

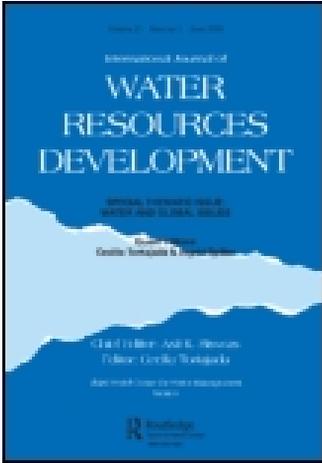
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Asian Water Forum on International Waters

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professionals should make every effort to put water on the international agenda.

- (7) Re-use of waste water may assist in overcoming the critical water situation and protecting the Mediterranean environment. For this it must be considered as a major element in the water strategy. Each country in the Mediterranean region should set up a policy and evaluate waste water reuse to protect natural sources and ensure sustainable development.
- (8) Considering the negative health and environmental effects of agricultural projects it is recommended that the governments of the countries from the Mediterranean region should:
 - (a) integrate health goals on land and water resources projects, particularly those involving irrigated agriculture;
 - (b) include health promotion and disease control considerations as basic directives for the planning, construction, management and operation of agricultural systems.

A follow-up activity was also suggested by convening a Conference for early 1996 to be organized by Bari Institute.

*A. Hamdy, Director of Research
Mediterranean Agronomic Institute
Bari, Italy*

*M. Abu-Zeid, Chairman
National Water Research Centre
Cairo, Egypt*

Asian Water Forum on International Waters

Bangkok, Thailand, 30 January–1 February 1995

The Asian Water Forum was convened at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, Thailand, 30 January–1 February 1995, by the Committee on International Waters of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA), United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP) and United Nations University (UNU). The Forum considered three major international rivers of Asia: Ganges–Brahmaputra, Mekong and Salween.

Participation in the Forum was restricted to 30 experts, who were specifically invited in their personal capacities. Three types of participants were invited: senior technocrats and decision makers from the co-basin countries of the three rivers, leading experts of these three systems, and representatives of the major funding agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the UN System.

In his welcome address, Prof. Alastair North, President of AIT, pointed out that Asia is facing a serious water crisis in the foreseeable future. Demand for water is increasing in all the Asian countries because of population growth and higher standard of living. Solutions can only be found if technological, socio-economic and environmental issues are considered simultaneously. He stressed the importance of international dialogue both for knowledge and technology transfer and for the management of international waters.

Subin Pinkayan, the former Foreign Minister of Thailand, and earlier Professor

of Water Resources Engineering of AIT, said in his Keynote Address that the development and management of international waters would be a critically important issue in Asia in the 21st century. Handled properly, fairly and efficiently, the stream of benefits that is likely to accrue to all the co-basin countries of an international river would not only be significant but also could be long lasting. In contrast, if these complex issues are mishandled, the potential for serious conflicts, or even serious regional instabilities, cannot be ruled out.

In setting the scene for the Forum, Asit K. Biswas, Chairman of the Middle East Water Commission and convenor of the Asian Water Forum, pointed out that with a projected population growth in Asia of 47% between 1992 and 2030, and a rising standard of living in the region for millions of people, water requirements will increase very significantly during the next several decades. Equally, the cost of developing each new cubic metre of water in the future will become increasingly expensive as supplies become more and more difficult to develop, and also as a result of an increase in water pollution. He forcefully argued that if the water crisis of the future is to be resolved, water must receive a much higher priority on the international agenda. Water was at best a 'bit player' at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio in 1992, where issues such as climate change and biodiversity took the centre stage. This is in spite of the fact that millions of people are dying each year due to lack of clean water and/or floods and droughts. Climate change has not killed a single person so far, and is unlikely to do so for the next few decades, even if the most pessimistic scenario becomes a reality. Thus the perception of the importance of water internationally needs to be changed. He argued that a water crisis is approaching fast, and, within this crisis, management of international waters will become a main focus.

Two papers were specially commissioned on each of the three river systems. It was noted for the Mekong that its lower part had been 'studied to death'. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on various technical studies, but these have had little impact on political decision makers. Accordingly, they have basically remained paper exercises. A new agreement was signed in April 1995 by the four riparian countries of the Lower Mekong River: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. It was generally agreed that this agreement was a good beginning but it will be a difficult task to move from indicative planning to actual development.

The integrated management of the Ganges–Brahmaputra system has been a very difficult task since the three countries concerned—Nepal, India and Bangladesh—have not reached any common agreement so far. One possibility suggested by B. G. Verghese was to extend the subject of negotiations beyond water. For example, Bhutan, Nepal and north-east India are all landlocked areas. Thus, transportation rights may be offered as a *quid pro quo* for water rights. Similarly, hydropower could be generated in Nepal for use in India and Bangladesh. By broadening the negotiating base, it may be possible for all three countries to have a 'win-win' result.

In contrast with the Mekong and the Ganges–Brahmaputra systems, there is currently no conflict between Myanmar and Thailand over the Salween River. It was generally agreed that not only will the proper development of the Salween benefit both the countries but also the current political climate is favourable for the cooperative development of the river.

The three river systems presented different sets of problems and opportuni-