

Asit K. Biswas



Photo: Revista Summa

Challenges the Global Status Quo on Water

Professor Asit K. Biswas, a tireless water proponent who constantly challenges the “status quo” and who helped foster a critical re-think among United Nations agencies, national governments, professional associations and others about how to improve delivery of water and sanitation services and management of our water resources, is the 2006 Stockholm Water Prize Laureate.

Professor Biswas is an Indian-born Canadian citizen and president of the Mexico

City-based Third World Centre for Water Management. The Stockholm Water Prize is a global award founded in 1990 and presented annually to an individual, organisation or institution for outstanding water-related activities. The activities can be within fields like education and awareness-raising, human and international relations, research, water management and water-related aid. The Stockholm Water Prize Laureate receives USD 150,000 along with a glass sculpture, which will be presented during the 2006 World Water Week in

Stockholm, August 20-26. HM King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden is the Patron of the Stockholm Water Prize.

A supporter of international collaboration

While many water experts have through the years contributed highly effective methodologies to the rational use and management of water resources, Professor Asit K. Biswas – as a science-driven water advocate – fostered a new “socio-economic and political climate” which enabled the effective translation of scientific (both natural and social) and technical advances into meaningful measures. His role as a global facilitator of international platforms where organisations and individuals can take concrete action on water, has taken many forms.

For example, as the main scientific advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Water Conference in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1977, Professor Biswas helped to formulate and promote the International Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. After approval of this initiative by the UN General Assembly, Professor Biswas advised

Citation

In its Citation, the international Nominating Committee, an independent body under the auspices of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, wrote of Asit K. Biswas:

“Professor Biswas is awarded the Stockholm Water Prize for his outstanding and multi-faceted contributions to global water resource issues, including research, education and awareness, water management, human and international relations in both developed and developing countries. While many highly-qualified experts in aquatic disciplines distinguish themselves as academicians, others as practitioners, others as government advisors, and others as writers and lecturers, Professor Biswas with his wide knowledge is highly recognised in all of these areas and, most importantly, has over a broad front applied his skills internationally, thereby adding new dimensions to the wise use and management of the global water resources.”

international and national institutions on how the Decade could be implemented. By all accounts, the Decade significantly improved the lives of millions of people in the developing world. During it, big strides were made in finding affordable technologies and participatory approaches to help serve those without access to improved water and sanitation services. The Decade also demonstrated conclusively that “business as usual” would never bring improvements quickly enough to cope with the backlog and provide access to growing populations. While conventional wisdom holds that water problems are similar in the developed and developing worlds, and that the same

of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. He managed to involve high-level personalities from most countries in the region to review and assess the water problems in the region face to face. The actual treaties on water issues between several countries were based on many of the recommendations of this Commission.

Finally, his concern with the fact that potential water leaders of the next generation are not being heard at major international forums inspired Professor Biswas to initiate a 3-year programme with the support of the Nippon Foundation, to select and mentor potential water leaders from all over the world who were below 40 years.

to six heads of United Nations agencies and to other intergovernmental and international organisations. The Third World Centre for Water Management, a “think tank” initially set up by Professor Biswas to give independent and authoritative policy and knowledge support to developing countries, also regularly advises many industrialised countries.

A prolific author

Professor Biswas founded the International Journal of Water Resources Development and continued as Editor-in-Chief for the past 21 years. He has been involved in the writing of 64 books, among them Water as a



Photo: SJWI

The 2006 Stockholm Water Prize Laureate, Professor Asit K. Biswas of the Third World Centre for Water Management, has worked hard to share his expertise with others.

solutions apply, Professor Biswas has always argued otherwise.

In another example, Professor Biswas, together with the former UN Undersecretary-General, Dr. Peter Hansen, reviewed the work of all the UN agencies for the Mar del Plata Conference and advised on how the impact of their water-related activities could be maximised.

Believing water is a source of collaboration and not conflict, Professor Biswas chaired the Middle East Water Commission from 1993 to 1997, with the support

The remarkable success of this programme is demonstrated by the fact that all the eight potential leaders he mentored now hold very senior positions.

A man of many roles

Many of his additional activities have also resulted in outstanding contributions to solve international and regional water problems. In his multi-faceted roles as a scientist and educator, he has acted as an advisor and confidant to policymakers in water and environmental management in 17 countries,

Focus for Regional Development, Integrated Water Resources Management in South and Southeast Asia and Water Institutions: Policies, Performance and Prospects.

Under his leadership, additional books on burning issues are presently in preparation, including Water Management in Mega-cities, Impacts of Large Dams and Poverty Alleviation and Water as a Human Right. He also published over 600 scientific and technical articles (mostly on interdisciplinary topics). Impressively, his work has been translated into 31 languages.