

## INTRODUCTION

From Monday 8<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2004, Stakeholder Forum and the UNEP GPA Coordination Office hosted an interactive online debate. The debate provided an opportunity for a variety of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders to discuss, debate, share views, experiences on the role and contribution of the United Nations, governments, the private sector and civil society towards the issues being addressed across upcoming UN meetings such as the 8th Special Session of the Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environmental Forum (GC/GMEF), the 12th Session of the Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD12), and GPA's Hilltops-2-Oceans Conference (H2O).

The thematic issues of water, sanitation and human settlements are the focus of discussions at GC/GMEF in March and the 12th Session of the Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD12) in April. In addition, the upcoming Hilltops-2-Oceans (H2O) conference also provides a space for the outcomes of this debate to be voiced.

The online debate focused on the themes **Water Management and Governance** and **Wastewater and Sanitation** and provided an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to GPA's understanding of stakeholder priorities around these issues in the context of upcoming UN meetings relevant to the GPA

## PARTICIPANTS

Throughout the debate over 85 stakeholders subscribed. There was positive regional representation with subscribers and visitors representing all UN economic and social areas. Over twenty percent of subscribers actively participated in the debate. The widespread geographic distribution of these

participants is reflected by their contributions. Opinions, views and experiences came from the Caribbean, Kazakhstan, India, Netherlands, El Salvador, France, New Zealand, Nile Basin, Nigeria, USA, Bolivia, China, Philippines, Turkey, Kenya and Small Island Developing States.

## OUTCOMES

Water management and governance proved to be the most popular topic of the debate. The majority of contributions focused around integrated water resource management (IWRM), legislative and economic policy tools and the role of civil society in the implementation of IWRM. An outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development was that all governments confirmed they would develop plans for IWRM and water efficiency by 2005 whilst providing support to developing countries. An ecosystem approach to IWRM dictates that activities such as dam construction, irrigation schemes, forestry and urban development consider the impact that reduced or increased water flow will have on down-stream environments (including coastal and marine environments) and human settlements, and that measures be taken to prevent serious or irreversible changes to ecosystems.

### **Regional Implementation of IWRM**

Examples of regional implementation of the IWRM strategies for 2005 featured in the early stages of the debate. Partnerships for IWRM, particularly in a transboundary context such in Kazakhstan, were highlighted as a uniting form of management. Partnerships embracing a variety of key organisations in the water sector have the potential to generate a new ethical responsibility for public water use through explanation, mutual information and education across the partnerships. Moreover, the increasing importance of role of civil society was a key feature for the implementation of IWRM. However, for these partnerships to succeed and the real impact of the project be observed, a longer-term commitment rather than the typical one off grant is required.

Issues of capacity for regional implementation of IWRM were also noted. Capacity in terms of financial support and suitable expertise were identified as issues for SIDS areas, as well as

developing areas in Africa. The slow pace of ministerial approval towards the implementation of MEA's (Multilateral Environmental Agreements) around IRWM was noted in some SIDS. It was also noted that it is imperative that policy makers and implementers are provided with the right and relevant skills and knowledge enhancement in order to link their national development priorities with various global environmental agreements.

### **Legislation and Economic Tools**

The role of legislation and economic tools in water management and governance featured throughout the debate. This was closely linked to the role of civil society in IWRM.

It was argued that legislation should not act as the principle tool for water management and that command-and-control approaches to pollution control have never really worked in isolation of more exhortatory approaches to changing industry and community behaviour. A positive example of good legislation experiences came from New Zealand in the hazardous substances sector where there is a good voluntary industry approach to an issue. Legislation, in this case, is needed to protect those industries from the one or two companies that do not adopt the industry standard and therefore have lower production costs.

Strong legislative enforcement was universally highlighted as a salient area for good water management. The variables contributing to this capacity include institutional capacity, community expectations and public pressure, the influence of industry on policy makers, tradition and international dialogue to name just a few. Indeed, the enforcement of existing laws and schemes were identified as the first step in implementing environmental legislations and integrated coastal management.

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### OUTCOMES *continued*

#### **Legislation and Economic Tools continued.**

The role of economic instruments, in particular privatisation of water utilities, was discussed from the perspective that private sector participation in water supply has never led to stabilized rates. Evidence was also presented from transition economies that have also demonstrated how market regulation fails to improve water resource efficiency. When water is conceived as a commodity, it becomes subject to economic laws of demand and supply. It was argued that the private companies can have too much control on the lives of the consumers by way of price manipulation and access to water. This has significant effects on the poor and vulnerable.

#### **Civil Society and Water Governance**

The role of civil society in the management of water resources and within the intergovernmental policy making arena were highlighted as critical. Civil society should, and must, be well positioned to raise international pressure to national governments to sustain efforts for IRWM as well as the wider number of conventions or MEA's to which they are party of. For this to be effective, civil society groups must be equitably informed and given voice within the UN system. An active, effective interface between civil society and the UN / other Intergovernmental agencies can keep sustained pressure on governments to be effective in implementing the law. In addition, where the legitimate authority (government) fails to take appropriate action to protect the environment, civil society needs to be empowered to take action. This is even more necessary in insurgency and conflict ridden areas.

The marginalized role of the poor in water governance was debated. Some contributors argued that some governments perceive water governance as exclusive rights of theirs, often rendering civil society at the receiving end rather than being empowered. The GC/GMEF session should ensure power to determine aspects of water resource management is restored to the poor. In addition to a marginalized role in policy making participation and implementation, the poor are often inequitably affected by poor water management. Poor water management, from catchments protection through to wastewater treatment and disposal, affects both quality of life and quality of the

environment. The poor are victims in both regards. Moreover, it was added that the majority of the poor are women. If water is to be managed sustainably to meet basic needs and achieve many of the MDGs, it is critical to mainstream gender in the governance of water and to pay special attention to pro-poor strategies. The poorest of the poor need to be empowered and have the capacity to take a leadership role. They need the financial and social capita, and an ability to negotiate with equal position, appropriate technology, place, time to fully have their voices heard.

The role of indigenous in civil society participation was also highlighted. It was argued that international, national and local water governance strategies should mainstream and centralise the water needs and the water management initiatives of the indigenous peoples. It was recommended that governments consider and value local, traditional and cultural water governance and management systems instead of over concentrating its attention on capital intensive and high risk systems or even allowing itself to be manipulated by external forces that may not be in tandem with local realities. The negative effects on indigenous peoples through large scale irrigation projects were used as an example of inequitable outcomes from water management. It was recommended that the empowerment of civil society can be achieved cell-based consultations with the people and will be a true demonstration of gaining public acceptance. Overall, the strong message for UNEP is that the role of civil society has to be brought to the fore if environmental governance is to take any meaningful role.

#### **Wastewater and Sanitation**

This topic did not generate the same level of debate as water management and governance. The key areas of discussion focused on wastewater treatment for sludge and industrial waste. The construction and operating of wastewater treatment plants was identified as a positive solution for environmental concerns. However, they possess limitations such as their expense and the sludge outputs. Sludge was argued as not receiving appropriate attention for its disposal. Industrial wastewater was also identified as a problem needing regulation for good environmental management

### ABOUT GPA

The United Nations Environment Programme provides the secretariat for the GPA. The GPA was adopted in 1995 and endorsed by 108 Governments and the European Commission in response to the increasing threat to the marine environment from human activities on land. Some 80% of the pollution load in the oceans originates from land-based activities.

The GPA is designed to be a source of conceptual and practical guidance to be drawn upon by national and/or regional authorities for devising and implementing sustained action to prevent, reduce, control and/or eliminate marine degradation from land-based activities.

For more information please visit [www.gpa.unep.org](http://www.gpa.unep.org)

### ABOUT STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum exists to support a strategic, global, multi-stakeholder movement to influence and implement sustainable development agreements and the Millennium Development Goals. Stakeholder Forum specialises in: Communications; Policy & Research and Multi-Stakeholder Processes. The partnership with UNEP focuses on outreach promoting the GPA among traditional and non-traditional stakeholders.

Stakeholder Forum's mandate is increasingly expanding from developing effective stakeholder participation in international policy negotiation, to include the creation of partnerships between stakeholders that delivers effective implementation at the national, regional and international levels.

For more information please visit [www.stakeholderforum.org](http://www.stakeholderforum.org)