

The Third World Water Forum outcomes

Kyoto, March 2003

The Japanese government hosted the 3rd World Water Forum (3WWF), a Ministerial Conference and a World Water Fair from 16-23 March 2003. It was intended to stimulate global awareness of water problems, to progress the policy debates and to catalyse actions beyond the rhetoric.

The agenda for 3WWF was full and varied, with up to 50 sessions per day it was necessary to be very organised.

Outcomes: participation

The Forum provided a meeting place for civil society, government, international institutions and the private sector. Sessions provided the opportunity for people to present information, pose questions or suggest solutions to a wide and varied international audience, discussions also took place in the corridors and cafes of the conference prompting new alliances to be formed and old ones strengthened.

Despite the high expense of Japan, there was reasonably good participation by civil society groups from developing countries, due to sponsorship activities of FAN, the Water Action Contest and many other organizations. The succession of international meetings over the last three years, means that the water sector are now better prepared to be more experienced operators in the policy environment and have formed stronger networks together to try and avoid the in-fighting that had occurred in earlier meetings.

Outcomes: Sessions

The sheer number of sessions and variety of issues discussed gave the Forum a lack of specific focus especially as there was no prioritizing of key issues from the WSSD in Johannesburg.

Many sessions were poorly thought out, up to twelve presentations were often crammed into a two and a half hour slot, this restricted the amount of time allocated to discussion and meant that sometimes issues were covered in no real depth.

The dialogues on Water and Poverty and Water, Food and Environment both made positive progress at the Forum.

Outcomes: Ministerial Conference

The Dialogue between Forum Participants and Ministers provided an opportunity for NGOs to meet with their ministers, who under normal circumstances they would have not have had direct access to, and talk about the issues that were concerning them. However the meeting itself was not strategic and was too informal to achieve any progress on commitments.

The Ministerial Conference came too close after the Johannesburg World Summit and, being outside the UN system, did not carry sufficient weight. Although reference was made to the WSSD Plan of Implementation in the final Ministerial Declaration, there was little effort to make promises to go beyond it.

The Ministerial Statement did not advance the Bonn and Johannesburg commitments into action. Ministers were unwilling to be bold and move the agenda forward. It neither tackled existing policy discussions, nor included clear moves to get from planning to action. This was especially disappointing as the promise in the run up to the Forum was that it aimed to translate visions in concrete actions.

NGOs criticized the governments at the Forum for their failure to commit to a sustainable approach to ensure adequate water supply and sanitation. WWF questioned the credibility of a Forum as it failed to draw on the 12, 000 water specialists gathered together to identify common sense solutions to water problems, but instead it continued to promote massive infrastructure as the sole solution to the worlds water crisis.

Two significant omissions are, lack of reference to the UNs statement on the right to water [November 2002], and lack of commitment to the World Commission on Dams report. These both represent recent policy successes and for them not to be acknowledged is disappointing and a cause for concern given that this Forum was intended to be one of implementation.

Follow-up to the 3rd WWF

Portfolio of Water Actions is a compilation of 500 action plans from Kyoto to meet the international targets on water supply, sanitation and IWRM. The site can be searched with key-words. It allows you to register activities, update information on activities and monitor the progress. Once you have registered your URL, it will automatically update from your own website. Alternatively you can email the information.

Discussions on follow-up, included recommendations that commitments made during the Forum are genuine, achievable, sustainable and measurable. There should be genuine political will and involvement of other sectors. Commitments should be communicated widely.

World Water Council disseminated an Analysis of the 3rd WWF. Lessons include:

Move beyond problem-identification and focus on commitments and actions
Regional meetings deserve more attention in preparatory period
International meetings useful on financing, food trade, access to markets,
trans-boundary waters, climate change, knowledge and skills
Strategy and methodology required to synthesise regional inputs
Involve Ministers and Local Authorities in preparations to create links and
relevance between Forum and Ministerial Conference
Strengthen link between Forum and other international water policy processes
Sessions should be policy orientated