



# Taking Issue

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Visit the SDIN morning strategy meetings for reports from working groups, information sharing and strategic discussions. SDIN Morning Meetings are open to all NGOs.

Meetings are held daily in Conference Room B at the United Nations Building from 9 to 10 am

*Articles reflect the opinions of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SDIN Network*

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<http://www.sdissues.net>

### The Chair's text:

## Time for improvement

Hectic activity in Mid-Manhattan, -delegates and major groups scrambled to finish their first reactions and text amendments over the week-end. Taking Issue had a chance to listen to a few of the major groups and get some of their views after an intense weekend of studying the Chair's text.

There seemed to be few if any divergent views among the NGOs on the need to include language on the rights-based approach. As Taking Issue reported on Friday, a rights based approach needed to be include in the chair's text. Failing to do so, would deprive millions of people their ability to fulfill their basic human rights.

What follows are a few reactions from a few major groups to the Chairs text, Monday morning.

### African Civil Society views on contentious issues in the chair's report

- The African civil society is opposed to the view being pushed by the US and Australia that goes against a rights-based approach to water, sanitation and human settlements. The African Civil society would like the chair's report to strongly emphasize the importance of a rights approach. African Civil society is also opposed to the emphasis on FDI and trade liberalization as this will further marginalize the poor countries.
- African civil society is not happy about the inclusion and emphasis on public-private partnerships. This had been removed in agreement with the support of civil society, but somehow found its way into the chair's report.
- The chair's report does not emphasize issue of governance especially in regard

to transparency and accountability in the management of resources in the three sectors of water, sanitation and human settlements.

- Provision of services must not just be targeted towards the very poor as is being pushed by Canada at CSD-13. Instead, all must have a right to get the services they need.

### Among the many reactions from the CSD NGO Consortium were the following:

The chair's draft elements should concentrate on the who, how and when. The text should provide focused, coherent and practical time-bound recommendations. Committed ownership of responsibilities by states.

Transparent, accountable and participatory follow-up and monitoring mechanisms that are UN-based and which report back to the CSD.

The Preamble should contain the following: All stakeholders, including users, need to be engaged in the assessment, planning, management, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of internationally agreed commitments.

Finally the Consortium also came out strongly for doubling ODA for the water sector as well as setting a date for when this should be done.

### Indigenous Peoples focused on missing points in the chair's text

- There is no specific mentioning of / inclusion of indigenous peoples throughout the text
- Indigenous peoples are being marginalized in the text.

In an effort to improve the chair's text, the Indigenous Peoples suggested adding the following clause on page two of the chair's report immediately after the section that says:

**“Recognizing the special development needs of Africa, LDCs and SIDS..”,**

With specific reference to outcomes concerning water, sanitation and human settlements, the text should read:

**“Recalling Article 25 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that “affirms the vital role of the Indigenous Peoples in sustainable development”**

### Women gave us the following points of view:

- the critical point is the way the chair's text is formulated: women are referred to as a target group and not as participants that can play their own specific roles in the different stages of implementation.
- a very clear statement from the governments on what their responsibility is should contain clear references to the fact that governments have the primary responsibility to ensure free access to the minimum required amount of safe drinking water, basic sanitation, sustainable and secure tenure and adequate shelter, and related basic services.
- a legal framework aimed at improving technologies to avoid raw sanitation discharge, including from septic tanks into the environment, should be developed. A shift to ecological (dry) sanitation and deployment of decentralized waste-water treatment including adequate information to the end users should also be included in the text.

### When Taking Issue approached the Trade Unions, their answer was:

We have two major concerns about this first Draft:

A number of key elements listed in the outcomes of the World Summit are not reflected in the Chair's report, especially those concerning the Social Dimension of Sustainable Development.

The Draft neglects to mention workers and their organizations. Trade unions believe that the role they can play in water, sanitation and human settlements is obvious. Sustainable development in these areas requires change – and if change comes, workers will be its foremost agents.

Trade Unions therefore ask that the following be added to the Preamble: *“Where activities affecting workers are contemplated herein, the expertise of workers and Trade Unions shall be engaged in that process”.*

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL BUT WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?

The report of the Secretary General (SG) “in larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all”, mentions the word “women”, but makes poor reference to actually involving women as partners.

By Lesha Witmer

The SG states in his introduction, that he has limited himself on which he believes “action is both vital and achievable.” Looking at the speeches and interventions of and within the UN including the SG himself, one wonders what happened to the urgent need of really involving women and by doing so, support them in playing a vital role in achieving the MDGs and the overall goals of the UN chapter.

### Comments made on lack of gender:

Despite the adopted “gender mainstreaming” policy of the UN, little of that is visible in the way things are organized and formulated:

- Recommendation is made to balance the Security Council in terms of countries, but not in terms of gender.
- Within paragraph 20, ‘civil society including women...’ should be added in

the sentence, “States can not do the job alone...and it is plain that the goals outlined here will not be achieved without their (*civil society including women...*) full engagement.

The third MDG already reduced the goal of gender equality and empowering of women to just an education issue. The SG stresses in his recommendations (40) the accepted measures to overcome gender bias and inequity. There was no mentioning however of promoting women:

- Being equal partners in decision-making,
- Get a real role in preventing war, peacekeeping and rebuilding by implementing resolution 1325 (114 etc.),
- Get access to vocational and higher education (45),
- Be involved in the design and planning of human settlements, water and sanitation programmes and projects,

- Have free choice when it comes to reproductive rights.

The greater impact of environmental pollution on women and the lack of information concerning for example the use of chemicals in food products did not tempt the SG to include recommendations to redress that.

Off course the measures that are mentioned are welcomed and countries are urged to implement them. The report would be even stronger if and when the recommendations would show awareness of the vital role women can play and not just picture them as target groups.

Full report: [www.un.org/largerfreedom](http://www.un.org/largerfreedom)

# THIRST!

Said about the documentary *Thirst*: “Beautiful and engaging, *Thirst* might just move you off the sofa and down to the mayor’s office”. And for those who missed the movie hour at Conference Room B yesterday, presented by The Earth Values Caucus and the Sierra Club, here are a few of the scenes and quotes, straight from the screen:

## Privatisation of water in Cochabamba Bolivia:

Accompanied by warlike images of police and military in violent confrontations with civilians, massive demonstrations, and finally the tragic killing of a young and innocent boy, the story of Bolivia’s attempt to privatise water was retold by Oscar Oliviera, leader of the Cochabamba anti-water privatisation struggle.

(Text:) Pressured by the world bank Bolivia privatised water in its third largest city.

A consortium led by the US based Bechtel corporation received exclusive rights to all city water sources. The response was unexpected...

## Oscar Oliviera:

“There was a feeling of indignation. Of saying “enough”. Because everything in Bolivia had been privatised. The only things that hadn’t been privatised were the air and the water.

At the start of the contract, the company raised the rates. We can show that Bechtel raised water rates 30 to 300%. And what was Bechtel’s attitude? To never show their face.

The government not only called on the police and military, but also snipers, dressed in civilian clothes, who shot into the crowds during the final days of the conflict. That’s when 17 year old Victor Hugo Daza was killed.

After seeing death, injuries, so many days of paralysis, of the country’s economic activities, the government decided to do as the people wished. They kicked out the Bechtel consortium.”

They kicked out the Bechtel consortium.” “This is the decision and struggle of the men, women, children and old people, of all the people of Cochabamba. This is the first step we have taken, a small but important one, towards the meaning of democracy.”

“For 30 years we had been repeating the slogan, “the people united will never be defeated”, but they were words carried off into the wind because the people never won. Many thought that globalisation had taken away our ability to unite, to organize, to feel the solidarity people felt in the past, when our grandparents and parents spoke of their struggles. I believe the struggle over water showed us that those feelings and values were not lost. Now people had lost their fear. From that moment I knew we would win. I decided to believe in the people. This collective will of the people had not been in vain.”

## John Briscoe, senior water advisor, World Bank:

What does it mean to say that water is a human right? As those who claim it so will say, it is the obligation of the government to provide free water to everybody. Well, that’s, that’s a fantasy.

## Maude Barlow, Chair, Council of Canadians and co-author of *Blue Gold*:

In recent years what we have seen is kind of a theft of the commons, the notion that absolutely everything should be commodified and put on the open market, and it is happening very, very fast. Basically we see this as an issue of human rights versus corporate rights.

## A self-help example from India and the boycott of bottled water Rajendra Singh, Rajasthan

Rajendra Sings village was dying out, due to drying out. But through various innovative ways of getting and saving water, like rainwater harvesting, the village came alive again. Today, people are moving back to the village, the numbers of girls attending school have increased considerably, and farming is becoming easy again. A perfect example of community based self-help, says Rajendra:

“Let me tell you one thing, Local Action, small local action, can change global thinking in a second. It influences global thinking in no time. Starting from such a small spot, it spreads in the village, in the country, and the world.”

“The issue, the basic issue is rights. Who owns the rights? The governments? This is the right of the community, of nature, and of the earth. But the government is taking ownership of this right to water, due to the pressure of the World Bank. The World Bank and the multinationals. Just as we won independence from colonial oppression I hope we will be successful one day in ending the privatisation of water.”

“In our childhood we never imagined buying bottled water. This has spread only in the last four to five years. And now, water is selling at the cost of milk.”

“Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola in India pump our water, taking it from under poor people’s land. But the water they fill in the bottles to sell, who’s water is that? This is the water of our civil society. We are calling for an international boycott of bottled water to stop the marketisation and privatisation of water.”

- ida



## DARE TO INCLUDE YOUTH IN YOUR DELEGATION!!

Especially at a conference like CSD, the voice of the youth must be heard. CSD is about making policy for future generations, and we strongly believe it is logical that the future generations have a say in this. It is after all our future that is at stake!!

By Anne-Marie Frissen, Gabi Spitz, Youth Delegates, The Netherlands

It is our conviction that youth can make a very valid contribution to the CSD-process, especially when they have the opportunity to give direct input to the government delegates of their country.

On the Right we have made a matrix in which you, as a delegate, can find the pros and the cons of including a youth delegate in your delegation.

We think it is very important to involve as much young people as possible in the CSD-process. Youth can participate the best if they are part of a national delegation: they can act as an adviser in the delegation and as a member of the Youth Caucus.

We praise the following countries that already have a youth delegate on their delegation: Australia, Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom.

We urge all other countries to consider including a youth delegate. We especially call on delegations from developing countries and countries in transition to involve a youth delegate, since youth from these countries have been underrepresented at CSD12 and CSD13.

PRO	CON
Youth have refreshing ideas	Youth might have radical ideas
Youth are the future generation we are talking about at CSD13	You will have to house them
Youth raise the level of stylishness in your delegation	You will have to feed them
Youth will visit side-events	You will lose your youth to side events with free food and drinks
Youth know the hip hangouts in New York	You will have to join them at these hangouts
Youth can form a bridge between civil society and national delegations	You might get critical questions and/or comments
Youth are eager to learn and willing to work hard	The pace of the youth might get tiresome

### ANNOUNCEMENT

## WASH ROUNDTABLE

### MOBILIZING WOMEN LEADERS FOR THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

19 April 2005, 1:15-2:45 pm, United Nations Conference Room 2

Ministers Hilde F. Johnson of Norway and Maria Mutagamba of Uganda launch "WOMEN LEADERS FOR WASH"

"There is no other tool for development more effective than the empowerment ...no other policy is likely to raise economic productivity or reduce infant and child mortality and no other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation" – UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 28 February 2005.

## HEARING THE UNHEARD VOICES ASPIRATIONS, PRIORITIES AND VISIONS OF WOMEN IN ACCESSING SAFE WATER, BASIC SANITATION AND HEALTHY SHELTER

Last year a similar side-event was organized by UN-HABITAT on the unheard voices of women. This year UN-HABITAT decided to once again bring these voices to the CSD as no opportunity should be missed to hear these voices. Especially since the voices of policymakers and expats are widely heard.

In her welcoming words, Dr. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT mentioned that it is the women and young girls that have to carry the immense burden of not having access to safe drinking water and sanitation and that they often lose hope. In this context she referred to a quote from Martin Luther King that illustrates the urgent need to invest in the future and to break the vicious cycle in which women and young girls find themselves.

**“Safe drinking water is not only water free from contamination, but also free from violence”**

**Hon. Hilde Frafjord Johnson,  
Minister of International  
Development, Norway**

*- If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you to go on in spite of all. And so today I still have a dream. (Martin Luther King, Jr., The Trumpet of Conscience, 1968)*

Taking Issue brings a few of the heart breaking quotes from women and young girls from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean about how lack of access to water and sanitation affects not just their health but also their dignity and quality of life.

-A young girl's dream in urban slums and even in rural areas is to marry into a household with a latrine.

- Men hide behind the bushes and watch women when they are squatting. If they see a woman alone, they creep up and molest her.

- She exercised the only other choice she had...to suppress the natural urge to relieve herself and consequently, learn to live with being constipated.

- We have to steal water by illegally tapping the underground water pipe.

- It takes her more than two hours to fill up two five-litre bottles

### The panel discussion

After hearing the unheard voices, the side event continued with a panel discussion with eminent persons; policymakers from Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Norway, Colombia, India, the Netherlands and a representative of the Huairou Commission. The challenge that was laid before them by Dr. Tibaijuka was the question of what is needed to deal with the problems that were raised by the unheard voices of women. Among the main needs identified were:

- We need to change the field, we need to understand what is happening out there
- We need to move from words to deeds in all three areas of policies, funding and implementation
- We need to include finance ministers in the discussions as well as the donor countries

- We need education at all levels, all that can have a positive impact should be educated
- We need to build alliances, such as the global WASH forum
- We need South- South cooperation to learn from each others experiences
- We need to respond to what these women with unheard voices need from us
- We need to see the connection between how improving water and sanitation contributes to the MDG target 11 to improve the lives of 100 million slum dwellers.

### The concluding message at last year's side event is worth repeating:

Courage and anger are necessary to be able to mainstream gender. Women leaders are critical in helping provide a platform for the ethical voices of women and helping translate goals and words into action. Questions of scale, financing and investment and integrated policies cannot be ignored as we move forward in a world where access to water and sanitation should be a fundamental right that will enable human society to live with dignity.

- kk



*After her opening remarks, Nane Annan listened attentively to the unheard voices.*



## EX-POPSTAR GONE ECOLOGICAL

Ken Gnanakan was the singer of India's first rock band, inspired by the Beatles, in the 60ties. Then all of a sudden, he turned his life around to become a full time Environmentalist, preaching the gospel of the ecological way of life.

**K**en prefers to talk about the environment, and for the past 8 years, the ecological way of life – the only way of life, according to the charismatic Indian with big white curly hair. But he really was a pop star in India many, many years ago. Quite a big one too. – Yes, I was in professional music for three years. It was in the early 60ties, the time of the Beatles. We played pop-music and a bit of rock and roll, very inspired by the Beatles. “The Trojans” as they were called, was in fact India’s first ever rock band. They played at gigs all over the country, mostly in nightclubs and other smaller venues, but also larger concerts. But the pop-star life was not enough for Ken. – I gradually became dissatisfied with all the pressures of professional music. You know, you stop enjoying the music. Eventually only drugs and alcohol can satisfy you.

Another musician introduced him to Jesus Christ, and in Ken’s own words: - It was a spiritual experience. I found the spiritual dimension of human beings. And once you find the spiritual dimension you start to understand human beings completely. Holistically.

### Helping the poor

So Ken quit the band. No more pop star. – Many people questioned my decision, some tried to bring me back. But I knew there was something else that God wanted me to do.

So Ken went to England to build on his first degree in chemical engineering. And after a masters in theology and a PhD in

philosophy, Ken, his wife and their two kids were ready to go back to India. An idea had been brewing in the former musicians head and he couldn’t wait to get started. – I’m a great believer in starting small. Start where you are. We started in our own house, my wife and I. I wanted to help the poor by giving them the level of education that they need to become useful in society. At first we had 11 students, and we taught them practical skills for them to go out and use. I believe that education is the key to development.

Ken’s organization ACTS (Agriculture, Crafts, Trades and Studies) quickly grew to a considerable size, and today it branches out in three directions: Education, Health and Environment.

### The way forward

And then, around 8 years ago, Ken discovered the ecological movement. Through networking, he met among others representatives from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences who introduced him to Ecological Sanitation - EcoSan. – This is the only way forward! All the other western development models are a disaster. And I’ll tell you why I believe in this. We’re not only talking about sanitation, we’re talking about health issues, water, agriculture and economy. It’s a totally integrated approach.

### The EcoSan toilets

One of ACTS joint projects with the Norwegian University of Life Sciences is a toilet project in the Bangalore slum Rajendranagar, housing as many as 20 000 people. The EcoSan toilet centre built in the slum only caters for 600 –

800 slum dwellers, but as Ken points out: it shows that it can be done. – We’ve used source separation toilets. The faecal matter is the one with all the infections. It is composted and used as a fertiliser to grow medicinal plants. The urine is sterile and is being used for banana plantations.

The project has also created 10 full time jobs and has eliminated sexual harassment associated with the traditional practices of defecating in the open.

- We are taking away what was a big problem, and showing people that garbage and sewage doesn’t have to be a problem.

### Jazz and ecology

The ecosan-toilets in the Rajendranagar slum is a low-end solution. But Ken also stresses that there are high-end sophisticated toilets and compost solutions available to people in western countries. The amounts of clean water flushed down in normal flushing toilets every day is ridiculous, Ken says, and urges people to become part of the eco wave. And although he gave up his pop-star career many years ago (mind you people still know who he is and recognizes him in India!), he still enjoys playing his guitar and doing a bit of singing. But no more Beatles. It’s all about jazz. And ecological sanitation.

- ida

*Dr. Ken Gnanakan will be among the speakers at a learning centre event on women and sanitation, Wednesday, April 20th, 3 – 6 pm, Conference Room C.*

(Hosted by the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

# IT'S TIME TO BRIDGE THE GAPS

**Global poverty cannot be eradicated, nor MDGs achieved, without bridging the gaps in public services, such as energy, water and telecommunications, provision around the world. That is why a representative alliance of international civil society organizations is calling for a General Agreement on Public Services (GAPS).**

## Background

This alliance (Public Services International; Consumers International; One World Action; Public World) has come together to campaign for a General Agreement on Public Services (GAPS), to promote quality public services based firmly on rights, and to underpin national and local democratic accountability with international standards. Robin Simpson, Consumers International and Brendan Martin, Public World have started drafting this Agreement. This Agreement will be for both public and private public service providers. There has been attempts at multilateral Codes of Practice before: from the UN perhaps too vague and from Swiss Rey Code perhaps too precise, what is being attempted now is to draft an Agreement with a more holistic approach. Below are outlined a few examples of what will be expected within the draft GAPS:

## Equitable Management Supply

The Agreement will want to include that it is morally wrong for some within a system to acquire utility services more frequently than others. In some places it is known that these shortages are even artificially induced. For example, in Georgia, it is common knowledge that public water comes on for two hours, in the middle of the night. People then wake up and fill buckets to keep them going through the next day. Such an inequitable supply causes much social grievances; and if that system is subsidized then the system is not worth it and public funds wasted.

## Transparency of Contracts

Between 1985 and 2000 in Latin America, 75% of all concession contracts in water were re-negotiated and at a global scale, 41% were re-negotiated - something is really wrong!

## The gaps

There needs to be an holistic approach to public services development, and through exploration of how to bridge:

**The resources gap**, between the services people need and the capacity for providing them.

**The accountability gap**, between those who make decisions about the way services are designed and run, and those whose lives depend on them.

**The equity gap**, between services available to poor and marginalized people and those available to the better off and privileged.

**The gender gap**, between the burden on women of failing services and their involvement in their design and governance.

**The labour gap**, between actual and required investment in workers whose rights and knowledge are respected.

**The ethical gap**, between the values required in public services and their corruption by either abuse of official position or the profit motive.

**The performance gap**, between inadequate systems and equipment and the potential of reforms based on democratic participation and social dialogue.

**The sustainability gap**, between the need for effective water, energy and transport services and protection of the environment.

Within the proposed Agreement this transparency of contracts will cover a range of issues from the recognition that unrealistic contracts are being drawn up; urge that the bidding process be open; that the problem of contracts drawn up in foreign currency when tariffs are in local currency and susceptible to currency collapse be tackled; that the contracts be published (even the World Bank recommends that major utility contracts should be published); that 'Implicit contracts' be the center, focusing on statu-

tory rights rather than 'explicit contracts' complying that consumers must be literate; that there is a need to translate the contract into 'simple' language: not only for the public but also for the municipal representatives who often don't understand what they are signing; recognition that there is a lack of in-house experience to negotiate terms with companies, so skills training is needed to create a level playing field.

## Transparency of regulation

There needs to be a rational price structure, because many times the tariffs are actually set too low, this starves investment in the systems: "under-pricing is the enemy of the non-connected". This can be seen from the Manila and Buenos Aires examples where the governments insisted on the lowest price, which starved investment causing the system to ultimately collapse. There needs to be public consultation over tariffs. This can be a delicate issue between those that are connected and those that are not.

That there are often irrational, sometimes abusive, connection charges must be dealt with. The main obstacle for the poor is actually getting connected NOT the current operational charges. This is because this cost is too large for a one-time payment to be made; they do not have this disposable income. For example a city in Russia, has a 10 year waiting list for connection to the telecom network, however for a 'special premium' of about 5000 US\$, one can get this connection quicker.

For more information, to discuss your active involvement or join the mailing list, please contact GAPS project coordinator Brendan Martin [gaps@publicworld.org](mailto:gaps@publicworld.org).

- HJ

## GIVING PEACE A CHANCE

### Lessons from the Nile Basin Initiative

**Former UN Secretary General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali prophesied in the 1980s that the next major war in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would be fought over water, not politics. Although this prophecy has not come to pass, the potential of conflicts looms large over shared water resources in the African continent. Hence the need for intergovernmental processes to resolve potential conflicts over utilization of water resources.**

Conflicts over sharing of trans-boundary resources such as water and forests have been flaring up at a worrying frequency across the globe, not the least in Africa, to the great concern of the international community. Perhaps the most hotly contested issue in recent days has been in the Nile Basin, which is shared by 10 countries in the Eastern, Central and Northern Africa. The countries - Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt, Kenya and Sudan - share the Nile River. The Nile has two main tributaries, the White Nile, which starts in Lake Victoria in east central Africa and the Blue Nile, which rises in the Ethiopian Highlands. The two join in the Sudanese capital Khartoum and flow through the desert into Egypt before draining into the Indian Ocean.

#### The Nile Waters Agreement

In recent months, tensions have been rising over the waters of the Nile. The main bone of contention has been with equitable sharing of the Nile waters, whose utilization is strictly governed by the 1929 Nile Waters Agreement. This agreement was signed during the colonial

era between Egypt, Sudan and Great Britain and allocated 48 billion cubic meters of the Nile waters per year to Egypt as its acquired right and 4 billion cubic meters per year to the Sudan. These allocations were later increased to 55.5 billion cubic meters and 18 billion cubic meters, respectively, under a 1959 bilateral agreement between these two countries that allowed for the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Apart from Ethiopia, which had a government in place, the Nile Waters Agreement (NWA) was made before the other Nile Basin countries gained their independence.

The agreement stated that no works would be undertaken on the Nile, its tributaries, and the entire Lake Basin that would reduce the volume of the water reaching Egypt. It also gave Egypt the right to inspect and investigate the whole length of the Nile to the remote sources of its tributaries in the Basin.

#### Rethinking the Nile Treaties

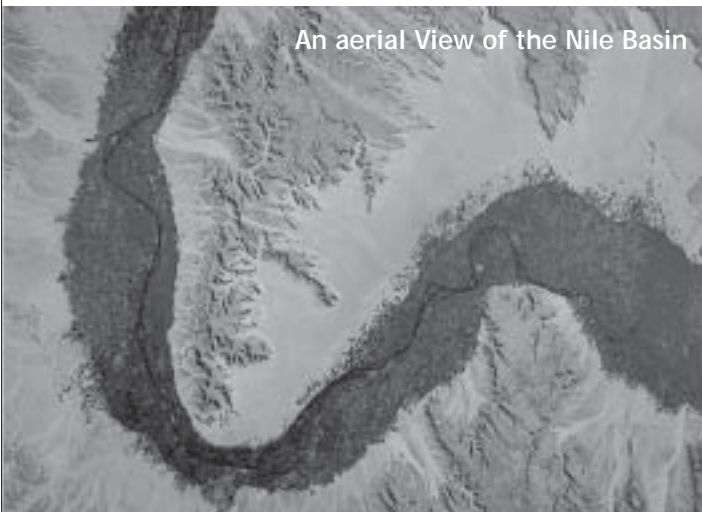
This right to inspect and investigate, which in essence gave Egypt veto power over any water or power project, has in recent years become debatable, as all the countries on the Nile Basin have become independent nations and are not likely to readily agree to encroachment on their sovereignty by Egypt. Population pressures and frequent draughts have intensified the demands by the Nile Basin countries to renegotiate the 1929 agreement. To cope, some Nile Basin countries are determined to implement projects that would tap into

the sources of the Nile. Some of them have already begun to disregard the NWA by initiating water projects that threaten to reduce the volume of water available to Egypt. Egypt considers any change in the agreement as a strategic threat and has repeatedly threatened to use all means at its disposal, including use of force, to keep its overwhelming share of the Nile's waters. However, other Nile Basin African countries consider the agreement as a relic of a colonial era which no longer reflects their needs and aspirations and hence recommend that it be annulled. Egypt on the other hand wants the agreements to be treated the same way as the boundaries of most Nile Basin countries, which were established by colonial powers, and are recognized under international law

#### The Nile Basin Initiative

It was thus clear to most observers that the threat of conflict among countries in the Nile Basin and Egypt was imminent. There was serious need to seek urgent, practical solutions for the looming conflict. Thus, to reduce the potential for conflict among the countries, and to promote cooperation so that the Nile river is used sustainably, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was launched in 1999. NBI is guided by what the leaders of the Nile Basin countries called a shared vision "to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources." Aside from resolving the conflict over the sharing of resources, the NBI also aims to tackle the issues of poverty reduction, environmental conservation and peacemaking among the Nile Basin countries. The NBI is governed by a council of Ministers of Water Affairs of the Nile Basin countries working through a technical Advisory Committee. The NBI

An aerial View of the Nile Basin



secretariat is in Entebbe Uganda. The World Bank has already committed to make funds available for developing projects in the basin, which will be financed through a trust fund. The African Development Bank has the responsibility of issuing grants to NBI member countries to facilitate research on the shared Nile waters. Governments in the basin have also pledged more than \$130 million to boost efforts aimed at achieving the NBI goals.

### Criticism

The Nile Basin Initiative has been described as a ‘closed shop’, typified by high-level meetings between politicians with minimal civil society input. Indeed, its critics have described the NBI as a ‘secretive’, top-down partnership of governments. This is partly due to the massively sensitive nature of the discussions, particularly as they pertain to the re-negotiation of the current water allocation regime. According to Patrick Muraguri, Executive Director of the Nairobi based Africa 21<sup>st</sup> Century Organization, a water advocacy NGO, although the Nile Basin Initiative is a noble idea, it has not had an open relationship with civil society organisations. He says not many CSOs were involved in its formation while issues around it have been tackled without involving civil society, which often works on the ground with local community members and who are most likely to bear the brunt of conflicts over natural resources. Others see the NBI as an initiative fronted by foreign bilateral donors in the hope of pushing private sector projects such as dams and hydro-electric power generation utilities along the Nile. Civil Society groups in Uganda see the NBI as having been started to lobby for the Bujagari Dam Project in the country, especially to calm conflicts between CSOs and the Ugandan government over the World Bank/IFC fronted project on the Nile

### The Nile Basin Discourse

It is perhaps the closed shop perspective that led to the formation of the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD), a Civil Society initiative aimed at monitoring progress on



The Nile River

commitments made under the Nile Basin Initiative by governments and provide a voice for the local communities in the process. Dr. Emad Adly, NBD Chairperson, says the initiative was formed upon the realization that the civil society has an important role to play to ensure the sustainability of social and economic development. He says NBD is committed to affirming the principles of partnership between all governmental parties and the civil society organizations in managing the resources of the Nile as well as planning proper policies to achieve this.

### Genuine change of heart?

One can only hope that the Nile Basin Initiative is a genuine resolve by countries in the Nile Basin to permanently address the potential time-bomb over sharing and management of water resources in the region and is not just a stop-gap measure to calm tempers while Egypt ponders new strategies to keep a firm hold on the Nile. It is however, a bold step in the right direction. Countries in the region need to focus and pursue concrete ideas such as exploring the

possibility of joint projects and concentrating on the most optimal use of the Nile that accommodates the interests of all players in the basin. Perhaps only when all countries in the Nile Basin are able to sustainably enjoy resources within their countries can lasting peace in the region and the entire African continent be realized.

- SW

## WATERS OF LIFE

**Ethical Principles  
And  
Community Success Stories**

**CSD-13 – Side Event**

Showcasing Community-Based  
Initiatives from the South

**TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2005**

**1:15-2:45 P.M.**

**The Church Center - 777 UN Plaza**

The Ecumenical Water Network of the  
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs – World Council of Churches

A light lunch will be served.

## QUESTION OF THE DAY



### Who would you like to see as Chair of the next CSD?

**Neth C. Dano, Third World Network, Philippines**

- I don't know, will it be possible for NGOs to do it? That would be great. Then it would probably be more about substance than about protocol. But of course, that's just dreaming.



**Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network**

- I think it should be a woman from a developing country. Women have a better understanding of family and community values, which is very much needed in the deliberations on sustainable energy. Women in developing countries have disproportionate needs as opposed to those from developed countries. We need a common ground and a balance between them.



**Tom Bigg, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), United Kingdom**

- I believe that the Hungarian Minister of Environment would do fine.

... and the next CHAIR is ...



Mwangi 05

### Contribute to Taking Issue

To publish articles in this newsletter, please submit your text before 5.00 p.m. to one of the SDIN facilitating organisations' staff. Or, send an email to: [kirstenkossen@yahoo.com](mailto:kirstenkossen@yahoo.com), or phone us on: +47 47 01 83 37

#### SDIN Facilitating Organisations:

**ANPED**, The Northern Alliance for Sustainability

**TWN**, Third World Network

**ELCI**, Environment Liaison Centre International

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