

Geneva Declaration

Joint meeting of UNEP National Committees/ ROE partner NGOs and Regional Civil Society Forum in preparations for the 5th Global Civil Society Forum

Geneva, 27- 28 November 2003

Introduction

This paper is drawn up by NGOs and UNEP National Committees, from countries in transition and developed countries of Europe meeting in Geneva on the 27th and 28th of November 2003.

Agenda 21 was the first intergovernmental agreement that gave recognition to stakeholders having *roles and responsibilities* in delivering sustainable development agreements. UNGASS recognised that in order for governments to make better-informed decisions stakeholders should be integrated in to the deliberation process. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation recognised that stakeholders working together could become a significant engine to deliver global agreements. We approach the UNEP Global Ministerial Environmental Forum and CSD12 recognising that we are in a time of creating new norms and standards for working within the multilateral system.

Principles

To guide the work of all stakeholders including governments we suggest the following approach. We recognise the principle of state sovereignty over natural resources, including waters. This would imply that every State:

- Retains primary duty for effective regulation to ensure access to availability of and quality of water;
- Has the obligation to protect and fulfil peoples right to water and sanitation;
- Should respect harmony of all ecosystems and human health;
- Should when developing river basin management strategies or making water policies integrate stakeholders into all policy planning and into all decision making process when necessary and appropriate;
- Should respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities;
- Should ensure that the Polluter Pays Principle is enforced;
- Should ensure legal security of tenure, protection from discrimination and equal access to affordable, adequate housing for all persons and their families. There should be no forced evictions.

The Rio Declaration recognises that Peace¹, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible. In this regard, the proliferation of conflict, the arms trade and soaring military budgets are detrimental to sustainable development.

¹ Principle 25

Access to basic water and sanitation are universal rights, and cannot be negotiated as commodities². The delivery of these rights is intrinsic and is a condition for poverty eradication.

To effectively manage water resources we believe that an integrated river basin management is an appropriate approach to sustainable water use. Where several countries share resources they should cooperate in managing these resources together. Conflict of interests should be addressed in an open, transparent and objective manner. Water legislation, regulations, rules and standards in the river basin should be harmonized among the basin countries.

Basics for Action

Lack of clean water and basic sanitation is the main cause of diseases transmitted by faecal contamination and constitutes a common problem in developing countries. In 1990 diarrhoea led to 3 million deaths, 85 percent of them among children. Between 1990 and 2000 about 900 million people obtained access to improved water sources, gains just sufficient to keep pace with population growth. An improved water service means any form of water collection or piping used to make water regularly available. It is not the same as “safe water,” but there is a long way to implement practical measures for safe water services. Connecting all households to a reliable source of water that is reasonably protected from contamination would be an important step toward improving health and reducing the time spent collecting. Though most countries talk about making access within 250 or 500 metres of people’s homes, individual household connections though desirable might not be affordable

Freshwater is a precious resource for many forms of life including human beings (because we have also marine forms of life which prefer the salty waters over freshwater), a common heritage of humanity, and a matter of common responsibility. Current assessments are that one in four people will live in countries that suffer serve water shortages by 2050. This growing scarcity and competition for water, in quality and quantity, threatens progress in poverty eradication, public health and food production.

Achieving Millennium Development Goals and Targets

We fully support the Millennium Development Goals and Targets and the addition of a Target for Sanitation made at Johannesburg.

In particular we support in this document

- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day;
Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger;
- Halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015;

² NGO Major Group statement to the Hague Ministerial Conference on water Security 2nd World water Forum 2000

- Develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005;
- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the losses of environmental resources;
- Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

However, we are very concerned that the means chosen and the measures undertaken by governments to deliver the goals and targets are at present inadequate to deliver them and fail to established deadlines

We believe that every year all governments' should inform the civil society on the progress in achieving Millennium goals and targets

The EU Water Initiative talked about harmonising the current annual expenditure of Commission and Member States of €1.4 billion. Subsequently, President Prodi has announced that the Commission wishes to set up a Water Facility [with a suggested fund of €1 billion]. This would take funds from the 9th European Development Fund and allocating these funds to water.

We welcome this Facility but since the funding requirements for MDGs are to double funding from all sources – and a one-off fund of E1 billion [it may be even less than this] represents only 8 months increase, with no sustainable permanent increase. We call on the European commission to report to the UNEP Global Ministerial Forum on what their long term plans are to deliver the finance to reach the MDGs.

Integrated water resources management shall include setting social, economic and environmental targets at the national and regional levels, including the integration of land- and water-related aspects, should consider basin or sub-basin approach and should be an integral part of the sustainable development programmes.

Consumption and Production

We recommend the development and application of a Sustainability Impact Assessment methodology for assessing the impact of human activities on the conditions of water resources.

We strongly support efforts of all stakeholders aimed at reduction of consumption by more effective water use in all areas particularly agricultural and industrial sectors.

Local and Regional authorities

We strongly believe that enhancement of the role of local and regional authorities, NGOs and individual citizens in water regulations, monitoring and planning is crucial for achieving positive results in sustainable water use. By no means is the role of governments in this process being diminished. It remains pivotal in supporting local inclusion e.g. education/capacity building, monitoring and producing enforceable regulations, as well as supporting regional and multilateral cooperation in the transboundary context.

We call for encouragement of local and regional authorities to pursue community involvement through consultative process and public hearings, and planning incorporated into wider water and land use context.

Means of implementation

Strategies

Access to water, sanitation and proper human shelter are of great importance for the fight against poverty. Poverty Reduction Strategies, any other strategies to reduce poverty should be an integral part of sustainable development strategies for water and sanitation employing a participatory approach for all relevant stakeholders, based on the principles of environmental justice and mutual responsibility of all actors involved.

Technology Sharing and Development

We consider the following actions amongst others as priorities:

- Use of adequate water treatment facilities for waste waters;
- The development of early warning systems with UNEP to see where water shortages are going to impact;
- Engagement of water users in the development of new technologies or investment programmes at very early stage;
- Full rejection of trade liberalisation of water and waste water services under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services;
- Decentralization of community water management needs across sectors, e.g. small scale and decentralised water harvesting projects or hydropower schemes. This would reduce the occurrence of inappropriate large-scale water projects.

Gender

The degree of mainstreaming gender perspective is a determining indicator of the success or failure of all future policies and action in the area of delivering the MDGs. In this regard particular attention should be paid to the role, skills and needs of women (along with Indigenous communities) as critical actors in safeguarding and monitoring water resources and water services.

Education and Information

Education plays a key role in better access to information and is an essential prerequisite of better healthcare and sanitation as well as water use. People should be educated to respect water and treat water as a non-renewable, vulnerable and valuable resource. We urge the Governments to create and integrate educational programmes on water and sanitation for all levels of societies. We encourage stakeholders to develop initiatives on education for sustainable development and we request from Governments to support these initiatives.

We recommend:

- Full disclosure and access to information relating to water resource quality and quantity and economic development activities that affect water resources;
- Development of a methodological framework for collating good practice.

Financial resources

We believe that international financing for water services and sanitation within the sustainable development context must be re-oriented toward enhancing locally initiated processes and supporting small scale projects that offer the best chance of integrating sustainable development objectives.

We insist that Governments should through domestic mobilisation and complemented by adequate donor funding deliver necessary support for adequate water services and sanitation

WE strongly stand for a right of each individual to be entitled to a basic level of water service and sanitation free of charge surpassing which water could be charged on the basis of either quantity of use or through general and commercial taxation having regard to people's ability to pay

Water and the services rendered by it is an asset for every country, and they should be assessed by means of indicators of sustainable development. We believe that as it stands now the GDP is not an appropriate indicator to reflect the importance of water and water services for sustainable development and combating of poverty.