

Some reminiscences on the formation and early operations of the Sri Lanka Water Partnership

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Background

The Dublin Experts Conference (Feb 1992) and the Rio UN Environment Conference (May 1992) led to collective efforts by many multilateral donors, including the UN, and the World Water Council, to establish a dedicated water resources organization that would focus on the issue of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). These efforts led to the formation of the Global Water Partnership (GWP) in 1996 as an intergovernmental organization headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, and hosted by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

The Global Water Partnership (GWP)

GWP was founded in 1996 to foster integrated water resources management (IWRM), defined as a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner, without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. The GWP has a legal personality and goes under the acronym GWPO. To promote and facilitate global networking, it set up a separate GWP Network (without legal basis) which links to the respective Regional and Country Water Partnerships and accommodates the GWP Partners.

At the initial setup, what the GWP envisaged was a Regional Network (Torkil et al), but soon the need for ground-level impact was realized and outreach was expanded to the country level. This led to the setting up of Regional Water Partnerships (RWPs), Country Water Partnerships and later even Area Water Partnerships (AWPs), especially in South Asia during the first decade after its establishment. Very close interaction with regions, countries and GWP partners was seen during this period. GWP senior staff, including the Executive Secretary, Finance Director, Senior Network Officers and even members of the GWP Technical Advisory Committee (GWP TAC) interacted closely with regions and CWPs. Incidentally, Ms. Kusum Athukorala, later Chair SLWP and Regional Council Member, GWP SAS, served on the first GWP Steering Committee. The interaction was facilitated and supported through many GWP events including a GWP Partners Meeting arranged in Stockholm annually. Most programmes at the time were region/country driven (local to global) with the integration of GWP goals and priorities.

However, during the last decade, there has been a significant shift to thematic programmes driven from Stockholm, with regions/countries fitting in their work to harmonize with the global approach, i.e. - a more marked shift from local to global.

With significant increases in theme/specialist staff in Stockholm, and with a budget that has not expanded in proportion, it was inevitable that the periphery would suffer, and a tail-ender syndrome resulted.

Regular interaction with country staff and GWP Partners has now gone “virtual” and only the annual RWP Chairs/ Regional Coordinators/Regional Communication Officers Meeting takes place as a face-to-face meeting in Stockholm or at another arranged venue.

As a policy, it appears that even network communications by GWP are now limited to correspondence/interaction with the RWP and Regional Offices, with these offices used as a conduit to pass on information, directions etc., and linked up with the GWP Network. The growth of GWP operations especially, driven by Stockholm over the last decade, may have contributed, as may have an increasingly limited budget based on its staff commitments. The Regional and Country Water Partnerships are seen as a feeder system for the global agenda, rather than being driven by their own imperatives. It seems the *de facto* situation is as originally envisaged at the formation of GWP, and a full circle has now been realized. The annual CWP budgets too in real terms have reduced (due to inflation/reductions) with supplementary funds mostly available for supporting global efforts such as SDG, Climate Action etc. To be fair, the increasing importance of the global agenda on the above as well as environmental issues etc. require a global approach and implementation fit. In other areas, an interactive local to global and vice versa approach would likely hasten the realization of IWRM benefits at the ground level and fully meet the expectations of the CWP especially.

South Asia Technical Advisory Committee (SASTAC) and Regional Water Partnership (RWP SAS/GWP SAS)

To establish Country Water Partnerships, the Institution of Regional Technical Committees was set up, first in Africa, SEA, followed by SAS termed SASTAC or the South Asia Regional Technical Committee for South Asia in 1998. These Regional Committees were charged with setting up Country Water Partnerships (CWP) and building the GWP partner base which was restricted to institutions. earlier.

SASTAC was Chaired by Dr M. Chital from India and hosted at the Water and Land Management Institute (WALMI) in Ahmedabad. SASTAC included, in addition to the Chair, the Country Representatives from SAS Countries. Sri Lanka was represented by Mr. Nanda Abeywickrama. Dr. P.S Rao, formerly an IIMI- IWMI (International Irrigation Management Institute which later changed its name to International Water Management Institute) ** Research Scientist, was appointed Technical Advisor to help set up CWP in each SAS Country.

In addition to the establishment of CWP, a 25-year Water Vision exercise was to be undertaken by each country and a Water Vision 2000-2025 document duly prepared. To support the Water Vision, a Framework for Action was developed followed by a Programme for Action.

These documents were prepared during the period 1998-2000. Funding for the above by GWP SASTAC for Sri Lanka was initially sourced through the Ministry of Irrigation.

This arrangement was due to intervention/ facilitation by Jacques Ray Executive Secretary GWP (Former IIMI) ** and myself as Director Water Resources Development at the Ministry, Jac and I had worked together at IIMI in the early nineties.

However, process issues in the transfer and use of foreign funds and throughput through the Ministry were seen as a bit cumbersome and it was later decided that these funds should be routed through LIFE, an NGO headed by Prof. Mohan Munasinghe. LIFE also served as the host institution for the newly formed Country Water Partnership in 1999 and later as well, when it was known as the Sri Lanka National Water Partnership (SLNWP), and formally established in 2000 as the Sri Lanka National Water Partnership. (was changed to Sri Lanka Water Partnership in 2005). Funding for activities was routed through SASTAC until 2002, when this was changed and routed through the Regional Water Partnership (RWP SAS). The RWP SAS was formally established following the South Asia Water Forum held in Pakistan in 2002, at which the Working Guidelines for RWP SAS GWP SAS were ratified. It was decided that the Chairmanship of the Regional Water Partnership and the Regional Office would rotate among SAS countries on a two-year cycle according to a one-time draw of lots.

The first country to take over regional operations with the appointment of a Regional Coordinator was Bangladesh, in 2002. This was followed by Sri Lanka, in 2004, and India, in 2006, at which moment it was decided that the cycle should be extended to 3 years, from the earlier 2 years. This was followed by Pakistan (which established its RO office in Sri Lanka and not in Pakistan due to certain donor issues) and then Nepal, followed by Bhutan. With the first cycle ending in 2018, Bangladesh took over once again in 2019, and in 2022, the Chairmanship of GWP SAS moved to Sri Lanka. The rotation/moving of the GWP SAS Regional Office (RO) to countries stopped in 2010, with the Chairmanship moving to Pakistan and my being appointed Regional Coordinator once again. The RO has been located at IWMI to date with a Sri Lankan Regional Coordinator.

The holding of the South Asia Water Forums (SAWAF) was a significant feature in regional networking in SAS and was held successfully in Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, supported at first by SASTAC and GWPO. However, this support was discontinued later by GWP as it expanded its CWP Network and funds became constrained.

Sri Lanka National Water Partnership/ Sri Lanka Water Partnership (SLNWP/SLWP)

Representatives of water and natural resources institutions, universities, NGOs and experts who participated in the Water Vision and follow-up activities participated in an inauguration meeting in 1999 held at Hotel Galadari, with a view to setting up the Sri Lanka Water Partnership. The event was convened under the aegis of SASTAC-by-SASTAC Member for Sri Lanka, Mr. Nanda Abeywickrama, and facilitated by IIMI (later IWMI) with Dr. M. Samad, IIMI Scientist, acting as MC. Around 50 participants attended the inaugural meeting. Mr. S.B Niyangoda, the Secretary, Ministry of Mahaweli Development, was nominated as Chair, and Mr. U. Sapukotuna, Additional Secretary, of the Ministry of Agriculture, was appointed as the Executive Secretary.

It was decided that the Host Institution for the Partnership, then referred to as SLNWP, would remain with LIFE as in the case with SASTAC operations in Sri Lanka.

In 2001 October, on retirement from government service, I was requested to support the work of SASTAC and SLWP and joined SASTAC Member Mr Abeywickrama, who operated from IWMI. IWMI had graciously provided us with free office and communication facilities on its premises as we had both served on the IWMI (IIMI) staff earlier. It is likely that it was the efforts of both of us that helped get the new IIMI Headquarters by facilitating the GOSL efforts to acquire the new Petroleum Corporation building in Pelawatte through World Bank/SIDA funds of Rs 84 million sourced through MIRP, a project handled by the Irrigation Management Division (IMD) of the Ministry. I was released from IMD for five years to IIMI (1989 -1994). The Secretary of the Ministry of Irrigation and an IIMI Board Member at the time, Mr. A.A Wijetunge, handled the processing through the state apparatus. Additionally, as the focal point at the Ministry for IIMI following my return to service, I also facilitated the IIMI name change to IWMI in 2000, handling the required issues from the Ministry including with the Legal Draftsman's office. This was a period in which there were some anti-IIMI issues/protests which prevented both the IIMI Director General, Dr David Seckler, and the Director of Administration and Finance, David Governey, from attending parliament on the day this was taken up for debate. I had to smuggle in Dr. M Samad from IIMI as a member of the ministry staff. Incidentally, although I was only on release to IIMI for 5 years, I was appointed to the regular IWMI staff in the hope that I would stay on. However, notwithstanding the many IWMI perks I received, I went back to the Ministry in 1994, after serving the 5 years, as I personally felt obliged to do so because the state had funded many of my training stints abroad, including post-graduate studies at the Punjab Agriculture University and later, at Silsoe College, University of Cranfield. I was happy to get back to public service. IIMI, on the other hand, has continued to pay me a pension since 1999.

IIMI shifted to its new Headquarters in Colombo in 1993. The hosting of SLNWP/SLWP and SASTAC was transferred to IWMI from LIFE in 2002 and I took over as Country Coordinator/Consultant.

As a concession to SLNWP/SLWP, all services including financial management and audit were provided free of charge by IWMI. SLNWP/SLWP, in turn, made a small grant of Rs 5,000/-annually to the IWMI Staff Welfare Association as a goodwill gesture.

With the formation of the RWP and the Regional Operations that started in 2003, the SASTAC arrangement concluded and the RWP took over regional operations and funding arrangements, operating from Bangladesh which held the Regional Chairmanship.

In 2004, the regional operations transferred to Sri Lanka with Mr Nanda Abeywickrama taking over as Chair of the RWP- GWP SAS. Mr. Dixon Nilaweera, former Secretary to the Treasury, took up duties as Regional Coordinator and functioned until I took over in 2005. By this time, it was decided that SLNWP should drop the word National as it connotes a link to the state, and the CWP was to be identified as SLWP, an independent entity.

Whilst providing services as Regional Coordinator to GWP SAS, my services as Country Coordinator was provided to SLWP free of charge during the above period. With Regional Operations moving to Sri Lanka, formal arrangements for hosting SLWP at a low hosting fee of 5% of expenditure were arrived at as there was the need to have a formal agreement for hosting of Regional Operations of GWP SAS.

IWMI provides these services at a 7.5% Hosting Charge of total funds handled/ throughput (not expenditure only as in the case of SLWP) for the regional operations of GWP SAS. The extremely low HI fee of 5% on expenditure to SLWP continues to this date.

Although the period of tenure of Sri Lanka as Regional Chair ended in 2006 and India took over the Regional Chairmanship under Hon. Suresh Prabhu (Ex-Minister of Railways -India), the transfer of regional operations to India came only several months later, in 2007 when a new Regional Coordinator was appointed in India. Although I was invited to continue during the India Chairmanship, I declined, as it would have involved moving to Bangalore where the Indian Institute of Science, the new Host Institution for the Regional Office, was located.

Similar arrangements took place with the Chairmanship moving to Pakistan in 2010, where I was requested to provide Regional Coordinator services as there were issues of transfer of funds to Pakistan by donors. RO operations continued from IWMI with services provided voluntarily by me to SLWP until Mr Upali Imbulana was appointed as Regional Coordinator GWP SAS, and I moved back to working full time as the SLWP Country Coordinator.

Working Guidelines of SLWP/Lanka Jalani (2000 amended in 2005)

The Sri Lanka Water Partnership was established as a not-for-profit non-governmental organization with objectives and principles of operation and governance as outlined in the SLWP/LJ working guidelines. The Working Guidelines of SLWP aka *Lanka Jalani* provided, among other things, for the affiliation with GWP and the recruitment of Partners from Institutions with a provision for Honorary Members as well. The latter was dropped subsequently as GWP required that only Institutions should be considered as Partners.

(The New GWP Reaccreditation now in the process after CWP was accredited to GWP in 2011, requires several changes to the Working Guidelines of CWP/SLWP. The new requirements involve a name change from SLWP to GWP Sri Lanka and stipulate that only GWP Partners are involved in SLWP governance, thus preventing many state agencies who are not GWP partners from serving on the SLWP Steering Committee and taking up positions such as Chair, RC Member etc.

A name change would severely constrain SLWP operations in that it will necessitate registering with the NGO Secretariat and its work plans and funding etc. scrutinised by the Defense Ministry, as is required for NGOs with foreign affiliations).

Programme Development

The first decade after establishment saw a dynamic programme develop due to adequate unrestricted funding by GWP, both for countries and the region. Several national-level consultations and policy dialogues took place on issues such as hydropower pricing, floods, droughts, IWRM, RSM, water for cities, groundwater, environment, and water policies. SLWP was able to secure support from the Water Integrity Network (WIN) for a river sand mining (RSM) project in 2009, which led to global recognition of SLWP's work on RSM.

An interesting development was that SLWP with the relevant authorities, including the Geological Survey and Mines Bureau (GSMB), the Central Environment Authority (CEA) and the Universities of Colombo and Ruhuna with the Network of Women Water Professionals (NetWwater) as principal collaborators, undertook RSM training for District staff, AWP and especially the police. The latter was seen earlier as part of the problem of illegal RSM. However, the SLWP approach was that the police were part of the solution. Unfortunately, it was soon realized that when the police acted, based on heightened awareness of prevention and the legal issues involved, and took equipment and illegal sand transport vehicles into custody, they were soon released by the intervention of the local political authority. To counter this, a special programme was developed with the Special Task Force (STF) of the police and the raids were then extremely successful as the STF was commanded from the Headquarters in Colombo and local politicians could not intervene. This was one reason for the success of the SLWP RSM programme.

A Regional Integrated Drought Management Programme (RIDM) and Consultation in 2010 paved the way for the development of the DIFID-funded Water and Climate Resilience Project (WACREP) for SAS resulting in Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) funding from 2012.

SLWP has also participated in most World Water Forums since 2000 and organized and held a well-attended side event at WWF Istanbul in 2009.

During its second decade of operation, GWP gradually reduced CWP funding due to greater demand from its expanded regional/country programmes. In addition, a thematic-based approach in later years with Theme Leaders at the helm led to a global to local approach rather than local to global, where activities that tie into the global agenda are usually funded and have priority.

The WACREP Project was the only source of additional funding during this period, and this project enabled SLWP to develop several knowledge products on CCA in national languages that filled a much-needed void and received wide acclaim. The SLWP CCA programme at the agency and ground level was singled out for special presentation by GWP in 2020 as one of the best implemented CCA country efforts on climate action.

After RIDM, not a single regional issue-based Expert Consultation was held in the region by GWP SAS, only governance/admin meetings were held. Consequently, priority regional topics that can be developed as regional proposals/projects have not been developed. Efforts to develop regional proposals using the *ad hoc* expertise within the RC, RO and CWP have not been successful. The approach currently is for global funding opportunities to be scouted by GWP/RO to try to fit in proposals with some country-based funding opportunities. However, a much-needed Regional Project such as WACREP cannot possibly result under these circumstances.

Locally Raised Funding (LRF)

Locally raised funding since the WIN project in 2009 has expanded to a regular fundraising effort by SLWP and earlier, through the contribution of staff services to donors.

Many corporates and banks such as Janashakthi Insurance, Hatton National Bank, NDB Bank, Brandix, Perera and Sons Ltd, IWMI and Unilever have supported several joint projects related to disaster mitigation, young water professionals, tea landscapes, school sanitation and health with supportive rainwater harvesting initiatives. These activities, carried out mostly in collaboration with SLWP Partners such as the Lions Club and NetWwater, have enabled SLWP reserves to be strengthened by over USD 50,000. Consequently, SLWP reserves are the highest earned reserves of a CWP in the South Asia region. These LRF reserves resulted from the payment for services provided by SLWP by sponsor institutions and contributions by a few office bearers of SLWP (including the then-Chair, SLWP) who charged their time to the WIN project in 2009.

As country coordinator and a water resources specialist, I had several opportunities of providing and charging time to several UN, UNWATER, GWP and WWF Japan projects/activities as a consultant, and this enabled a contribution of about USD 20K made by me personally to SLWP reserves. Similarly, Euro 11,250 was contributed to the coffers of the GWP SAS regional budget during my tenure as Regional Coordinator GWP SAS.

Area Water Partnerships (AWP)

The Concept of AWP originated in South Asia, in view of the need for an institutional linkage based on water resources criteria that CWP could deal with on a practical level for collaborative action at the basin level. Sri Lanka had developed 6 AWP, namely, Ma Oya, Upper Mahaweli, Deduru Oya, Malwatu Oya, Nilwala and Kirindi Oya. Water resource profiles were developed for each AWP area as part of the river basin and work programmes.

Initial establishment activities were undertaken with the support of the NWSDB, the ID and local NGOs along with the support of other state institutions such as divisional secretariats. Many local-level activities brought much-needed visibility to SLWP, several of these activities had the support of the local bureaucracy and politicians as well. These AWP were established between the 2000 and 2004 period, and as adequate financial resources were available from GWP during this time, made a significant impact, especially on issues of RSM and community water. Similar AWP were set up in other SAS countries as well. The reception by GWP to the development of AWP was lukewarm, as GWP did not consider the global scaling up of AWP as being practical or required.

With expanded GWP global and country programmes, the much-needed funding with the AWP for a minimum critical mass of activities could not be sustained and declined. AWP contributed immensely to the successful RSM programme that SLWP undertook with GSMB, CEA and the Police including the STF, District Secretariats, Colombo and Ruhunu Universities and NetWwater. Over the last 10 years, AWP activities have largely remained dormant and have declined.

SASNET RBO - Network of South Asia River Basin Organizations.

A Sri Lankan initiative from the SASTAC period was supported by all SAS countries This was the RBO network with the Mahaweli Authority as the focal agency for the region, which was to be linked to the International Network of River Basin Organizations (INBO).

GWP SAS and SLWP established a technical secretariat at the Mahaweli Authority (Mahaweli Centre) with equipment support to initiate work.

A proposal for funding was submitted to GWP, and GWP instituted searching for a donor with this proposal as one of its key projects at the time, and negotiations were undertaken with the Netherlands government.

Meanwhile, ADB had supported Japan to set up the NARBO (Network of Asian RBO) at the ADB office in Japan, so SASNET RBO was “absorbed” into the NARBO, with SAS losing an opportunity to strengthen its own RBO network.

The only concession given was that the Mahaweli Authority serves as a Vice President of NARBO, which had no significant benefit to the region, to either RWP or CWP.

****IIMI/IWMI. The International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) was established with its Headquarters in Sri Lanka in 1984 under an Act of Parliament based on an agreement with the Ford Foundation. In 2000, IIMI was renamed the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) by an amendment to the IIMI Act.**

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