants
A dialogue between 519 Ministers, senior officials and Forum participants was held to discuss the Ministerial Declaration. The Dialogue Final Report contains a consolidated list of ideas generated during the Dialogue and notes ‘strong support’ for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and for affirming rights to water, and ‘strong calls’ for accountability, transparency and stakeholder participation in decision making on water issues.
Stage III Minister’s Meet on Water, Food and Agriculture

Ministers identified food security and poverty alleviation, sustainable water use and partnerships as key challenges for the agricultural sector. The Conference convened to discuss five themes in sub-groups: safe drinking water and sanitation; water for food and development; water pollution prevention and ecosystem conservation; disaster mitigation and risk management; and water resources management and benefit sharing. The meeting adopted a ‘recommendation on Water for Food and Agriculture’, which outlines a plan of action, including commitments to: modernise and improve agricultural water use; increase water productivity; promote better governance; consider environmental aspects; undertake research and development; and foster international cooperation.

South Asia and Ministerial Declaration

Nine member Indian team including Water Resource Minister strongly recommended deleting paragraph 11 of the Draft Declaration during the Ministerial meeting. Raising the justification for having this paragraph, India told the delegates that many countries of the world like China, Brazil, and Turkey were strongly against the incorporation of this paragraph. India also recommended that it is unfair to omit the word ‘dam’ in the declaration as dams play an important role in developing water and making the availability of water match the requirements of the future.

The Paragraph 11 of Draft Ministerial Declaration reads: “Recognising that cooperation between riparian states on transboundary and/or boundary watercourses contributes to sustainable water management and mutual benefits, we encourage all those states to promote such cooperation” (Third World Water Forum 2003: 11).

Twelve member strong Bangladesh team (including Water Resource Minister and member of Joint River Commission) recommended constituting a small committee to discuss in regard to paragraph 11. Bangladesh recommended that the first line of Paragraph 11 should read, “Recognizing that international cooperation on transboundary water management and benefit sharing will contribute to peace and security”. Bangladesh also recommended adding the impact of climate change on freshwater in ministerial declaration. Appreciating the inclusion of Paragraph 11 which
is very much instrumental in ensuring world peace and harmony, three member Pakistan team endorses the Declaration in entirely. Further, Pakistan team suggested that the Forum to express its firm resolve and commitment to honour the obligation and right of countries as spelled out in various bilateral and multilateral treaties (Ibid: 24). The delegates of Nepal supported the argument put forward by Bolivia regarding benefit sharing and access and navigation to the sea as an important element of benefit sharing.

**Evaluation of Kyoto Declaration**

At the end of the Conference, the Ministers and Heads of the state and governments adopted a ‘Ministerial Declaration’ and a ‘Portfolio of Water Actions’. The presence of large number of participants and the diversified views they represented made the debate louder, sometimes acrimonious, and the views more polarized. The polarisation of views was also apparent in the Kyoto Ministerial Declaration. Because of such diversified and polarized views, the Ministerial Declaration issued at the end of the Forum was termed as ‘awash in compromises and generalisations and lacking in specificity’ (Salman 2004: 14).

The Ministers and Heads of Delegations agreed to promote Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), ensure good governance, and explore the full range of financing arrangements. They affirmed the necessity for countries to better coordinate monitoring and assessment systems and encouraged promotion of cooperation between riparian states on shared watercourses. They called upon each country to develop strategies to achieve the millennium development goal to halve the population of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015 and encouraged studies for innovative technologies to assist with attaining this goal. The Declaration also urged the countries to review and establish appropriate legislative frameworks for the protection and sustainable use of water resources and for prevention of pollution, and to cooperate to minimise the damage caused by disasters.

The Ministerial Declaration did not make an explicit reference to dams. However, it enumerated a number of means for improvement of agricultural water management, which included water storage. It also recognised the role of hydropower as one of the
renewable and clean energy sources, whose potential should be realised in an environmentally and socially equitable manner. This is because of increasing global concern over fossil fuel consumption, which is known to trigger climate change. It is also noteworthy that the Declaration, on the issue of financing of water infrastructure, gave a lukewarm reference to the Camdessus Report, only taking note of the Report, although in another paragraph the Declaration recommended exploring the full range of financing arrangements including private sector participation in line with ‘national policies and priorities’. Moreover, the Declaration suggested that funds should be raised by adopting cost recovery approaches ‘which suit local climatic, environmental and social conditions, and the ‘polluter-pays’ principle, with due consideration to the poor.’

The failure of the Kyoto Declaration to endorse the Camdessus Report was somehow similar to the failure of the Hague Declaration to endorse the vision recommended by the World Commission for Water in the 21st Century. In both instances, the issues were too difficult and controversial for the participant ministers to make a commitment. Thus, the Kyoto Ministerial Declaration attempted to walk a middle road on the contentious issues that were debated at the Forum. The result was a statement that attempted to please everybody. Moreover, the Declaration had little, if any, specific and measurable actions. It was by and large, a replication of The Hague and Bonn Declarations, which indicates that it is not a win-win situation for all.

Mexico World Water Forum: The Fourth COP
After nearly a decade of discussion on global freshwater problems, the WWF has toned down its solution as marked by its theme for the 4th Forum as “Local Actions for a Global Challenge.” The 4th WWF convened in Mexico City, Mexico from 16 March to 22 March 2006. Over 200 thematic sessions were held, and almost 20,000 participants attended, representing governments, UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, academia, business and industry, indigenous groups, youth and the media (IISD 2006). The Forum concluded with a Ministerial Conference on 21-22 March, with some 140 ministers and high-level officials gathering in both closed and open sessions, which included dialogues and roundtables on various aspects of water management. A Ministerial Declaration was adopted, calling for international action on water and sanitation issues.
From the beginning, the Forum emphasized the strategic importance of water to national security; the need for a long-term vision on water management; and the need to create a new water culture that enables people to face water and development challenges based on cooperation and tolerance (IISD 2006). While the membership of WWC growth has increased 40 percent, increased in areas of water financing, monitoring and so on, the achievement in freshwater crisis is yet be consolidated.14

The guiding principles of the Forum include privileging the value of local knowledge and experience as a key factor in the success of water policy-making; producing concrete, policy-oriented outputs aimed at supporting local action on a worldwide scale; promoting dialogue among policy sectors; and addressing regional challenges to yield regional and global commitments through a regionally-based preparatory process. The Forum’s main theme, “Local actions for a global challenge,” was addressed through five framework themes: water for growth and development; implementing integrated water resources management (IWRM); water supply and sanitation for all; water management for food and the environment; and risk management.

**Mexico Ministerial Declaration**

Six ministerial roundtables offered a platform for participating ministers and high-level officials to exchange experiences on various aspects of water management like, water efficiency and transfer of water-related technologies, capacity building for effective water management and basic sanitation at the local level, water for the environment, decentralization process, governance, institutions, and the enhancement of all stakeholders’ participation, financing local water and sanitation initiatives, development and strengthening of national water monitoring mechanisms and targeting, adoption of the Ministerial Declaration.

**Debate and Comments on Draft Ministerial Declaration**

The Draft Ministerial Declaration was developed during an open consultative process. However, to forge a broad consensus, the Draft Declaration was presented to the country ministers. Bolivia proposed a “complementary declaration” made jointly by Cuba, Venezuela and Uruguay, and Bolivia stating that “access to water with quality,

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14 While welcoming the participants during the Forum inauguration, Forum Co-Chair Fauchon summarised progress achieved between the 3rd Forum and 4th Forum (IISD 2006).
quantity and equity, constitutes a fundamental human right” and that “States, with the participation of the communities, shall guarantee this right to their citizens” (IISD 2006). The departure from the conventional proposal is that Bolivia explained that the international efforts would be made at the CSD and other UN and international forums to recognize and make this right effective. Brazil commented that it did not support the reference to “international” in the Declaration recognizing the Forum’s contribution to promoting the exchange of best practices and lessons learned on “international” water and sanitation issues. Stressing that these were not included in the Declaration, Austria, on behalf of the EU and Switzerland, emphasized the importance of the ‘right to water and sanitation’; the need to ‘maintain the sustainability of ecosystems’; and the importance of ‘sustainable hydropower’. Israel addressed incorporating alternative technologies for sustainable management of marginal water resources. Uruguay highlighted aspects of its constitutional amendment stating water as the essential resource for life and access to water and sanitation as fundamental human rights. Nigeria emphasized the need to address the issue of corruption in delivering water services.

Asia Pacific Water Forum: Coalition Building for Water and Sanitation

Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan and President of the 3rd Forum, said the Asia-Pacific region’s diversity has been an asset, rather than an obstacle, to finding solutions to water problems. Thus, water ministers from the Asia-Pacific sought the establishment of a new network that will work in unity to address water challenges in the region. Several development agencies supported the proposal and the Asia Pacific Water Forum (APWF) was conceived in Mexico meeting and officially launched at the Conference on ADB’s Water Financing Program in September 2006. APWF is designed to be an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, and non-political network. It will work to increase the region’s access to improved water supplies and sanitation, protect and restore river basins, and reduce people’s vulnerability to water disasters (ADB 2006). APWF’s goal is to contribute to sustainable water management for achieving the MDGs water targets in the Asia-Pacific. Specifically, the APWF shall champion efforts aimed at boosting investments, building capacity, and enhancing cooperation in the region’s water sector. The ADB is a key supporter of the APWF and will help organising the 2007 Summit. Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Minister of Water
Resources of Bangladesh, said the Asia-Pacific Water Forum should strive to provide 100 percent safe water access and sanitation coverage in the region and reduce the vulnerability of people to water-related disasters (IISD 2006).

The Ministerial Declaration reaffirmed the critical importance of water for sustainable development and underlined the need to include water and sanitation as priorities in national processes, particularly national sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies. The Ministers and official representatives reaffirmed commitments to achieve the internationally agreed goals on IWRM and access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and the decisions of CSD-13. Ministers also acknowledged the input of the Forum for the follow-up segment on water and sanitation of CSD-16 to be held in 2008.

The Declaration recognizes the importance of domestic and international capacity-building policies and cooperation to mitigate water-related disasters, the role of parliamentarians and local authorities in increasing sustainable access to water and sanitation services and support for IWRM. The Ministers also welcomed the launch of the WAND as a means of implementing the CSD decision to develop “web-based tools for the dissemination of information on implementation and best practices.”

Comparisons among the World Water Forums: Structure, Process and Outcome

After four World Water Forums, it is pertinent to review the process and its outcome. Since its inception in 1996, the WWF has been convening meetings in regular intervals. As the Fifth WWF is announced to be held in Turkey in 2009, the triennial WWF meetings can be termed as the Conference of Stakeholders (COS) for global freshwater. Unlike, the other multilateral environmental COPs, the WWF has not set the agenda for negotiation as its initiatives are voluntary. It has been seen that all the WWF meetings held in March especially giving importance of World Water Day on March 22nd every three year. The WWF is open to all the stakeholders of water ranging from NGOs to Corporate houses to national government and financial institutions for better understanding of regional water issues and the hurdles to address those issues. The growing number of participants in the successive Forum meetings has strengthened the
continuance of WWF. The theme of the each Forum meetings guides the individual country to focus on the issue despite opposition from the NGOs.

So far as the Marrakech, The Hague and the Japan forums are concerned, a sharp look indicates that the Marrakech Forum had only talks and no discussion. The Hague and the Japan forums discussed literally every water issue under the sun as numerous sessions with more than three dozens of thematic water issues (See Table-5). Due to the vast choices of sessions available, participants often went to the ones that interested them, and where their ideologies and views were likely to be supported. A good example was the various sessions on dam-related issues. A major constraint of the second forum was the total absence of integration between the various sessions. No serious efforts were made to document papers and discussions of the Hague Forum that left with some superficial summaries of certain selected sessions.

The situation in some ways was better, but in other ways worse, at Japan, in comparison to The Hague. For example, if the dam issue is considered again, at Kyoto, a constructive debate on this subject was organised by the International Hydropower Association and the International Rivers Network. The views on dams of these two institutions are polar opposite. The two groups listened to each other, and there was the beginning of a dialogue between the opposing camps. Some believes that the debate on the issues of dams was a plus for the Kyoto Forum. All the three forums were similar in one way (Biswas 2003). The vast majority of sessions at the Third Forum were similar as in The Hague and no new ideas came from the Second and Third World Water Forums, no new grounds was broken, and no new commitments were made by the Government present.

Nonetheless, some believe that the high number of participants and sessions, spread over three cities, meant that no participant or institution had a clear and integrated view of what was happening during the Forum. Whereas the Report of the World Commission on Water set the tone for the Second Forum, the third Forum basically constituted a jumble of some 350 independent sessions, without any integrative linkages. Like the Second Forum and the Bonn Conference, the Third Forum also had an inter-ministerial meeting. The Ministerial Declaration was equally bland as the other
two meetings, which had any impact on water management and development practices in the world.

Notwithstanding the implementation of Ministerial Declarations in the Forum which is not binding, the Declaration has set a concerted effort for action on immediacy of the issue. During the last two Forum meetings, the World Bank and the Asian development Bank (ADB) have declared to increase the investment portfolio in the water sector in developing countries to meet the MDGs. The Forum meetings also witnessed innovative approach to address the freshwater issue. One such example is the Asia-Pacific Water Summit announced by the ministers under ADB, which is going to finance on water sector till 2010.

Table-5: World Water Forums: The Legends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum/year</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Plenary Session</th>
<th>Ministerial meeting</th>
<th>South Asia government delegates</th>
<th>Expense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-1997</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Water: World's Common Heritage</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-2000</td>
<td>The Hague</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>From Vision to Action</td>
<td>100 sessions on 7 themes</td>
<td>120 ministers</td>
<td>India-9 Bangladesh-3 Nepal-5</td>
<td>$7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-2003</td>
<td>Kyoto</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>World Water Action</td>
<td>351 sessions on 38 themes</td>
<td>130 representatives at the ministerial level,</td>
<td>India-9 Bangladesh-12 Pakistan-3 Bhutan-5 Nepal-9 SL-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth-2006</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>Local Actions for a Global Challenge.</td>
<td>200 sessions on 5 thematic issue</td>
<td>140 ministers and officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Series of WWF official Reports

The Rational of Large Water Meetings: An Evaluation

The WWF’s mission is to enable multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue to influence water policy making at a global level, in pursuit of sustainable development. Since Mid-1990s, there have been a growing number of large, centralised international meetings aimed at some or many aspects of the fresh water problems. Some participants of these international meetings have significant doubts about the utility of
these meetings. As the number and size of expensive international meetings have grown, critics have been raising questions about the utility of these water meetings.

Few evaluation of the large water conferences have initiated after the Kyoto Forum, but not independent or objective (Gleick and Lane 2005; Biswas and Tortajada 2005 and Varady et al. 2005). One recent survey involved around 65 responses to a questionnaire, but approximately half of the respondents had not attended any large water meeting and another quarter had only been to one (Biswas and Tortajada 2005). Few official indicators or measures of success of large water conferences are available, and there are many ways to evaluate them. No definitive indicator can be chosen: many outcomes are purely subjective or qualitative – developing new collaborations among water experts or groups, information sharing, public declarations, media attention, and even just meeting old and new friends. Other indicators can be quantitative and formal: adoption of political resolutions, expenditures of money on water-related problems, generation of information and data.

"I strongly feel that the vision on 'water and people' as endorsed in the Hague Second World Water Forum is being diluted in the subsequent WWF and organization of the forum lost the opportunity to focus on issues. The WWF also does not create impact in proportion of the time and financial resources invested in it," says Gourisankar Ghosh, Executive Director, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), who has been participating WWFs meeting since 2000 (Source Weekly 2005). Wilfred Decosta of INSAF, New Delhi, who attended the 2006 Mexico Forum, says "People are being deliberately alienated from the water in those Forums because all the private water companies and their supporter like World Bank are organising these meetings. The Forum is a corporate get together for discussing world water market, which is detrimental to common people".

Some of the benefits and disadvantages of global water conferences are indicated by Gleick (2004). The benefits of Global water conferences are as follows:

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15 In reaction to the Source Weekly item of 21 September 2005 based on Peter H Gleick and Jon Lane's article in Water International, Gourisankar Ghosh sent his response to IRC. When contacted by Source Weekly, the WWC said they would not give an immediate reaction but preferred to publish a reply in a future issue.

16 Personal Communication with Wilfred DeCosta, Convenor, INSAF on March 28, 2006.
• Highlight the importance of water in the broader poverty debate;
• Raise political and media awareness of water issues;
• Generate consensus on important cross-cutting water policies;
• Enable sector leaders to share knowledge and discuss new solutions;
• Enable sector professionals to meet each other, network, and make personal contacts;
• Enable young professionals to gain speaking experience;
• Provide an occasion for the launch of major initiatives;
• Permit host countries to highlight their efforts.

Similarly there are more disadvantages than benefits in Forum meetings, they are as follows:
• Meetings have unclear objectives;
• Produce weak declarations or action plans that are not implemented;
• Repeat empty generalizations of principles;
• Lack concrete links to the reality of the lives of people (especially poor people) around the world;
• Fail, through their sheer size and lack of coherence, to enable significant professional exchange of knowledge;
• Inhibit, rather than enhance effective participation by decision-makers;
• Fail to attract local governments, and fail to engage national governments, which are the principal policy-makers;
• Are dominated by a small group of regular participants, who push their own agendas;
• Are biased towards support agencies and well-organized special interest groups from industrialized countries;
• Fail to reach out to leaders in other sectors such as finance and development policy;
• Lack accountability for the costs and outcomes of the conferences;
• Are expensive both in money and time.

The Role of the Ministerial Meetings
Ministerial meetings are now routinely organized as part of the global water conferences. Early proponents of comprehensive “World Water Forum” meetings
argued that the traditional water meetings held in the 1970s and 1980s were narrowly devoted to academic and scientific issues and lacked integration with policymakers and the public. To a large degree, this was an accurate observation and concern. This led to an effort first to invite water and environment ministers, and ultimately to embedded Ministerial meetings within the Forums themselves.

It can be argued that not one of the Ministerial Declarations produced as a result of this approach includes specific measurable programs or actions or new commitments. In fact, despite the trend towards embedded ministerial meetings, there has been no further useful or stronger statement generated at any of these more recent meetings than those produced at the 1977 Mar del Plata or 1992 Dublin conferences (Biswas 2003).

Another drawback is the presence of water or environment Ministers at these meetings can lead to distortions and disruptions as conflicting interests have attempted to influence the language, content, style, and outcomes. In the end, the Ministerial products have been described by separate observers as “hardly an edifying example of political leadership on water” (Lane 2003), “awash in generalizations and compromising language”, and “uncritical” and “weak” (Cain 2004: 189-197). The Ministerial conferences are vital, but when held in conjunction with large international water meetings they do not result in progress. Ministers of the environment, or water, or finance should certainly be invited to participate in international water conferences.

Ministerial statements made at such conferences are not legally binding on countries. While they may help influence or educate senior policymakers, those outcomes could be achieved at smaller, separately held meetings coordinated by the United Nations, where ministerial functions and activities are well understood and better managed. In particular, this approach would help to carry water-related messages to Ministers of Finance or Economic Planning, with whom the traditional water sector conferences have failed to communicate. Water professionals need to attend finance meetings, not to expect the reverse.

Thus, large majority of water sector professionals are opposing the trend towards large and costly international water meetings which have been a mistake. Indeed, among senior water-sector professionals there is near-unanimity that the number of such
meetings has become excessive and that they have lost focus and effectiveness. Additional large-scale meetings, rather than generating positive benefits and real progress toward solving world water problems, are more likely to highlight their failure to make such progress and call attention to the fact that words are no substitute for action. Global conferences must be well planned with clear purpose, attendance, and objectives. Moreover, many of the benefits of international meetings can be obtained through small detailed technical and policy workshops designed with specific outcomes and objectives.