

Institutional Arrangements for International Cooperation in Water Resources

ASIT K. BISWAS

Chairman, Middle East Water Commission, 76 Woodstock Close, Oxford OX2 8DD, UK

ABSTRACT Three papers were specially commissioned for a Special Session on 'Institutional Arrangements for International Cooperation in Water Resources' during the 8th World Congress on Water Resources in Cairo, Egypt, in November 1994. The Session also include a Panel discussion in which Presidents or senior officials from six major water-related professional associations made brief presentations on the desirability of establishing a World Water Council. This paper is a summary of the entire Special Session.

Introduction

During the VIII World Congress on Water Resources organized by the International Water Resources Association (IWRA) in Cairo, Egypt, a Special Session was organized by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the World Bank on 'Institutional Arrangements for International Cooperation in Water Resources'. The Special Session covered half a day, and was held on 22 November 1994. The Session attracted a very large audience: some 175 participants from around 45 different countries were present.

The Session was organized into two parts. The first half consisted of three specially invited papers by Yahia Abdel Mageed (Sudan) and Gilbert F. White (USA); M.A. Chitale (India); and Brian Grover (Canada) and Michael Jefferson (England). Following the presentations of these three papers, and the ensuing discussions, there was a coffee break. The second half of this Session consisted of a panel discussion, where Presidents or other senior officials from six major water-related professional associations (International Association for Hydraulic Research, International Association of Hydrological Sciences, International Association on Water Quality, International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, International Water Resources Association, and International Water Supply Association) and the Executive Secretary of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, made brief presentations on their views on the need for establishing a World Water Council. Following these presentations, there was an extensive discussion on the creation of a World Water Council, after which each Panel Member was given two minutes for their final comments. The Special Session ended with an overall summary of the proceedings by its Rapporteur, Asit K. Biswas, Past President of IWRA.

The present paper is a summary of the proceedings of the entire Special Session.

Presentation of papers

In opening the session, the Chairman, Guy Le Moigne, Senior Adviser on Water at the World Bank, pointed out that the concept of a World Water Council is not new. For example, it was discussed at some length, both formally and informally, at the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin in 1992. The idea was subsequently elaborated upon by Brian Grover (CIDA) and Asit K. Biswas (Past President, IWRA) in the June 1993 edition of *Water International*, the official journal of IWRA. The Executive Board of IWRA, during their meeting in Cairo in November 1994, reviewed the overall idea of a World Water Council, and concluded unanimously that it is an interesting and exciting concept, and thus needs to be explored further seriously and comprehensively.

The first invited paper of the Session was on 'Critical Analysis of Existing Institutional Arrangements' by Yahia Abdel Mageed (Secretary-General, UN Water Conference) and Gilbert F. White (University of Colorado). They pointed out that the need for improved institutional arrangements for international cooperation in general, and better coordination between UN agencies in particular, has been recognized for more than two decades. The report prepared on this subject by Asit K. Biswas and Peter Hansen for the UN Water Conference convened at Mar del Plata, Argentina, in March 1977, reviewed the existing situation in terms of present and further activities of the United Nations system in water resources development, examined possible gaps and overlaps between the water programmes of all the different UN agencies, reviewed the constraints faced by the system to improve coordination, and made recommendations for coordinated action by the UN system as a whole.

The report emphasized the opportunities for more effective arrangement at the inter-secretarial level to correct weaknesses without implicating existing organizational structures or disrupting current activities. The options ranged from the maintenance of the existing process to the creation of new autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies.

Two years later, in 1979, an Inter-Secretarial Group on Water Resources (ISWGR) was established, by the United Nations, which normally holds annual meetings, though these could be supplemented by additional formal or informal meetings as and when necessary. While this arrangement was an improvement over the prior prevailing condition, it is now generally agreed that it fell far short of the aspirations of the UN Water Conference as outlined in its resolution on the institutional arrangements for international cooperation in the water sector. Thus, ever since 1977, while some progress has been made in this area, much more remains to be done. This should receive priority attention.

ISWGR has now had some 15 years' experience in promoting coordination throughout the UN system. It was responsible for the preparation of the International Conference on Environment and Development in Dublin in January 1992. However, the Group needs to be significantly strengthened in order to make its coordinating role more effective, and it needs executive power to oversee implementation of joint and collaborative programmes of the UN system.

On the basis of the analysis by Mageed and White, it is evident that the existing arrangements to coordinate water activities at the international level is weak, and the problem is likely to become more difficult in the future because of the complex challenges facing us in terms of sustainable management of

scarce water resources in all developing countries in the 21st century, and the difficult agenda before us. Accordingly, there is now an overall consensus among all the water professionals on the following three issues:

- (1) There is a clear and demonstrable need for better cooperation and coordination in the water area at the international and regional levels.
- (2) There is now an overwhelming recognition of the importance and the urgency for meeting that need.
- (3) A dynamic process needs to be found, and generally agreed upon by the water profession as a whole, to move forward by successful resolution of these difficult problems and the associated issues.

Mageed and White pointed out that there is now an urgent need for integrated water planning which considers social, environmental, institutional and other related factors. More emphasis needs to be given to environmental and economic tools than ever before. Equally it is necessary not only to think at the UN system level but also to emphasize the importance of local organizations.

As the most important consideration before the Special Session is the third consensus referred to above, the main question now is how to devise a dynamic process to move forward. Mageed and White recommended that the time has come to mandate a group in Cairo to take action in active involvement with all other appropriate groups. This will initiate a dynamic process and is probably the best way to move forward.

The second invited paper was by M.A. Chitale (Secretary-General, International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage). He pointed out that water management, both nationally and internationally, is fragmented, and hence if the existing methods and approaches are to be improved, integrated management of this resource is necessary. The unit for such a management process could be the river basins. This concept of river basin management is fully compatible with the ideas expressed in Agenda 21 of the UN Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

The management of international river basins has evolved steadily over the past two centuries. The organizations managing the river basins should be allowed to grow in phases, depending upon their existing and emerging requirements. A standard and uniform structure for all such basins is neither desirable nor possible. Historically, various river basin organizations have evolved chronologically in terms of consideration of navigation, and then fishing rights and hydropower. A current major emphasis is on water allocation between various uses and parties.

In the final analysis, the success of any basin organization will depend on its management capability. Equally the nature of its organization and its stage of evolution will dictate the type of personnel necessary.

It may also be necessary to consider cooperative arrangements which could extend beyond a single geographical basin, which could be regional in character in terms of obtaining benefits for a larger area beyond the basin parameters. Equally, all the river basin organizations and regional water management bodies will need an international platform for exchanging their experiences and for developing common global strategies. The proposed World Water Council could provide such a platform.

Chitale suggested that an umbrella structure could be envisaged for the proposed World Water Council which could include geographical governmental

institutions such as river basin organizations and regional water management bodies, professional non-governmental associations such as IWRA and ICID, and the water-related agencies of the UN system. The Council could thus have three types of stakeholders, who will work closely together not only to develop global strategies but also to monitor the formulation and implementation of such strategies.

The General Assembly of the World Water Council should therefore have institutional membership from all the above three categories, and hence it is likely to have a large membership. A small and more manageable governing body would thus be necessary to ensure its functioning in an efficient manner.

The third invited paper was on 'A World Water Council: One Possible Model' by Brian Grover (formerly with the Canadian International Development Agency, now with the World Bank) and Michael Jefferson (World Energy Council). They started with a simple but important question: "Are existing international arrangements for cooperation in water resources good enough?". Their answer was an emphatic "No". It required the cooperation of at least 18 separate United Nations organizations to sponsor the Dublin Conference in 1992. Not surprisingly the Dublin Conference recognized the inherent weaknesses of the existing organizational arrangements at the international level, and proposed a World Water Forum or Council to include "all private institutions, regional and non-governmental organizations along with all interested governments."

The example of the World Energy Council (WEC) was given as one possible model for the World Water Council. WEC is a non-political, non-governmental and non-profit organization which exists to promote the sustainable supply and use of all forms of energy for human benefit. Established in 1924, WEC functions through some 100 national member countries, of which 29% are industrialized, 55% are developing and 16% are economies in transition. The governing body of the WEC is the Executive Council, composed of nominated representatives of all the Member Countries. This Assembly meets annually to consider, note and approve a wide range of administrative, financial, membership and programme issues.

National Member Committees pay yearly subscriptions to WEC based primarily on a formula combining energy consumption and production data by country and electricity consumption per capita. The subscriptions ranged from a high of \$40 000 to a low of \$2000 in 1993.

Grover and Jefferson suggested that the typical functions and activities of WWC could include the following:

- raise and maintain the global profile of freshwater issues to ensure sustained global commitment for their resolution;
- provide ongoing global assessment of the state of the world's water resources and their management; and
- create special commissions or committees to research, analyse and provide advice on specific water issues which are international or global in nature.

While no budget could be prepared for WWC in its present state of evolution, based on WEC experience, an annual budget of US\$2 million is likely to be adequate.

The authors judged it unlikely that any existing water-related international organization can be transformed successfully into a WWC.

Discussion

The extensive discussion that followed the three presentations was wide ranging. Many issues were raised. It is interesting to note that not even a single speaker questioned the need for a WWC: the comments were primarily on its possible functions and other related issues.

There was general agreement during the discussion that the main roles of the WWC could be to:

- inform;
- assess;
- advise; and
- advocate.

In addition, WWC's potential role in monitoring and conflict mediation was mentioned, but not as frequently or as emphatically as the above four possible activities.

Panel Discussion

During the second half of the Special Session, which was chaired by Jamil S. K. Alawi, Undersecretary of Bahrain Ministry of Works, Power and Water, six professional water associations and the Water and Sanitation Collaborative Council made brief presentations on the need for and the desirability of establishing a World Water Council. Not surprisingly the views ranged from an overwhelmingly enthusiastic endorsement of the concept to very lukewarm support. However, a significant majority of the speakers felt that the time has come to examine seriously the need for a new World Water Council and, if the need is clearly demonstrated, how should the international water community proceed to establish such a dynamic institution?

Among the main points made by the various Panel Members were the following:

- Prima facie there appears to be a need for a World Water Council. Detailed discussions should be initiated between all major water institutions and associations on the establishment of such a Council. It would be desirable to initiate extensive discussion between the main stakeholders, including professional water associations, as to how best wider issues of integrated water management could be addressed.
- WWC should not duplicate the existing activities of the various water associations, nor should it be their competitor. It should fill the gaps, and also strengthen those areas where existing efforts are inadequate.
- There was general agreement that none of the existing bodies could form the core of the Council. Thus, it would probably be necessary to establish a new entity.
- The Council could be given the role of a holistic coordinator between the existing professional associations, and also between the water profession and the political decision-making bodies.
- Water resources management is fragmented at both national and international levels. The establishment of the Council could be an attempt to converge these diverse activities, which could result in accelerating the much

needed integration process that has been discussed in numerous national and international fora in recent years.

- Whatever form the Council takes, and whatever process is agreed to for its establishment, it must attain its ultimate objectives. The process chosen should be evolutionary, and not revolutionary. Expectations of the achievements of the Council in the short term must be realistic and rational. The Council should be allowed to evolve with its concomitant successes and failures.
- The Council should not compete with the existing world congresses of the various professional associations.
- Reasonable financial resources would be necessary to make the Council truly effective. Initially, available resources are likely to be modest. Hence, a lean and efficient Council needs to be designed. It should not be a direct competitor of other professional water institutions for funds.
- Given resource constraints, some thought should be given as to how best various developing countries can participate actively in the functioning and activities of the Council.
- Only a World Water Council can successfully raise the profile of water in the international political agenda, as has been argued in various international fora in recent years.

After the presentations by all the Panel Members, there was extensive discussion on various issues from the floor. The following general points were made:

- During the Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation at Nordwijk, The Netherlands, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council was asked to examine the concept of a World Water Council. The Special Session audience rejected the idea that the Collaborative Council could be transformed successfully into a WWC for the following reasons:
 - (1) Water supply and sanitation is only one part of water resources management. In terms of total water use, domestic water supply is only a very small fraction of the total global water demand. The Collaborative Council has to be totally redesigned and significantly expanded in order to bring in other interests and disciplines.
 - (2) The Collaborative Council already has a large membership. If it is expanded, as would be necessary if it were to form the core of the new Council, its structure would become cumbersome, unwieldy and inefficient.
 - (3) WWC must be action-orientated, and not provide only a forum for discussion and consultation.

Accordingly the Special Session recommended that neither the Collaborative Council nor any other existing professional association should become the nucleus of a new and effective WWC. There appears to be a need for a WWC, but this should be carefully identified and studied. The world does not need a Council that will just be another institution that is only a 'talking shop'. It must be demand-driven and action-orientated.

Water problems vary from country to country, and even from one region to another within many individual countries. No one institution can solve all these problems alone. However, WWC can go a long way in identifying and, it is

hoped, solving, many of the water problems which are not being explicitly or properly addressed by any of the existing institutions and associations.

The Special Session unanimously recommended that Dr M. Abu-Zeid, President of IWRA, be appointed as the Chairman of the Interim Founding Committee of the World Water Council in his personal capacity. He should appoint a small group of experts to this Committee representing various stakeholders, and with proper geographical representation. The City of Montreal has already offered to host the Secretariat of the Interim Founding Committee. If, after examining it carefully, the Chairman found the offer reasonable, it should be accepted. The session participants hoped that the first meeting of the Committee could be convened by early Spring 1995, in order to develop a work programme with the following two major objectives:

- (1) preparation of a report with guidance on how to create and operationalize the World Water Council (it should include recommendations on the mandate, membership, functions, administration, financing and implementation of WWC); and
- (2) presentation of this report to the IWRA Executive Board by September 1995 so that it can be discussed at the following Board meeting.

The participants hoped that if the need for a World Water Council is clearly demonstrated, as it appears to be at present, the first major meeting of the WWC could be organized in September 1977, just before or after the IWRA World Water Congress in Montreal, Canada.

Copyright of International Journal of Water Resources Development is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.