

2000 GERALD LACEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE WORLD WATER FORUM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ICID

Alan Hall of Hydraulics Research, Wallingford addressed an audience of approximately 60 people at the Institution of Civil Engineers on 16th May 2000. The lecture followed the AGM.

Alan Hall started his talk by giving an overview of the forum with water security being put into the political framework. 120 ministers attended the meeting. A lot of work had been put into preparations for the event. It had the vision to make water everybody's business and place it within the political framework.

The forum was led by the World Commission on Water with numerous other groups under it. The Commission had produced a report "A water secure world" which set out the following messages:

- Holistic systemic approaches
- Integrated water resources management
- Participatory institutional mechanisms
- Institutional, technological and financial innovation
- Full-cost pricing of water services
- Targeted subsidies for the poor
- Government as enablers and regulators
- Private investment and community action
- Mobilising political will
- Behavioural change by all

Two of these are of particular interest to ICID; full-cost pricing of water services and private investment and community action. While the NGO's did not present a united view they and the trade unions protested about the idea of privatisation of water resources. The Commission view was clear in that water resources are a government responsibility with the private sector providing capital and infrastructure for water distribution.

It was estimated that an extra \$100 bn per year would be needed to implement these reforms.

A framework for Action provided five points of which the most important to ICID was tackling urgent priorities which had five urgent water problems. Protecting and restoring water resources, achieving water-food security, extending sanitation coverage, meeting the challenge of rapid urbanisation, and managing floods.

The Ministerial Declaration was significant in that no speeches were made and it also produced useful contacts such as those between Israel, Jordan and Palestine. Also the USA made a positive contribution because they have water resource problems. The declaration included:

- Meeting basic needs
- Securing the food supply
- Protecting ecosystems
- Sharing water resources
- Managing risks
- Valuing water
- Governing water wisely

The Indicative Global Water Security Targets gave six points of which the most important one for ICID is the increase

water productivity for food production from rainfed and irrigated farming by 30 per cent by the year 2015. This was further covered in The Paradox which highlighted the needs of increasing water resources for agriculture competing with other users, and protecting the ecosystem.

Four aims were presented for achieving water-food security. These were getting more from rainfed production, trading food as well as growing it, enhancing crop productivity per irrigated drop and involving the farmers. This leads to Achieving a Balance and calls for significantly more water (15-20%) to be allocated to the food sector. This will lead to a conflict between water for food and water for nature.

The implications for ICID were then discussed. Water for food and rural production is too important to be so neglected. For example, in Pakistan 50 per cent of the working population are directly involved in irrigation and 20 per cent are indirectly involved. Irrigation uses 95 per cent of the water. ICID should be involved in any future meetings.

This raised the question of *What is ICID?* While it is a loose network of like-minded engineers and a technical forum for exchanging knowledge it might also be considered as having a heavy bureaucracy that tends to restrict debate and progress. It was pointed out that the national committee of some countries restrict membership and the Central Office is influenced by the Indian Civil Service (ICS). In reforming ICID it should not be perceived as the champion of central government irrigation agencies. Also the irrigation community is much wider with civil society, social development experts, private suppliers and operators contributing. Therefore, there is a need for ICID to embrace a wider constituency.

Some suggestions for reform of ICID are:

- De-couple Central Office from ICS and modernise its structures.
- Recruit the Secretary-General from an international base. Traditionally, head of the Central Water Commission (ICS) fills this post after retirement.
- Change the culture from a defensive control culture to a more open partnership.
- Learn more about concerns of others and prepare better arguments on the value of irrigation.
- Widen ICID membership with broader-based National Committees.
- Give President and other senior office bearers more profile as ambassadors.
- Devolve more responsibility to office bearers.
- Open dialogue with various environmental organisations.

The priorities for ICID should be to accept that increasing the area under irrigation is not the main issue but should focus on making the existing areas more productive. ICID should engage more with those outside the irrigation field so that there is better interchange of views. ICID should provide leadership in getting water-food security higher on the water agenda.

The present working groups could be made more effective in focussing on:

- Achieving greater water productivity
- Managing irrigation systems as efficient service-oriented activities
- Reform institutions; decentralise, involve communities and private sector

- Improving smallholder irrigation and rural development
- Pricing (of food and water) and cost recovery
- Resolving conflicts with environmental groups

It is time that there is an open debate about ICID because irrigation is so important and it will be marginalised.

Discussions

Following Alan's presentation there was a lively discussion which centred on the role of ICID, pricing policies and the function of NGO's.

While ICID started out as an engineering organisation it welcomes other disciplines. A quick poll was held which indicated that about half those attending the meeting did not have engineering as their first degree. Also several of the contributors to the discussion had non-engineering backgrounds and added to the scope of the discussion.

It was felt that the British National Committee should address the issues and send the speaker's recommendations to New Delhi and President Bart Schultz.

It was pointed out ICID tries to be representative but ends up with a bland response because it tries to please everybody.

There was also doubt raised about the effectiveness of large meetings although in the case of the World Water Forum, speeches were kept to a minimum and working groups used as the main forum for exchange of ideas. It was also pointed out while these meetings may not give all the answers they do provide a framework.

The question of cost recovery was discussed. It was thought that schemes can be split into rice and non-rice schemes. Capital can be raised to build a scheme and then not maintain it until further capital is raised for rehabilitation, which is delayed maintenance.

While it is easy to meter domestic water supply it is much harder to measure irrigation supplies because of the large volumes and large number of users. Because of this lack of control it would appear to make it more difficult to increase water productivity by 30 per cent by 2015 and this was thought to be an over-optimistic objective. However,

although it may appear that the farmers do not pay an equitable price for water they are effectively taxed, said to be an estimated 25 per cent, because of a low food price policy to placate the urban population.

The position of NGO's was raised. They are organisations that can raise issues and have a strong voice. However they do not have a united front and harangue each other as well as the chairman of the meeting. While not associating NGO's with direct action it was commented that those who dug up Parliament Square receive undue attention. Engineers do not seek publicity.

Peter Johnson

Editors's note:

The BN Committee did contact Bart Schultz, and here is the gist of his response:-

I agree that we have to improve our image. With respect to this there are several promising developments:

- the publication of the Journal by John Wiley (see p.29);
- the rapid development of ICID's Internet site: www.icid.org. During the Second World Water Forum we published the draft strategy for Action, together with the country position papers, as well as our position paper on dams. This gave a good impression;
- I have given presentations during the Rural Week of the World Bank and for the World Commission on Dams. In July I will visit FAO. Through all these activities I will present ICID's work and opinions;
- I am also working with Central Office to publish our books in a more professional way

These are just a few examples at central level. We should also not underestimate the very good work that many of our National Committees and Work Bodies are doing.

MEMBER PROFILE – Peter Johnson, Land Drainage Engineer



Peter has been doing a sterling job recently in writing up accounts of some of the technical meetings. Here is a bit more about him.

Peter Johnson holds a PhD in Civil Engineering from Leeds University and has over 30 years experience in land drainage, irrigation and rural development. More than 25 years of this has been spent overseas in Asia, South America and Africa. His main expertise is in the investigation, design, review of designs and construction supervision of irrigation and drainage projects using both surface and groundwater resources. Since 1985 he has been an independent consultant, prior to which he worked with large international consulting firms including Acres International and, - inevitably perhaps, - Sir Murdoch MacDonald and Partners, where so many engineers of his generation learned their trade.

His Country Experience includes Argentina , Ethiopia, Malaysia, Armenia, India, Nigeria, Bahrain, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Romania, Burma, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Dominican Republic, Kenya, St Lucia, Ecuador, Liberia, Turkey, Egypt , Malawi, and Viet Nam.