

Network of Asian River Basin Organizations (NARBO)
-- Symposium on Catalyzing IWRM investment in the Asia-Pacific Region--
Report to the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit

1 December 2007, Beppu City Social Welfare Hall

Participants from 11 countries met on the eve of the 1st Asia Pacific Water Summit to discuss key challenges for integrated water resources management (IWRM) in the region, and future directions for NARBO to assist governments and river basin organizations (RBO). The Symposium was convened by Japan Water Agency, Asian Development Bank and ADB Institute as NARBO Secretariat, in collaboration with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Infrastructure Development Institute of Japan. Key points discussed were as follows.

Recognizing that:

1. The eastern and southern parts of the Asian Continent and the northern parts of Indonesia and Australia are influenced by a monsoonal climate under which distinct patterns of rainy season / dry season emerge in the region, and also precipitation varies substantially on a monthly basis. Thus, the Asia-Pacific Region encounters either problem of too much water or too little water by seasonal changes of the climate. This tendency of “too much water or too little water” becomes more significant due to the global climate change.
2. Generally speaking in the Asia-Pacific Region, the upper reaches of river basins which are steep and located at near- plate boundary zones are geologically vulnerable to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. On the other hand, the lower reaches of river basins are formed of flood-prone alluvial plains. Once heavy rains hit the river basin areas, flood water flows quickly down to the sea causing sediment disasters such as erosion, landslides, debris flow and so on in the upstream areas and lethal impacts on socio-economic activities, specifically human lives and assets in the downstream areas.
3. Water demand is projected to increase with continued economic development in the Asia-Pacific Region. Disaster risk increases concurrently as more people and assets are accumulating in the flood-prone alluvial plains than ever before. The region’s rich natural environments are already degraded and under further pressure. Water resources and ecosystems need to be protected to ensure sustainable development to future generations. Governments need to improve their water infrastructures and strengthen their institutional capacity to address these challenges through effective water resources development and management.

Appreciating that NARBO’s 56 member organizations are starting to make an effective contribution to the introduction of IWRM in river basins across the Asia-Pacific region since the network was established in 2004, the participants adopted the following directions for NARBO activities in the coming years:

1. NARBO will facilitate the implementation of IWRM in the Asia-Pacific Region taking account of its characteristic features, including the occurrence of water-related disasters arising from floods and droughts, the continuing increase of water demand due to economic development and urbanization, and widespread deterioration of water quality and environment in river basins. To help RBOs develop locally appropriate solutions in river basins, NARBO will elaborate the IWRM approach in practical guidelines that reflect the rich and diverse experience across the region. The guidelines will be prepared in collaboration with member RBOs and knowledge partners, in time for presentation to the 5th World Water Forum in 2009 in Turkey.
2. Drawing on its first five years of experience, NARBO will also prepare a long-term plan for introduction of IWRM in river basins across the region, to help governments and RBOs achieve the MDGs and respond to the unprecedented transformation facing the region in the management of water resources, including the increased variability and risks brought by climate change.
3. NARBO will continue to support governments and RBOs in improving the enabling environment for IWRM, including policies, legislation, institutional development, and public awareness and participation. NARBO will also continue to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience in the development and management of water resources, in priority topics such as water rights, disaster management, water quality management, and climate change adaptation. NARBO’s performance benchmarking and peer review service will be expanded, and NARBO will pilot an advisory service for RBOs in the preparation of integrated long-term investment programs in river basins.