

Preparation for the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico

International meetings offer opportunities for civil society to come out of the field and their local environments and be involved at the international level; to share their local experiences and influence policies. The potential is high with many opportunities for learning and forging relationships with other organizations working on similar issues.

The time and effort involved in participating in an event such as a World Water Forum is considerable. These updates and notes on the lead up to the 4th World Water Forum give an indication of just part of the hard work and planning required.

November 2005: World Water Forum preparatory meeting, Monterrey, Mexico

On request of the International Organizing Committee (IOC), FAN Coordinator, Danielle Morley attended this meeting along with Jorge Mora (FANCA) and Eduardo Vasquez (Mexican Consultative Council on Water). Participants who represented beacon organizations and interest groups were asked to undertake an initial shortlisting of sessions from the 550 which had registered towards the final 150. FAN has secured 5 NGO sessions which we are putting together with help from our members and other civil society networks.

Process

Over 550 sessions had registered, but only 150 sessions will run in Mexico. This breaks down into 30 sessions for each thematic day: 24 of which were selected in Monterrey and 6 were selected by the Mexican secretariat afterwards.

Sessions were assessed on the following criteria

- 1) How they will include local actions
- 2) Impact of expected outputs
- 3) Relevance of proposed topic
- 4) Preparatory works for the Forum
- 5) Includes other organizations
- 7) Forum support
- 8) Strength of the convening organization
- 9) Geographic reach of the session

FAN secures funds for 5 NGO sessions at the 4th World Water Forum

The funding covered planning and participation for 2 international NGO sessions under the IWRM and water supply and sanitation themes and 3 regional sessions for NGOs in Africa, Asia and Latin America, to be organized by regional groups with local actions from the regions.

Members interested in presenting their work at the Forum were asked to submit an application to present a case study by 15th November 2005. Case studies were included in a central database for selection. Members were offered support with writing and editing to prepare their application forms, if requested, before the end of September 2005.

July 2005: NGOs Submit Letter to Organizing Committee

Freshwater Action Network together with a number of NGOs and Civil Society Networks sent a joint letter to the Organizing Committee of the Forum outlining concerns about civil society participation.

June 2005: update

We continue to follow the preparations for the 4th World Water Forum, Mexico 2006. We are reaching out to NGO session conveners from the 2003 Kyoto Forum, to make an assessment of NGO plans and thoughts for this event. We will also be contacting you for ideas as we move forward. FANCA is now confirmed as a Coordinator of the Consulting Network of the Americas. This group is made up of 48 government agencies, NGOs, private sector and technical and academic institutions working in countries across the Americas. FANCA, together with the Mexican Water Advisory Council, is coordinating the NGOs and acting as the primary contact with the Secretariat.

February 2005: FAN attends Preparatory Beacon Meeting, Mexico

Danielle Morley, FAN Coordinator, attended the Beacons Meeting in Mexico together with Jorge Mora Portuguez (FANCA Coordinator) and Alejandra Salazar (FAN Mexico). They continued to push our recommendations on civil society involvement to the secretariat of the Forum.

The meeting updated participants on the state of play of the 4WWF. Beacon organizations were introduced; these will play a key role in shaping the thematic content of the Forum. There was also an update on participation, which will be via Regional Committees and Local Workshops.

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February 2005: FAN attends the launching of the European preparatory process, Paris

Participants from European networks and organizations met to discuss what and how Europe would contribute to the 4th World Water Forum in 2006. Jayne Millar, FAN Information and Communications Officer, attended this meeting for FAN.

The main theme that came out of the meeting was solidarity both within Europe and between Europe and rest of the world. Once again FAN lobbied for active participation of civil society in the preparatory process and the Forum itself but as yet we have not seen any real evidence of this.

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May 2004: FAN Meeting with the World Water Council on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participation in the 4th World Water Forum

Major points discussed

- The overarching theme of the Forum on Local Action is perceived at the same time as very opportune and very challenging by CSOs. But the theme should not be simply a slogan; it should really make a difference!
- Due to the general theme on local action, it is critical that CSOs be involved and integrated from the beginning in the preparation of the Forum, together with other representatives of the local stakeholders; there are various networks of social actors that can act as suitable platforms.
- Because it is in Mexico and in Spanish it is an important opportunity for communities and local organizations in Latin America to join an international meeting
- Importance to develop innovative ways to conduct sessions in the Forum; the usual academic and panel sessions should not be the unique model; other possibilities need to be worked out; the examples of the learning centre and the partnership fair in CSD are good examples but other possibilities could be developed. One example given: media training for CSOs. This should not apply to the Forum only, but also to the preparatory meetings.
- Cooperation with the World Water Council: one possibility discussed on water laws and policies; FAN is collaborating with 10 other CSOs to design a research project aiming at analyzing water laws and involving local CSOs in the preparation/transformation of water laws; this project could develop partnership with the project of the Council on water policies (and perhaps the one on strengthening local stakeholders)

- The Forum offers a unique opportunity to strengthen local stakeholders' capacity as they prepare reports and sessions for the Forum, again this could be an area of cooperation with the Council.
- More generally the various themes/projects of the Council dealing with local stakeholders could provide opportunities for cooperation; indeed CSOs face difficulties to transform their approaches and results into changes in water laws and policies;
- The topic 'water as a human right' fits naturally in the programmes of CSOs because for people on the ground the notion of right is associated to that of protection against the important power structures.

Other miscellaneous recommendations:

- The issue of visas to attend meetings in Mexico is critical for many organizations from developing countries; the experience of the kick-off meeting was illustrative in this respect. For the Secretariat of the Forum it is important to work out a procedure with the Mexican embassies around the world in order to make this process less cumbersome.
- Funding for CSO participation should be secured in advance, with a fair process for selection to ensure regional representation on a range of issues
- Board of Governors of the Council: it could be useful to advertise (web site for instance), not only the names and affiliation of Governors but also to indicate who they represent (college?) and their occupations/competences

March 2004: Report back on the 4th WWF Kick Off Meeting, Mexico City

FAN was sponsored to attend this meeting because of our role in the NGO sessions at the 3rd World Water Forum. Danielle Morley attended for FAN and Jorge Mora attended for FAN-Central America.

The meeting was co-organized by the National Water Commission of Mexico (CNA); the Japanese Secretariat of the 3rd World Water Forum and the World Water Council. The aim was to launch the 4thWWF, March 2006 in Mexico, and share ideas, between the 250 participants on the structure and themes. Participants were theme coordinators from the 3rd World Water Forum, representatives of World Water Council and potential donors.

The official launch took place at the President's Residence Los Pinos with speeches from President Fox of Mexico, World Water Council president Bill Cosgrove and the DG of the NMA. Fox said that we live in a borrowed land and emphasized the need to develop a culture of respect towards water, to develop strategies to preserve water as a public good, to increase its value for future generations. Cosgrove said that the WWF had raised

awareness on water, but had not made a political impact on Southern governments or raised finances to the sector and that local action is the only way!

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Notes on initial discussions about the 4th World Water Forum

The overall theme is ***Local Action for a Global Issue***. The plan is to have a Forum based on the four themes, successful local actions particularly from Latin America, and specific studies; a Ministerial Conference; a Virtual Forum on the website; Water expo and fair, including culture, artistic expression and children's activities.

NGO Discussions

FAN facilitated the discussions on the NGO table with representatives from Mexican CSOs. We discussed how to challenge governments and donors on local action, how to have a dialogue on our terms, how to mainstream NGO work and gain respect, how to influence and be more centrally involved, how to be well organized and coordinated. Recommendations and questions to the organizers were:

- Where are NGOs included in the organizational framework presented?
- NGOs to create a national NGO platform in Mexico to work together in preparation, to play a leadership role for international NGOs and to liaise with CNA
- NGOs to create an (informal) international organizing committee
- To be classed as Civil Society Organizations, rather than NGOs
- To have the opportunity to be protagonists, to shape the debates, rather than participate as invited representative onto a panel.
- Organizers to identify sponsorship funds for Southern NGO participation early
- To have a dedicated NGO/CSO day during the Forum
- To have a preparatory day before the Forum

Theme discussions

The 4 proposed themes being discussed are:

- Water and Sanitation infrastructure services
- IWRM
- Feeding the world without damaging the environment
- Linking the water sector to other sectors

What is local action in this context? How will a global meeting respond to local actions? They require financial and political support, and this has institutional implications for the main actors in the water sector. How will local actions be properly represented by the international organizations, governments and private sectors, CSOs should be given centre-stage and supported.

Recommendation from our table: Include sessions on scaling-up, replicability, financing, sustainability. Define local action better, so it doesn't get manipulated by the international institutions. Emphasize poverty eradication, social sustainability and economic development, not just environmental aspects. Take care of language and definitions.

Regional Discussions

FAN participated on the Africa table and promoted ANEW as a platform for outreach and involvement of NGOs in Africa. Only 2 African people present. Main point was how to get representation direct from the majority of African people, how to find and discuss real issues of the people, rather than something that suits the interests of governments and donors.

Other

There will be a Citizens House organized by International Secretariat on Water

Conclusion & thoughts

The meeting was the mass brain-storming style 300 people in a hall, so the results were haphazard. It is not known when the results of this meeting are published to judge the level of influence we had. A report should be published on the World Water Council website.

Number of Mexican NGOs was not very high (I met approx 8). They are not yet networked or in a position to identify a Mexican NGO for coordination, but this is what they want to work towards. One NGO, working on environmental sanitation is on the national organizing committee with NCA. More work needed to develop Mexican contacts.

The organizers will have to undertake a lot more outreach and change of strategy to give substance to the local action theme. Typically WWF convenors are institutions that promote top-down and technocratic interventions, rather than community based approaches. There is a high risk that the Forum will not live up to its name unless sufficient NGOs, experienced in community level water programmes and/or research and advocacy are given a mainstream facilitating role, supported by the organizers.

We met with Daniel Zimmer from World Water Council, keen to get more NGO members. We discussed the concerns that we have regarding the role of NGOs in a local action global meeting. He requested that we communicate our needs to him and he will liaise with the NCA and the organizing committee (in Mexico and International).

FAN-Central America wants to be involved and to use it to promote their case studies and experiences on the ground in the region. They are not yet sure what the most appropriate strategy for their participation. Jorge tried to attend the planning day for the Americas, but was refused admission while they resolved problems from the 3WWF, this does not reflect well on inclusiveness. It is not yet clear who will lead the preparations for the Americas; if it's the NCA it is likely to be more inclusive than the IADB.
