

# "The answer is Better-integrated water resource management"

An interview with Gabriel Eckstein, IWRA President

## Profile of Mr. Gabriel Eckstein, IWRA President

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The International Water Resources Association, established in 1971, is an international network that applies scientific policies and mobilizes various stakeholders to contribute to the achievement of global water resources goals. It also publishes policy reports and publications on various water issues. Currently, the IWRA is preparing for the XVII World Water Congress in Daegu, Korea in May next year. On the celebration of World Water Day (March 22), Future Eco interviewed the president of the IWRA. I asked him on world water issues - challenges in the global water sector and the water industry, the role of IWRA, and the World Water Congress etc.

## What is the future water resource plan of the International Water Resources Association?

IWRA has just adopted a new Board that will last for the next three years. We are therefore in the process of assessing and updating the future strategy of the association. IWRA has so far done some excellent work on the science-policy interface, water governance, water quality, and smart water management. We will continue to develop and grow as a platform for networking, knowledge sharing and advocacy for better water resource management across the world. We plan to expand our network even further into new parts of the world including Central and East Asia (with our XVII World Water Congress planned to take place in South Korea in May 2020) and Africa (with our close involvement in the 9th World Water Forum planned to take place in Dakar, Senegal in 2021).

**This year's World Water Day theme is 'leaving no one behind'. How does the IWRA think about the theme? In that regard, what business areas are the IWRA focusing on?**

This theme fits very well with Sustainable Development Goal 6: water for all by 2030. It is vital that we ensure everyone benefits from more secure access to water of suitable quality and quantity, but we know that today there are still billions of people who are still living without access to safe water, negatively impacting every part of their lives. We need to ensure that marginalized groups of people are not overlooked, or even face discrimination, as they try to access and manage the safe water they need. IWRA is collaborating this year with WaterLex and WIPO to hold the 1st World Summit on Leaving No One Behind. The Summit is a two-day event taking place in Geneva, Switzerland, where experts, academics, water professionals, and stakeholders from all disciplines will present their ideas, research and projects that could help solve some of the problems associated with identifying, including or supplying solutions for people that are being left behind regarding access to water and sanitation.

**The water sector, which is mostly affected by**

**climate change, requires close cooperation with many stakeholders. Please let us know if there is a representative cooperation project carried out by the IWRA in connection with the government, industrial or academic society.**

In the lead-up to the XVII World Water Congress taking place in Daegu, in May 2020, IWRA has been working closely with K-water to look at innovative smart solutions for water management. Building on the idea that you cannot manage what you do not measure, finding ways of better and more cheaply measuring water resources to allow real-time adjustments is critical to adapting to future changes not only in climate, but also in demographics (population growth and urbanization). We are continuing this collaboration by looking at real world examples of where smart water management is making a positive impact, not only in cities and wealthy countries, but also in rural communities and in poor countries.

**The number of disputed areas is increasing due to the interests**

**of each country in securing water resources. If this problem is neglected, it will increase the intensity of the war between nations. Are there any measures made by the Association to address this problem?**

IWRA maintains a neutral political position on all transboundary water issues. For example, we published a special issue of our journal *Water International* focusing on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which we launched publicly in Stockholm at World Water Week two years ago. The special issue was one of the most successful we have ever produced, in large part due to the non-political position we take. The issue was welcomed by high-level representatives from not only Ethiopia but also from Sudan and Egypt. IWRA advocates that developing stronger lines of communication across the science-policy interface can lead to better knowledge sharing, which can also build bridges across national borders.

**What challenges does the international community face in the water industry?**

Pollutants of emerging concern are

going to become an increasingly significant issue in the years to come. We are already seeing high levels of interest and concern in this subject from our colleagues in UN agencies and the other international organizations such as the OECD. We already have concerns about micro-plastics and chemicals entering the waterways that adversely affect both human and ecosystem health. With new chemicals and compounds being invented all the time, the risks associated with their release into the environment are hard to judge, especially when we are uncertain about how they will react with other compounds already being released, or that exist naturally in the nature. With the added pressures of climate change and an increasing demand for water generally, we need to find better ways to manage both emissions and treatment. Better-integrated water resource management is the answer.

**What do you think about the Korean water industry and what are the challenges and opportunities?**

Korea is taking a strong role

internationally in the water sector. It has the opportunity to take the lessons it has learned and the technologies it has developed to other parts of the world, especially developing countries. The economic development in the Republic of Korea over the past 50 years has been staggering, and this places Korea in a fairly unique position when engaging with developing countries, as the lessons you can share as a country are personal, based on your own experience. Korea has not always found the right answer straight away, but it is also continuing to adapt and learn. As a result, this is an exciting time for Korea on the world stage.

**There is still a view that we should be wary in using industrial and technological means in approaching water issues. What is your opinion on this?**

While it is true that sometimes the old tried and tested approaches of our ancestor are the best way forward, we live in a world that is changing faster than at any other point in human history, so we need to have flexibility and adaptability built into our water


treatment and supply systems to ensure better water security. This means better real-time monitoring and management. This means the use of technology. The challenge, especially for developing countries, is finding a cost-effective way of managing our water resources while trying to improve water security for all.

**Please introduce the XVII World Water Congress to be held by the IWRA in Daegu in May 2020.**

We are really looking forward to our next Congress taking place in Korea. This will be the first time that our Congress will be held in East Asia. The theme of the congress is “Foundations for global water security and resilience: knowledge, technology and policy”. The Congress is co-hosted by K-water, the Ministry of Environment, Daegu Metropolitan City and the Korea Water Resources Association. The Congress program will include high-level panels, presentations of the most up-to-date scientific research, and special session arranged by other international organizations. It will also provide

an ideal platform for researchers, professionals, experts, policy-makers, students, and stakeholders to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

**What do you expect from the WWC?**

The objective of the World Water Congress is to provide a meeting place to share experiences, promote discussion, and to present new knowledge, research results and new developments in the field of water sciences around the world. For almost five decades the World Water Congresses have provided an excellent and unique opportunity for the identification of major global themes concerning the water agenda, and for bringing together a large cross-section of stakeholders for the development and implementation of decisions in the field of water. I expect that the Congress in Daegu will be one of our largest in recent years with strong support from water experts in the region and from across the world. And I know that the hard work being put into the Congress by our Korean colleagues means that it will be an amazing event for all participants.  Press Heejung, Park