



# The Role of the Asia Pacific Water Forum

**Ravi Narayanan**

Chair, Governing Council, Asia Pacific Water Forum



Myanmar Delegates and APWF Members, 3rd APWS



Synthesis of Asia-Pacific regional process, 8th World Water Forum

The Asia Pacific Water Forum (APWF) has played a unique role in advancing water security in the Asia Pacific region since it was set up in 2006. This uniqueness has several features of importance.

First, it was set up at the suggestion of the assembled Water Resources Ministers of the region at the fourth World Water Forum in New Mexico in 2006 as a network to promote regional cooperation and share knowledge and experience in the water sector. Thus it not only had a broad basis of support from the Ministers, it benefitted from the visionary leadership of the late Mr. Hashimoto, a former Prime Minister of Japan. This was hugely strengthened by the unanimous decision of several influential organizations including the Asian Development Bank to request Mr. Yoshiri Mori, another former Prime Minister of Japan to become the President of the APWF and for the Japan Water Forum to provide the secretariat for this initiative. These early decisions gave the APWF a strong foundation and have since helped in maintaining a sense of continuity.

Second, from the beginning a decision to broad base the leadership of the Governing Council with members from Singapore, Indonesia and India (now also from China) gave the APWF a pan Asian identity which has been enormously helpful in strengthening its legitimacy as a truly regional entity. This has been further helped by the decision to keep the APWF as a lightly administered network with a consensual approach to decision making which has not only helped its reputation as lean entity but has also allowed the free and open participation of a number of internationally reputed organizations in its activities. The support of Singapore's Public Utilities Board (PUB) to support and host the regular Governing Council meetings is of great significance.

Third, the APWF has been and continues to be a focused network which concentrates its efforts, energies and resources on a few key initiatives. The development of the concept of Asia Pacific Water Summits which seek the commitment of the top political leadership of the region to advancing water security in the countries region has had a big impact, particularly since three Summits have been held in Beppu, Japan in 2007, Chiang Mai in Thailand in 2013 and Yangon in Myanmar in 2017 which have had the backing and support of the highest level of political leadership in the host countries. The role of coordinator of the region at four World Water Forums (in Turkey, France and Korea) since its

establishment in 2006 has given the APWF a recognition as the natural focal point for the region's engagement in water related issues.

The role of the APWF in working with the Asian Development Bank and other regional partners in the region in the development of three editions of the Asian Water Development Outlook has helped to promote an analytical basis for assessing water security in every country in the region, big or small.

These features have raised the profile of the APWF and some new opportunities for furthering its objectives have emerged. Among them is the new responsibility of acting as the coordinator of the Focus on Asia sessions at the prestigious Stockholm World Water Week. The engagement of a number of crucial ministries of Japan in the third Asia Pacific Water Summit in Yangon is very important since Japan has not only so much experience and knowledge to offer in all aspects of water security, Japan's support to developing countries in strengthening their water security plans and projects is unmatched by any other country.

These new opportunities as well the continued attention to existing commitments will be addressed provided we recognize the value of those attributes which have helped the APWF to progress to where it is today.

Surely the most important one has been the sheer commitment and hard work that has been and continues to be put in by the small and dedicated members of the APWF secretariat, actively supported by the leadership of the Japan Water Forum. As Mr. Mori remarked at the conclusion of the first Asia Pacific Water Summit in Beppu in 2007, the achievement of such a big and complex event by such a small team is truly an enormous tribute to their commitment and ability. That commitment and those abilities have not diminished in any way since then.

The mutual respect and trust that has developed between the APWF secretariat, the Japan Water Forum and the Governing Council and members of the APWF is also of great significance as we go forward.

The open style of engagement with members of the APWF which allows them opportunities to take on leadership roles in different roles of water security is another important and positive factor.

These attributes are not found everywhere, which is why we need to recognize and value them as we look forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

20th February, 2018