

YOUNG WATER PROFESSIONALS SYMPOSIUM



Hon Dinesh Gunawardena, Minister of Water Supply and Drainage, addressing the symposium

Introduction

Many young people working in the water sector in Sri Lanka today have the potential to contribute to policy formulation and development. However appropriate avenues for their involvement are lacking. In order to address this issue, the Sri Lanka Water Partnership (SLWP) organized the Young Water Professionals Symposium (YWPS) which was held under the theme of "Towards a water secure future" in November 2012 in Colombo. The

symposium which was sponsored by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and Unilever Sri Lanka, provided a platform to show case the ideas of young water professionals in Sri Lanka.

The symposium also provided an opportunity for networking among professionals in various sectors. The themes considered at the YWPS ranged from an examination of existing laws relating to the water sector, discussion of the effects of river sand mining and climate change, to health related issues.

Need for the Symposium

Sri Lanka lacks a comprehensive water policy and suffers from a lack of political will to address crucial issues. As a result change often occurs only as a reaction to occurring events. The SLWP has adopted a strategy of addressing active topics such as floods, droughts, landslides, river sand mining and river pollution to highlight the need for an integrated approach to water management. This has been strengthened by knowledge sharing and capacity building at school and community levels to increase support for IWRM. This symposium promoted this agenda by highlighting the views of young water professionals who will lead the sector in the future.

The Symposium

Young mid-career water professionals below 35 years including those in the state or private sector, research institutes and universities were encouraged to submit abstracts under six broad thematic areas. These thematic areas included; optimizing water utilization, improving water delivery, good governance, economic and financial feasibility, environmental sustainability and cross cutting themes such as IWRM, capacity building, climate change adaptation and risk management. The conference provided a lively forum for young professionals to explore important issues related to water in Sri Lanka and provide their input towards policy making in the water sector.

Poverty in South Asia will be eradicated and living conditions of all the people will be uplifted to sustainable levels of comfort, health and well-being through coordinated and integrated development and management of water resources of the region.



The sessions in progress

Inauguration

Hon Dinesh Gunawardena, Minister of Water Supply and Drainage and Chief Government Whip was the Chief Guest at the Symposium inauguration and Professor Mohan Munasinghe, joint winner of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was the Keynote Speaker. The Hon Minister in his address stressed the importance of proper water management and the need for protection of water source areas and water ways to ensure future needs of the country. Prof. Munasinghe in his

presentation on 'Sustainable Water Resources Management (SWARM) – Poverty, Food Security and Climate Change Nexus', highlighted the added implications of climate change for water resources management and its sustainability. The Director General of IWMI Mr. Jeremy Bird and Chairman Unilever Mr. Amal Cabraal representing the two sponsors, pledged their continuing support for such initiatives in the future.

Technical Sessions

Fifty eight abstracts were received and were evaluated by a Technical Committee. Of these, thirty were selected for submission of papers and twenty four were listed for presentation at the two day three session symposium. A special Awards Committee evaluated the presentations and three presenters/authors were presented with awards based on both paper content and quality of presentation. Two received sponsorship support for participation at regional/global water events while Unilever awarded sponsorship for a regional event to the best presenter on water quality at the symposium.

Outcome

The proceedings of the symposium and all papers submitted will be published, based on approval. The recommendations of the symposium will be evaluated for policy adoption through a forthcoming expert consultation, after which a policy brief will be submitted to the authorities for consideration. With a high level of interest generated within the water sector and the high quality of the papers and presentations, it is likely that the next step would be the organizing of a similar event for South Asia.

Further information can be obtained from:

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Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in South Asia.

Striving for good governance, equity, access, adequacy, quality, productivity and sustainability in the water sector.

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