

Focus :

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

ROUNDTABLE

[GE9]

Room Mother Teresa
Palais Brongniart

Wednesday,
September 19th, 2012

WORLD WATER FORUM: REVIEW AND OUTLOOK

MAIN FINDINGS

The last World Water Forum (WWF) was held in Marseille from 12 to 17 March 2012 and contributed to the water problem being taken into account to a greater degree in international considerations. What's more, a few weeks after the WWF, Rio+20 clearly confirmed access to drinking water and sanitation as a priority within its final declaration. The WWF allowed for cross-cutting and enriching dialogue to take place among different stakeholders who were not used to speaking to one another: the public, private and voluntary sectors. In parallel to this, the influence of civil society was able to grow. The next WWF will take place in Daegu, South Korea, in 2015. It is vital that by that time, the commitments made during the Marseille WWF lead to a significant and measurable improvement in access to water and sanitation. This will require extra mobilization and coordination efforts from all stakeholders, be they public, private or associations, in both the Global North and South. Another need is that of working with the organizers of the next WWF in order to ensure that the society-focused approach bringing in a multitude of different actors is made long-lasting, while also ensuring that implementing the right to water remains a central theme.

SPEAKERS

Laurent Chabert d'Hières
Managing Director, Eau Vive

Emmanuel Poilane
Director, France Libertés - Fondation Danielle
Mitterrand

Martine Vassal
Deputy to the Mayor of Marseille, France

Pierre Victoria
Deputy Director, Department of Sustainable
Development,
Veolia Environnement / Governor, World Water
Council

MODERATRICE

Dr. Céline Hervé-Bazin
Consultant specialised in water communication

Professor, CELSA

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Pierre Victoria points out that the last WWF made headway in ensuring that the water problem is taken into account in international concerns beyond the degree to which it was in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). What's more, several weeks after the WWF, Rio+20 clearly confirmed access to drinking water and sanitation as a priority within its final declaration. Ensuring broad access to water should be one of the main issues for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are to be defined by the year 2015. What's more, the WWF has allowed several emerging thematic areas to be looked at more deeply, such as the links between water, sanitation and food, the need to enhance ecosystemic services and the water footprint. The next WWF will be held in 2015 in South Korea. Work needs to be done with the organizers in order to ensure that the right to water continues to be a central one. In order to make its voice heard, France can use an organization model whereby excellence can be recognized around the world: watershed-based management, responsibilities devolved to local authorities, recognition for NGOs and businesses, etc.

For **Laurent Chabert d'Hières**, the WWF has allowed for four major levels of attainment to be reached. Firstly, the preparatory phase has allowed for enriching cross-cutting dialogue to take place between stakeholders who were not used to speaking to each other from the public sector, private sector and voluntary sector. In parallel to this, the influence of civil society was able to grow and some of the ideas for alternatives have gained in credibility. Furthermore, priorities have been clearly set and put in order: water for the people, water for business, water for the environment. Finally, the WWF led to the creation of a shared conviction: now there is a need to implement the right to water in a concrete manner. The credibility of the WWF depends on whether the commitments made during the forum can lead to a significant and measurable improvement in access to water and sanitation by 2015. This is to be done by voluntarily implementing policies in countries in the Global South, given that many of them do not make full use of the help that is made available to them. Regarding France, it is vital that all development

aid stakeholders coordinate with one another in order to achieve better results.

Emmanuel Poilane welcomes the cross-cutting and structured work that has been carried out by civil society during the WWF, particularly the quality of the exchanges between NGOs and local authorities. Nevertheless, he regrets the fact that during the opening ceremony, the French Prime Minister had to leave the room immediately after giving his speech, taking a large section of the audience with him and leaving many of the speakers, including the President of Niger, facing a very sparsely attended auditorium. This could be interpreted as a lack of respect and a sad symbol of the North-South relationship. Although water is a crucial issue in countries in the South, the same is not the case for developed countries, which are more concerned about the energy problem. Water is not set as a high enough priority, including in the MDGs, where access to drinking water and sanitation only appears as the third target of the seventh goal. Society must reorganize itself around the value of sharing water as a vital good. Remobilizing policy on a global level is necessary; this alone will allow strong international commitments to be made and will allow for the right to water to be made effective.

Martine Vassal points out that the last WWF, with 25,000 participants over the course of a week, represents the largest event ever organized in Marseille. The WWF was a complete success, particularly thanks to the fact that varied and original exchange mechanisms were put in place, such as the fact that a Youth Parliament was set up, the challenges of society were taken into account and civil society was given a large role. This approach should be spread over the long term, particularly with a view to the next forum.

SUMMARY OF AUDIENCE EXCHANGE

Who can play a role in managing the problems related to water?

Citizens have an important role to play in applying pressure on politicians. Unfortunately, in developed countries, the public at large often remains ignorant of the urgency of the situation in countries in the South, and do not feel affected. The media does not really

speak about this topic, except when a crisis occurs. Nevertheless, given climate change, developed countries will not be free from water shortages, and this is another reason why it is important to raise awareness among their populations. Furthermore, the WWF has placed the emphasis on cross-border cooperation and a watershed-based management strategy. Rio+20 marked a step backwards on this point, leaving the door open to "globalizing selfishness", as Michel Rocard said during the opening session of the Convergences 2015 Forum.

Why was an alternative forum held in parallel with the WWF?

Martine Vassal highlights the fact that the WWF organisers opened the event up and stretched a hand out to all associations. Emmanuel Poilane adds that there was an entrance fee for the WWF, something which could represent an obstacle for the public at large and the voluntary sector. **Laurent Chabert d'Hières** advocates in favor of diverse approaches: although the technical questions seemed to have been better considered by the WWF, certain society-related issues found a more resounding response in the alternative forum: the appropriation of water by certain states, the

displacement of populations in order to build dams, etc. **Pierre Victoria** calls on the stakeholders to set aside their previously agreed stances. He asks what the word 'alternative' means: **alternative to what?** All of the stakeholders, including activist organizations, were represented and were able to express themselves extensively during the numerous substantive debates which were held during the WWF, particularly on the question of comparative advantages of different management methods.

Did the WWF allow for good practices in countries in the South to be identified, practices which could be useful for developed countries?

Precarious living conditions are starting to affect cities in developed countries, and these cities do not yet know how to tackle this. To the contrary, some collectivities from countries in the Global South have been able to develop effective strategies which provide essential services to impoverished populations living in informal urban areas. This is why a delegation of elected representatives from Niger was able to advise local authorities from Lower Normandy on this topic. This is a good example of reciprocity and exchange of expertise.

REPORTER

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MORE ON THIS TOPIC

- Millenium Development Goals:
www.convergences2015.org/Content/biblio/Brochure%20MD%20C2015_Nov12.pdf
- Summary of the Water Forum :
www.worldwaterforum6.org/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/publications_elem/publications_global-water-framework_28-08-2012.pdf