

Conference Report

First Meeting of the Club of Tokyo for a Global Water Policy Dialogue, Tokyo, 25–26 September 2000

The Club of Tokyo has been established as an informal network of the most influential water and development professionals in the world, who, because of their acknowledged technical and intellectual capabilities and their very senior positions, can influence and informally give direction to global discussions and an agenda on water.

Fourteen leading international experts on water and development issues, and very senior policy makers were invited to join this exclusive club. The members were selected after a peer-group survey, and the simple criterion used for selection was that they were all considered to be the best and most influential by their peer group. No consideration was given in the selection process as to their country of origin or residence and gender. Everyone invited promptly accepted to join the club. The club members will meet once a year with no specific agenda. Discussions will focus on what they consider to be the most important water and water-related issues for the next 10 years, and how these can be resolved efficiently and in a timely manner.

All the members were invited to join the club in their personal capacity, thus the club is totally independent and is *not* affiliated to any institution. The Club of Tokyo is financially supported by a grant from the Centre for Global Partnership of the Japan Foundation, and is sponsored jointly by the Third World Centre for Water Management, Mexico City, and the International Development Research Institute (IDRI), Tokyo, both of which are also providing some funds for its operation. The International Water Resources Association is a co-sponsor of the club. Because the members first met in Tokyo, it was decided to call it the Club of Tokyo. Prof. Asit K. Biswas, President of the Third World Centre for Water Management, and Dr Kazuo Takahasi, President of the International Development Research Institute, are the Co-chairs of the Club.

For the first meeting of the Club of Tokyo, Tokyo, 25–26 September 2000, each of the members was asked to identify one water issue which he/she considers to be the most important for the next 10 years, to prepare a think-piece on it, and to lead discussions on the issue during the two-day meeting.

The members of the Club of Tokyo, as well as the priority topics they selected, are as follows (in alphabetical order):

Minister Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, Egypt: Pricing for irrigation water;
Prof. Asit K. Biswas, Co-chair, Mexico: Lack of long-term national water policies;
Prof. Benedito P.F. Braga, Brazil: Total urban water management;
Prof. Malin Falkenmark, Sweden: Inability to link environmental, water and food security;
Dr Torkil Jonch-Clausen, Denmark: Integrated water resources management;
Dr Aalt Leusink, The Netherlands: Public–private partnership;

Dr John Pigram, Australia: Transfer of water technology and experience between countries and regions;

Dr Ismail Serageldin, USA: Water for agricultural production;

Dr Aly Shady, Canada: Water for the poor;

Dr Kazuo Takahashi, Co-chair, Japan: Governance and water;

Prof. Yutaka Takahashi, Japan: North-South collaboration;

Dr Olcay Unver, Turkey: Inter-sectoral coordination in water for regional development;

Minister Jay Narayan Vyas, India: Large dams and sustainable regional development;

Dr Mohamed Ait Kadi was the only member who was unable to participate in the meeting.

The coordinators for the club activities are Cecilia Tortajada of the Third World Centre for Water Management, and Hidemi Yoshida of the International Development Research Institute.

It was generally agreed that natural balances of the water systems all over the world have been seriously disturbed. The qualities of both fresh and seawaters are increasingly deteriorating with an alarming lack of long-term policies to target quantity, quality and management problems. Seldom are priorities identified in any systematic manner, and thus attempts to achieve long-term cost-effective solutions have often not succeeded.

The world is changing very fast, and the roles of the various water management actors are changing as well. For example, compared with the past, the private sector and civil societies are having increasing influence on the decision-making processes, governmental decision making is becoming more transparent and responsive to societal needs, and social, environmental and institutional issues are receiving more attention. Prof. Biswas, the co-founder of the Club of Tokyo, said in his opening statement that, in his view, water-management practices are likely to change more during the next 20 years than during the past 2000 years. However, most institutions still continue to be too conservative, too engineering oriented, too dogmatic and too risk-averse in their attitudes to respond to these existing and emerging challenges successfully.

Most of the water issues are interrelated with other issues, which means that both problems and possible solutions do not depend, and should not rely, exclusively on the water profession alone. In spite of the fact that the policies on water, the environment, agriculture, energy, industry, etc. are interlinked, water is often viewed as if it was independent of all other sectoral issues. Additionally, the participation of the different sectors of society has become so important that efficient water policies can no longer be developed unilaterally by any one stakeholder alone, be it the government, the private sector, or NGOs. Individuals and institutions are increasingly becoming interested not only in management and operational aspects, but also in planning and operation of water-related activities. Thus, effective means of consultation, cooperation, coordination and decision making have to be developed by all the interested parties so that water development and management policies and practices become more effective and acceptable to a vast majority of the population concerned.

The importance of water pricing and demand management as tools to promote more efficient and equitable water management and conservation practices was discussed. While demand management should be considered seriously as

an important alternative to solve the water-scarcity issue, water pricing and cost recovery also should be considered objectively, with an open mind and free of dogma. Water pricing may be an economic issue, but it needs to be considered within an overall framework of 'social water management'.

It is often argued that the poor cannot pay for clean water. However, many studies from countries as diverse as Mexico and the Philippines indicate that the poorest sectors of developing societies often pay several times more for non-clean water, delivered by tankers or sold by water vendors, than more affluent populations with direct access to better quality of water in their homes. This fact is often not considered objectively by some policy makers and NGOs. It frequently seems that part of the world is happier to live with the present unacceptable situation, rather than demanding improvements in quality of life and poverty alleviation. To achieve more efficient water allocation to an increasingly expanding population, it may be logical to consider that costs, at least in terms of operation and maintenance of the necessary infrastructures, be recovered. This practice could be linked to clean, affordable and reliable water availability and wastewater disposal, and targeted subsidies to the poor. Thus, cost recovery and pricing appear to comprise an attractive and feasible alternative to provide better services to all, including the poor, and to promote more efficient management practices. Pricing and cost-recovery policies should be developed, which should be economically efficient, socially equitable and politically acceptable. Pricing is an important issue on which informed and objective debate has hardly started. More studies and analyses of actual experiences are needed for different socioeconomic and political conditions in different parts of the world on issues such as incentives, subsidies and sociopolitical acceptability. Communication and information are important components of an overall strategy. Real debate on agricultural water pricing has yet to begin.

Regarding current paradigms, the urgent need to move from concept to implementation was considered essential. Global paradigms such as sustainable development and integrated water resources management were discussed. These concepts are unquestionably attractive but their actual implementation in operational terms has left much to be desired. It is desirable to analyse their applicability objectively; conceptual attractiveness alone is no solution.

Rather than ignoring the need for alternative conceptual frameworks that are implementable, individuals and institutions collectively should welcome constructive analyses and criticisms of the existing mainstream approaches. Some of the current conceptual frameworks and theories on water development should be carefully analysed and, if necessary, reconsidered. Such new analyses and open discussions can only be beneficial to the water profession, and also can contribute to increasingly efficient water management.

It may even be necessary to consider pluralism of paradigms. Societal behaviour and ideological preferences and their interrelations with water are so complex that water professionals may need a different, open-minded and flexible approach to understand such intricate interlinkages. This makes it necessary to develop paradigms that are flexible enough to incorporate the multifaceted and multidimensional orientation of all the actors, along with the equally complex impacts of their decisions.

Since the present paradigms have not solved the current problems, the urgency of the need for a paradigm-shift was discussed. However, one existing paradigm should not simply be replaced by another, unless it can contribute to

better water management at the operational level; otherwise, it may result only in a shift from one to another. The coexistence of pluralism and paradigms may be desirable, since instead of promoting a single ideology, different paradigms could be used under different conditions and different levels of development. A cynic may claim that protecting any existing conceptual framework has become more important than finding a new paradigm that actually works.

Technology was analysed not as the key to progress, since its use depends on acceptance by society, but as one of the tools for development which could lead to further advances in the fields of agriculture, desalination, water management, etc. Technology and knowledge will become increasingly important components of the solutions to the water problems of the future. The potential of applied research and new technology, not only from the water sector but also from other sectors which may have direct implications for water-management approaches and practices, should be given accelerated consideration.

While science and technology have played an important role in furthering water development, it seems that this path needs to be reconsidered seriously and modified to suit the present and emerging conditions. Even when science is a tool for the generation of new knowledge, it can provide only one part of the solution to the water problems: society will provide the other half. Thus, water professionals and academicians should consider societal ideas, ideologies and values, as they are important expressions of education, cultural backgrounds and, most importantly, perceptions and attitudes towards reality. Alternative views on water development cannot be generated only by the engineering discipline, but must also come from humanistic and social sciences as well. It is thus surprising that even though interdisciplinarity is very clearly a must for water development, the different disciplines still do not recognize, first, that knowledge is not generated only by one specific discipline and within the universities, but also by society, and second, that a dynamic exchange of views would benefit all parties.

Decentralization and participation of stakeholders at different levels were discussed. At present, many consider that non-governmental organizations represent the voice of the poor, probably because various levels of governments are often not delivering water-related services efficiently, and thus NGOs could be used instead. This assumption has not necessarily been correct. Decisions must not be taken always at the lowest level, but rather at the most appropriate level, which may vary from case to case and also over time. A single body, be it government, private sector or NGO, is unlikely to see beyond its own interests, agendas and priorities, invariably over the long term. Exclusive reliance on one institution could marginalize the opinions and participation of other sectors. Multiple participation is desirable in decision-making processes so that a broader spectrum of opinions and interests may be considered.

Decentralization in the water sector has not been easy to implement. Not surprisingly, the actual impacts of decentralization in improving significantly people's lifestyles over large areas have not yet been realized. Benefits of decentralization have automatically been taken for granted. In many cases, for example, central responsibilities have been transferred with no technical or financial support, or assurance that adequate capacity exists at the decentralized level to carry out the transferred task efficiently. Central authorities often appear to consider decentralization as more of an annoyance than an essential partnership. Decentralization can contribute to a new way of managing water in many

developing countries. The current status indicates that more time is necessary before the process can be properly planned and implemented. Only then can the benefits of local experience and knowledge be channelled effectively to solve the water problems of developing countries.

Effective transfer of technology, knowledge and experience between developed and developing countries and between developing countries themselves have not occurred to a significant extent thus far. While foreign experts have worked in developing countries for years, in many cases the experts have failed to create, adapt or transfer best practices simply because of their lack of understanding of the social, cultural, environmental, political and institutional differences between the countries concerned. Legal and institutional frameworks are normally well established in most developed countries, and their implementation is taken seriously. The situation is often very different in developing countries, where implementation has become a real problem. Lack of knowledge by foreign experts of the institutional, environmental and cultural backgrounds, and/or the interests of the local population, is often a constraint. Disparities and differences in conditions between developed and developing countries should be understood first in order to achieve more effective cooperation at different levels. Additionally, applicability and characteristics of the knowledge and technology to be transferred have to be evaluated in advance and a monitoring system should be developed.

It was also noted that sharing of knowledge between North and South has improved with time, but we still have a long way to go before this can become truly effective. Knowledge and experience transfer within the developing world is likely to be an important factor in the coming years. This is not receiving appropriate attention at present. Successful case studies of South–South exchange of ideas, experiences and solutions should be documented and evaluated in order to understand, replicate and adapt them under appropriate conditions.

There is no question that, in the long term, capacity building and generation of knowledge within the countries concerned is the best solution to ensure efficient water management and to improve the overall social welfare. However, there are serious problems that will have to be overcome, such as the decline of funding in research and development activities in developing countries, and the fact that qualified human resources at the local level who have the necessary knowledge and skills are often not available.

During the extensive interactions between the members, several critical water issues emerged. Among these were:

- water availability to feed a growing global population;
- linkages between water development and poverty alleviation;
- development of cost-effective, equitable and implementable solutions for the urban problems in an increasingly urbanizing world;
- identification of linkages between the hydrologic cycle and economic activities;
- regular migration of humans and domestic animals as a result of water scarcity in very arid areas;
- proper education for the next 2–3 generations on efficient water management;
- need to link water security with food security, energy security and environmental security;

- reconsideration of some of the existing solutions and paradigms that are not operational;
- the danger of addressing tomorrow's problems with yesterday's mindsets;
- concurrent consideration of three pillars of development: government, private sector and civil society;
- new ways of governance.

The members of the club shared a common feeling of the urgent necessity to solve the water problems of the world in the coming years. It was generally felt that time is not on our side, and thus complacency is no longer an option. The water profession needs to rethink many of the current conventional approaches so that there can be new conceptual breakthroughs. Business as usual and incremental advances are no longer feasible alternatives. A clear and objective understanding of water-nature-society-economic interlinkages is necessary so that rational, efficient and equitable water policies can be formulated and implemented. The complexity of these tasks should not be underestimated, but they must be achieved.

The club members generally agreed that overall visions are still missing on what is required at global, regional and national levels both for the present and also for the next 20–25 years, and, most importantly, how these visions could be accomplished. The challenge facing the water profession may be to develop sector policies that could then be integrated as an essential component of development policies, with further integration of disciplines, projects, sectors and institutions. This will not be easy, but given determination on the part of the water profession and political will, this can be achieved. There could be strong forces for maintaining the status quo because of vested interests and other reasons. These will have to be overcome. The main objective will be to foster a new culture, and new thinking flexible enough to reach the different levels of society.

After considerable discussions, the club members collectively identified two priority issues for the next decade: analysis and review of established paradigms with the objective of finding implementable frameworks, and water pricing and cost-recovery. During the second meeting of the Club of Tokyo, which is expected to be held in Egypt late 2001, it is expected that the members will discuss and analyse these two issues in greater detail.

The first meeting of the Club of Tokyo provided an excellent forum for an in-depth dialogue on the priority water issues of the next decade. Free from any institutional linkage, the members discussed whatever issues and aspects they considered to be important, frankly, comprehensively and without rancour. The club has thus created a formidable but informal network of thinkers and individuals influential on water-related issues, which may become an important development in the water areas. Because of their positions and responsibilities, it is generally impossible to find all the club members in one continent at any one time, let alone in one specific city. The club has thus provided a unique opportunity where the members can share their views freely, frankly and privately, on any water issue they consider worth discussing. The club plans to remain informal, and it will have no secretariat or bureaucracy.

The background papers prepared by the members of the club on priority water issues will be published by Oxford University Press as a book. Thus, the results of the first meeting of the Club of Tokyo will be disseminated exten-

sively. It is expected that the summary of the discussions of the club will be widely dispersed, as will the results of the innovative studies the club will be sponsoring in the coming years.

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