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Note on Svaraj Participation at the World Water Week 2008, Stockholm, Sweden.

Participants

- Bharti Patel, Director - Svaraj
- Balasubramanian, Director – ADISIL, Tamilnadu

At a time when billions of people live without sustainable access to safe drinking water or suffer ill health due to poor sanitation, when food crises, bio-energy crops and climate change place ever-increasing demands on water resources, the WWW is a good opportunity to raise concerns and discuss solutions. World water week is an annual gathering of 2,500 experts, representing over 200 organizations including national and international organizations including - development banks, waste management companies, humanitarian groups, think tanks, and representatives from several international organization all with a stake on water in some form or another.

WWW 2008

The World Water Week 2008, in Stockholm was in its 17th year. Svaraj together with partners have been attending the event since 2003 with the support of SIDA's technical funds to Svaraj. There has been much learning for Svaraj and our partners. This year we invited our partner and close associate Balan from Adisil in Tamil Nadu who accompanied Bharti Patel to the event.

The World Water Week, Stockholm was my first visit to a country outside India. It was a very useful and informative event to our work and me. - Balasubramanian, Director – ADISIL, Tamilnadu

The institutional strategy of www - *"promotes the exchange of views and experiences between the scientific, business, policy and civil society communities, thereby advancing the water, environment, health, livelihood and poverty reduction agendas."*

This year being the year of sanitation, the world water week was designed under the theme, progress and prospects on water for a clean and healthy world with special focus on sanitation. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development co-lead this year's sessions on the role of business in sanitation and several member companies participated

On the face of it this activity must make WWW a good place to be in. And credit should be given to the organizers for getting a group of people together to discuss ways to improve access to people's right to clean water and sanitation.

Some reflections

My experience and learning from this year's event is mixed. Many of the presentations were very technical. There were nearly 100 sessions, each with a technical presentation from 3 – 4 researchers. Many PhD thesis. – many of them inspiring and educational.

But when it comes to solutions, often what is considered is a market solution with the arguments that the public sector has failed in its responsibility (often because of corruption) to provide for these services and that private sector can see this as a good business opportunity. *"...water is a tremendous business opportunity – because there is no substitute to water"*. The founder's business seminar

During the week there was much talk on pricing of water – arguing that only pricing could control use. Water use in agriculture was raised on many platforms as the main user of water and free water allowed for its abuse and that control and regulation of over-use is required.

I felt there was little analysis on the social and environmental impacts. It is a very uncritical and unquestioning environment in this context. There was also very little discussion on genuine participation by civic society in the form voluntary organizations, NGO's, citizen participation or trade unions.

Below are highlights of the workshops Bharti Patel and Balasubramanian participated

Domestic private sector - DFID together with the World Bank Water and sanitation project - workshop titled - "unlocking the potential of domestic private sector in the delivery of water and sanitation services to the poor" - discussed how local - small and medium enterprises- could be given this role as franchises i.e delivering (selling) water door to door through tankers. When Svaraj raised the question of where the water would come from – the reply was from Local authorities/Councils of course!!!!.

Virtual Water - This year the Stockholm Water Prize was awarded to Laureate Professor John Anthony Allan from King's College London and the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London for his pioneering work on Virtual water - development of key concepts in the understanding and communication of water issues and how they are linked to agriculture, climate change, economics and politics.

Payment for Ecosystem Services - The seminar highlighted the need for recognizing the true value of nature and captures it in decision making. It also makes an economic case for conservation over short-term exploitation. Here the example of Nestle in Europe was highlighted – where Nestle is paying for the service of a clean environment to bottle and market natural spring water. Nestle was concerned that pesticides usage in local agriculture was leaching into the spring and contaminating it. They are paying farmers not to use pesticides in their agriculture and convert to organic farming so that they can continue to exploit clean water. The booklet on recommendations on payment for ecosystem services in integrated resource management is worth further discussion in India.

Water footprint - The study on the scale of British water consumption makes the attempt to measure the UK's total "water footprint". It is claimed that the UK has become the sixth largest net importer of water in the world. Only 38% of the UK's total water use comes from its own resources; the rest depends on the water systems of other countries, some of which are already facing serious shortages. Taking virtual water into account, every other British person soaks up 4,645 litres a day; "What's particularly worrying is that huge amounts of the food and cotton we consume are grown in drier areas of the world where water resources are either already stressed or very likely to become so in the near future," said WWF's water footprint expert.

The Poster Exhibition both Junior and Senior is indeed a good opportunity to discuss the practical innovation in water management

The Indian representation on the use of Drum sticks as a water purifier was popular amongst many as was the senior poster on eco san where Vishwanath Srikanth (known as rain man in Karnataka) exhibited the workings of his own home on recycling solid and liquid waste and successfully cultivating paddy on his rooftop. But the idea of weekly clean up of human excreta and the transfer from the collected box to a composter appeared to be too much of a tall order for many Indian visitors.

Behavioral Change - On many occasions this silent taboo was raised by Indian participants and the need to encourage behavioral change was stressed. Well meaning agencies and government bodies initiatives on eco sans have proved futile

The discussion in one workshop concluded that that risks to health is a weak motivator and that a market based solution like building a toilet for home improvement brings a change to social status instead of a health intervention. Washing hands with soap will make hands look, feel, and smell good and not stress its importance in preventing sickness.

In the corridors, and over expensive lunches or free sandwiches there was much discussion on the value of such conferences and its outcomes.

Meeting with key participants

- Water Integration Network – who have agreed to support our partners Adisil
- CII – Mr Raghupathi, Balan from Adisil Bharti raised the issues of markets for organic produce and discussion over guaranteed prices. This needs to be followed with further representation to the local CII body.
- IFOAM were to discuss support for Adisil's work on education, training and markets in organic farming. Balan to look into details of the criteria for a discussion draft proposal to IFOAM
- IVL – In Stockholm, to discuss their role in Svaraj's work along the Arkavathi region. – Dialogues continuing

Follow up

1. Invited to speak at Dr Mohan Sinha Mehta memorial trust in Udaipur on emerging issues and perspectives on water resource management - the global perspective.
2. Shared experience and knowledge with staff and partners including Foundation for Ecological Security in Udaipur, with Farmers about the environment consciousness and sanitation of the city and the people
3. Continued dialogue with IVL staff for further collaboration in Bangalore
4. Continued e- dialogue with other participants at the conference.
5. Balan written many articles about the Water City (Stockholm) in the local (TN) magazines and newspapers

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