

WATER AND THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA FROM DUBLIN TO KYOTO

WATER for ALL WATER BRIEFS

A Slow Start: Dublin 1992

Over the last 10 years, the concept of worldwide water security has become central to the international development agenda. But that has not always been the case.

At the Rio conference in 1992, for example, water was not high on the agenda. One of its preparatory conferences, held in Dublin, Ireland in January 1992, probably had a greater impact than the Rio Conference itself.

This preparatory meeting gave rise to the Dublin principles:

1. Freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment;
2. Water development and management should be participatory, involving users, planners and policymakers at all levels;
3. Women are central to providing, managing and safeguarding water; and
4. Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

On the Agenda at Last!

It was the 2nd World Water Forum, held in The Hague, The Netherlands in March 2000 (the first forum took place in Marrakech in March 1997), that brought the water crisis to the top of the international development agenda. More than 5,000 water stakeholders, 100 ministers, and more than 600 journalists attended the event. For the first time, the need for Integrated Water Resources Management received wide recognition.

Principal to the achievements of the forum was the introduction of the water security concept alongside environmental security and food security. The forum also underscored the notion -- "**Water is Everybody's Business**" -- that all parts of society should have a say in the management and distribution of water and that the political, economic, and social systems should be open, fair, and equal for all. In other words, **Good Governance**.

This momentum continued with the International Freshwater Conference held in Bonn, Germany in December 2001.

The Millennium Development Goals

For all the Second World Water Forum's success in placing water on the international agenda, the water security goals were yet to be adopted as international, global principles outside water-specific forums.

This was achieved at the United Nations' Millennium Assembly in October 2000, when the following target was set: "...to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people living in extreme

poverty and to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water resources."

Reinforcing the Goals: The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Even sanitation saw some of the most specific action-oriented outcomes of the Summit.

Delegates at the Summit reinforced the commitment to halve the proportion of people who lack clean water by 2015 and added access to sanitation to this commitment as well. These goals were supported by a United States announcement of a \$970 million investment in water projects over the next 3 years, and a European Union announcement to engage in partnerships to meet the new goals, primarily in Africa and Central Asia. The United Nations received 21 other partnership initiatives in this area, with at least \$20 million in extra resources.

The 3rd World Water Forum in Japan

The 3rd World Water Forum was held in Kyoto, Shiga, and Osaka, Japan in March 2003. The Forum focused on water actions taken around the world to improve water security in the 21st century and to contribute concrete solutions to world water problems, building on the momentum from Johannesburg.

The Way Forward: CSD 13, the MDG Task Force, and the International Decade of Water for Life

Water and sanitation, along with human resettlements, were selected as the focal issues for the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) process, the mechanism for putting the WSSD Plan of Implementation into practice. The CSD 13 meeting, scheduled in April 2005, will reflect a new international consensus on ways to move forward. The UN MDG Task Force on water and sanitation's report will include a set of specific policies and strategies on how to maximize the role of water in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The international community's commitment to this process is reflected in the UN General Assembly's declaration of 2005-2015 as the Decade of Water for Life.

Asia – a Regional Focus

The international agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is also being pursued at a regional level. The Asian Development Bank's Water for All Policy, established in 2001, promotes the need for an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to water management and development.

The water policy has seven elements – to support national water sector reforms; foster the integrated management of water resources in river basins; invest to improve and expand the delivery of water services; foster the conservation of water and improve efficiencies; encourage regional cooperation; support stakeholder consultation and participation at all levels; and improve water governance.