

Biwako Declaration for Actions on Water and Forests

Roundtable on Water and Forests

Otsu, Shiga March 21, 2003

The world is facing 'a water crisis'. While there are areas where people do not have access to enough water to fulfill their basic necessity, there are areas where people are suffering from water-related disasters such as floods and debris flows. At the same time, the world is facing 'a forest crisis'. Forests are facing rapid decrease or degradation due to natural and socio-economic causes such as forest fire, over-exploitation, illegal logging, population increase, and poverty. Approximately 9 million hectares of forests are disappearing in the world every year, resulting in disastrous consequences including floods, landslides, soil erosion, desertification and loss of biodiversity.

Forested watersheds are sources of water for households, agriculture, industries and ecosystems, in both upstream and downstream areas. On the other hand, we need to recognize that forests also use water for their growth.

Even though the issues of water and forests are closely interrelated as such, these issues have been discussed separately in the international fora. Based on these facts, we, people with diverse backgrounds and from different disciplines, who came together at this Roundtable on Water and Forests during the Third World Water Forum, will unanimously promote the following actions.

ACTIONS

1. We will fully acknowledge the necessity of actions to promote sustainable forest management toward solving water-related problems as a component of comprehensive and multifaceted water management programmes. Every one of us, individually and cooperatively, will also tackle these problems related to this action at local, national and international levels by formulating necessary policies and strategies for forests, water, watershed, environment, biodiversity and human society in a holistic and inter-disciplinary manner.
2. Recognizing the need to better understand the interactions between upstream and downstream and the relationship between forests and water from catchment to the ocean, we will further develop research and monitoring on related issues, particularly on the effects of forests on river flows, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge and other water-related phenomena. We will utilize the results of these actions to promote appropriate integrated watershed management practices for conserving and rehabilitating sound hydrological cycle, as well as to promote comprehensive evaluation of forests with regards to their hydrological functions.
3. We realize the cultural, social and economic impacts of policies and measures related to forests and water, and to promote cooperation and partnership among governments, local communities, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders, respecting tradition of local people, through the development of systems which facilitate the relationship between upstream and downstream areas.
4. We recognize the urgent need to widely disseminate relevant scientific knowledge and information to the relevant stakeholders, decision makers and general public in order to promote sustainable forest management, and to solve water-related problems in consequence. We will try to develop effective and easy-to-understand educational tools, taking into account the true information needs of the people. In order to facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building, we will also develop a network for sharing common understandings and for exchanging information and experiences on the issues of water and forests.