



# IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition 2019

Sri Lanka event provides an outstanding platform for water and development progress.

**B**illed as the largest water event in southern Asia this year, the IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition 2019 provided a powerful platform for progress on water and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It brought together some 3000 water sector professionals from 100 countries, representing key and influential organisations, to discuss and build alliances around the pressing water issues facing the world.

With millions of lives, the environment and economies all in need of sustainable solutions for pressing water problems, the event helped progress the opportunity of re-imagining sanitation and safe drinking water for all.

“The UN Sustainable Development Goals are inspiring water professionals

to re-imagine how they do water and sanitation. IWA believes it has a pivotal role in supporting the SDGs by sharing knowledge – the innovations in science and practice – that underpins a ‘new-normal,’” said IWA Chief Executive Officer Kala Vairavamoorthy.

**“ IWA believes it has a pivotal role in supporting the SDGs by sharing knowledge”**

**Kala Vairavamoorthy**  
IWA CEO

He continued: “Although the potential to do things differently in emerging areas exists, the window of opportunity to create a more

sustainable pathway is relatively small (5-15 years) and hence quick action is needed.”

Doulaye Kone, Deputy Director, Water Sanitation & Hygiene at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, drew attention to the need to look beyond traditional service delivery, highlighting the potential for non-sewered sanitation to help address the needs of the 4.5 billion people without access to decent sanitation. “I believe this is an opportunity for IWA members to really come together and think what is the next type of technology, the type of service model, the type of business model, that would actually enable a new industry to launch.”

The Congress together with its integral Exhibition provided a meeting space to inspire participants to transform water management and to bridge the gap between disciplines, →

The full programme included engaging panel discussions, including this one on diversity and equity



between theory and practice, and to present latest research and best cases.

## Crucial development themes

The Congress covered six themes: drinking water treatment and supply; faecal sludge and wastewater treatment for resource recovery; city water and faecal sludge utility management and services; integrated water resources management; and efforts towards SDG 6, the water SDG. The 59 sessions included those on: off-grid toilets and decentralised sanitation technologies; creating a new non-sewered sanitation industry; groundwater management and governance; antibiotic resistance in faecal sludge management; and capacity building and training approaches for water safety plans.

## Influential keynote insights

The quality and range of themes covered in Sri Lanka were reflected in the inspirational input from influential and expert keynote speakers, of which Doulaye Kone was one.

Utilities have a central role to play in ensuring water and sanitation needs are met. Dr Silver Mugisha, Managing

**“Gender equity is a non-negotiable human right... I believe water and sanitation can be the exemplar in this.”**

**Madhu Krishna**  
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Director at Uganda’s National Water and Sewerage Corporation, endorsed a ‘self help’ outlook, also combining technology to improve efficiency, staff engagement, cross-subsidy support for the poorest customers, and, in particular, collaboration. “We are no longer talking now of best practice, we are talking of next practice – a practice that is better than the way you are doing things. You can achieve this through collaboration.”

Dr Pay Drechsel, Strategic Programme Leader at the International Water Management Institute, drew attention to the need to connect water management in urban and rural areas. “To 2050, urban water demand will

increase by 80%. For the cities to cope with this, to address climate change, to address the population increase, it is very important to make the right investments,” he said. “Investments could be made in the agriculture sector... Improvement in irrigation use efficiency of just 10% could solve the water crisis of the cities.”

Dr Valerie Naidoo, Executive Manager at the Water Research Commission, South Africa, highlighted the importance of and the prospects for innovation. “The developing world, for it to reach the SDGs and to move basically into a more resilient space, will have to use innovations and the innovations ecosystem in a smart way,” she said. “You have to put some work around partnerships and collaboration, and a critical mass of funding and innovation development, in order for this to be realised.”

Madhu Krishna, Deputy Director, Global Growth and Opportunity at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, emphasised the important progress that needs to be made for women. “Women are not at the centre of decision making. They don’t have agency, or their voices are often

subdued, if heard at all,” she said. “Gender equity is a non-negotiable human right... In 2020, we shouldn’t be talking about gender equity, it should be taken for granted in our sector, and I believe water and sanitation can be the exemplar in this.”

Rosie Wheen, Chief Executive of WaterAid Australia, added a broader challenge for the sector – one she sees as key in making progress on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. “You can’t be what you can’t see. We have to reimagine the future and tell that story, and share those stories so that we can create a new possibility,” she said.

### A platform for participation

The Congress & Exhibition provided the opportunity for some significant interactions with and for participants.

Almost 100 people from the more than 50 institutions now participating in the Global Sanitation Graduate School initiative were present. The School extends training developed at IHE Delft through partner bodies around the world with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its goal is to train more than 10,000 sanitation professionals by 2030 by building a network of more than 100 partners.

“What we achieved during this Congress was a critical milestone in the development of this framework,” said Professor Damir Brdjanovic of IHE Delft.

There were some 80 delegates from the Water Harmony network, which aims to harmonise water education. It was initiated in 2012 by Professor Harsha Ratnaweera of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and has facilitated more than 20 IWA University memberships. The network includes more than 50 universities, and delegates included those from Central Asia, Ukraine, Moldova, Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

“They were overwhelmed by the programme and the social and professional networking, and returned home determined to involve more from their own universities and countries,” said Professor Ratnaweera.

## IWA Water and #DevelopmentCongress & Exhibition 2019 in numbers

**3142 participants**

**6 themes**

**59 sessions**

**122 poster presentations**

**27 workshops**

**4 forums**

**100 exhibitors**

**184,000 Tweet impressions**

Congress President  
Eng. Thilina Wijetunge,  
General Manager, Policy &  
Planning, NWSDB



The Congress also saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bangladesh Water Works Association (BWVA), representing a significant milestone in IWA’s ongoing collaboration with Bangladesh water professionals.

BWVA’s 15-strong delegation was led by the President Mr Md Anwar Hossain. Discussions in Colombo were around the formulation of the new chapter of IWA in Bangladesh, alongside BWVA becoming a Governing Member of IWA. BWVA also carried out a brainstorming session with the fellow members from Bangladesh with the IWA-BWVA partnership in mind.

### Recognising excellence

A highlight of the event was the presentation to two outstanding individuals of the 2019 IWA Development Awards for their contributions to progress on water needs in low- and middle-income countries.

The award in the research category went to Dr Miriam Otoo, formerly Research Group Leader – Resource Recovery and Reuse at the

International Water Management Institute in Sri Lanka, for her research on resource recovery business models for lower- and middle-income countries. The award in the practice category went to Sikandarsab Meeranaik, of the Sankalpa Rural Development Society, for his work on the development and implementation of rainwater harvesting systems in vulnerable dry regions.

Dr Otoo’s work goes beyond addressing the technical challenges of RRR and has influenced policy and adoption in international guidelines in LMIC. The scientific rigour, the real case studies that demonstrate the application of RRR business models, and the innovative approach to RRR in LMIC, together with the policy influence of the work developed, were the main supporting reasons for the jury’s unanimous decision.

Mr Meeranaik started the NGO, which installs rainwater harvesting recharge systems in bore wells in rural India and has, to date, implemented more than 1500. The low-cost technology implemented in extremely vulnerable dry regions was considered to epitomise the spirit of the IWA Development Award – Practice. The





The Congress gained from the full and vibrant participation of Young Water Professionals



Research category winner Dr Miriam Otoo

business model incentivises the transfer of funds from companies to farmers, having a strong direct impact in the communities served, as well as contributing to maintenance of food production in times of drought.

## Twin launches

The Congress also provided a fitting opportunity to mark the first World Water Loss Day, drawing attention to the need for greater action to reduce the estimated 346 billion litres lost every day from drinking water supply networks globally.

WWLD has been initiated by the Water Loss Specialist Group of the International Water Association. December 4th was chosen for WWLD since both the IWA Congress and this year's water loss event of the American Water Works Association were under way at the time.

"Water loss is a global issue. Although there are many successes to promote, there are also many more countries that need to start to reduce non-revenue water (NRW) in some way or form," commented Stuart Hamilton, Chair of the IWA Water Loss Specialist Group. "The idea of World Water Loss Day is to gain momentum and to get every country to participate

in reducing loss of this valuable product."

Also, there is growing interest worldwide in the use of nature-based solutions to mitigate and improve water availability and quality at the same time as benefiting nature. To help catalyse further progress, IWA and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) used the Congress as the opportunity to launch the publication 'Nature for Water: A series of utility spotlights', available as an Open Access book from IWA Publishing.

## From Sri Lanka, with thanks

During the closing session, Diane d'Arras thanked, in particular, the host country for staging a hugely successful event that marks the growing influence of IWA and the biennial Water and Development Congress & Exhibition series. She extended a special mention and thanks for support of the event to Sri Lanka's Ministry of City Planning and Water Supply, represented by Hon. State Minister Urban Development, Housing & Water Supply, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, and the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, represented by Thilina Wijetunge, General Manager, Policy & Planning.

Thilina Wijetunge, as Congress President, praised the spirit of all



Practice category winner Sikandarsab Meeranaik

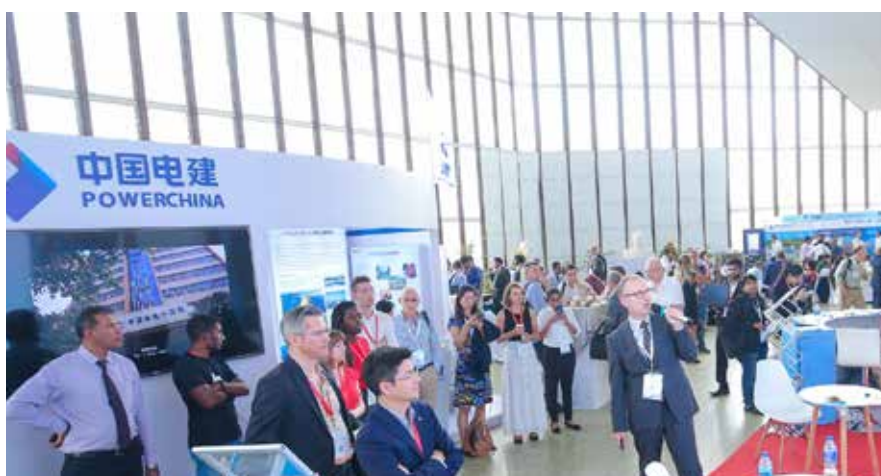
involved with delivering the event, noting how hosting of the Congress contributes to water progress as part of Sri Lanka's development. "When we look back now, there could not have been a better timing for this event," he said. "With a new government in place, and with boosting aspirations and spiralling hope, we are all looking forward to a new period of development and economic revival!"



**Official opening of the 2019 IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition**



**Networking in the exhibition area**



**More than 100 exhibitors showcased leading-edge technologies and projects**

## Exhibition

The Exhibition formed an important part of the overall IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition. It was the platform where companies, organisations and countries showcased leading-edge technologies and projects coming from more than 100 exhibitors.

The main sponsors of the event, PowerChina/SinoHydro, Wabag, Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and Lihero, had prominent and lively booths, which were visited by the event VIPs. With a strong global character, exhibitors from locations such as Japan, Turkey, Austria, UK, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, India, China, Hungary and Spain presented their solutions in their booths, and engaged in lively

discussions with delegates and established new business contacts. Host country Sri Lanka was represented by several government organisations, utilities, knowledge institutes, and technology providers.

A daily Business Forum programme took place within the Exhibition, showcasing best practices, latest projects and groundbreaking innovations from various exhibitors and experts. Among these best practices were solutions presented by Sri Lanka-based organisations (e.g. IWMI, Green Plan Lanka, IRHA, Romasha Engineering, and various Sri Lankan Ministries). They presented solutions focusing on a development context (e.g. water security through rainwater harvesting, sustainable use of land and

water resources). These Sri Lankan best practices were discussed in an international context to include global knowledge and know-how.

Isle Utilities coordinated the Emerging Technologies Programme and presented sustainable solutions for emerging economies.

## Feedback on the Exhibition

The International Water Association is pleased to report that, in the feedback received on the Exhibition, 100% of the exhibitors indicated the event was either as they expected or went beyond their expectations.

Several exhibitors were loyal and returning exhibitors in IWA's global event series, accessing the high profile of the delegates. The entire event had more than 3000 attendees, and more than 83% of the respondents rated the number of contacts above expectation. The exhibitors' weighted average mark was an 8 for this event (on a scale 1 bad – 10 excellent). Visitors rated this event with 4.4 stars out of a maximum of 5 stars.

The Exhibition of the IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition once again proved to be the networking and business place for the international water sector. We are excited to see the upcoming event, the 2020 IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark (18-23 October 2020), build on this success. ●