Regional visions: the basis for collective strength and local action

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Vision 21 offered a unique opportunity for a host of different countries to share their visions for the future, and demonstrated in the process that diversity should be no obstacle to unity.

A clean and healthy world, in which every person lives and participates in a hygienic environment, has reliable access to affordable, safe and adequate sanitation and water for consumptive and productive use.’ This is the shared vision of the six countries that participated in local and national Vision 21 consultations in Africa and formed an input into the Africa regional vision. To achieve this, the Africa team set out one objective, ‘The placement of water supply and sanitation high up on the developmental plans of the African Governments through advocacy with national governments, sub-regional and regional groups/institutions.’

In all, 21 countries participated in the social mobilisation process of Vision 21, in which local catalysts and national and regional co-ordinators worked together during the months of January to November 1999. It was a period in which the participants developed local, sub-national and national visions and, in a ‘fountain’ of bottom-up consultations, brought all regions together to create a unique global vision.

The countries in each region included:
- Africa: Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda
- South Asia and South East Asia: Bangladesh, India (Gujarat), Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand
- Latin America: Chile, Ecuador
- Small Island Developing Countries: Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad
- Central/Eastern Europe and New Independent States: Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan

While the challenges of the future in the water and sanitation sector are felt worldwide, they are felt more acutely in the developing world. The experience and the resources of the industrialised world are key to future efforts at problem solving. The regional and national visions offer a brief overview of the regional differences and universal similarities in water supply, hygiene and sanitation. The provision of these services is closely related to each nation’s economy and the enabling environment of policy and institutions. The crisis is most apparent in sub-Saharan Africa while Asia, the Middle East, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean are faring slightly better.

A world of visions

The following regional visions reflect the input of participating nations in the regions. Highlights of each vision will be presented here. Many of the principles and changes drawn out from each of the regional consultations were prompted as a result of discussions on specific topics such as:
- strategies for management and treatment of wastewater (domestic and industrial)
modernisation of the water supply and sanitation sector
rehabilitation of water supply and sanitation systems
regulation and certification on a regional basis
financial resources and planning capacities
changing the legal framework
private sector participation and decentralisation
environmental degradation
information and communication
water policy development
institutional and legislative reform
conditions of service
cost recovery
sustainability at local level

Similarities abound in each of the regional visions. In particular, the call for a clean and healthy world having safe and adequate hygiene, sanitation, and water supplies, is common to all regional and national visions, as is the centrality of people in the management and decision-making of the resource. While the Caribbean vision, and the African visions emphasised the importance of mainstreaming gender and gender sensitive approaches, the Asian and Latin American upheld the principles of water and sanitation as a basic human right.

A vision for Asian societies is for all the people in Asia living in harmony with their environment as one earth community, interconnected with one another, upholding the principles of ethics and human rights, individually and collectively own and take responsibility to ensure an equitable and good quality of life through hygiene, sanitation and safe domestic water supply with equity for all.

**Placing people first**

This vision is enshrined in the principles of people accepting the responsibility of stewardship for the resource, water and sanitation as a human right, the need for the changes in lifestyles, behaviours and awareness raising, good governance, transparency, accountability and corruption free practices, people-centred technologies and gender sensitive, people-centred approaches.

The shared vision for Africa outlined above shares many of the principles with the Asian vision but would add financial sustainability, political will, and poverty alleviation as additional principles. The Latin American vision includes many of the key points from the other visions, but explicitly states that water is a good with an economic, social, and limited value.
behaviours associated with them among the critical changes that need to occur in the sector. The core points of their vision relate to changes to the institutional and regulatory regimes, the development of the management and administrative structures and skills, involvement of civil society in decision-making processes, accessibility of new technologies, standards and measures being consistent and affordable, and improving the environment and water quality.

A new partnership

Finally, the Industrialised Countries vision is one in which a country’s population receives sufficient amounts of good quality water and has adequate sanitation so that its health and well being are not compromised by the lack of such services. In providing these services, the environment must be adequately protected and used in a sustainable way. The achievement of this Vision requires a partnership between all concerned, from the individual citizen to the government acting collectively.