

Deep words, shallow words: An initial analysis of water discourse in 40 years of UN declarations

October 31 2011

UN University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health today published a study of the changing language related to water in high-level declarations from eleven UN conferences on water and the environment over the past forty years. Both deepening and shallowing of key terms were evident throughout the documents and the report suggests effective strategies for highlighting and strengthening key concepts.

"The vocabulary of water percolates into daily conversations worldwide, whether in relation to personal or societal survival, the status and health of the [global environment](#), or to water's importance in other realms of sustainable development including food and [energy security](#)," says UNU-INWEH Senior Fellow Dr. Alex Bielak, who co-authored the study with PhD student Dana Mount of the joint McMaster University/UNU-INWEH graduate diploma program, Water Without Borders.

"As a result, the words used to highlight important issues related to water also matter, particularly when used by experts or when they come with the endorsement of highly-regarded bodies like the United Nations, especially in the form of UN Declarations and Resolutions."

Themes covered include: [Water Scarcity](#), [Water Security](#), Desertification, Water Quality, Sanitation, Science and Technology, Poverty, Gender, Food, [Climate Change](#), and Health. Moreover, there is

a four page 'Summary for Decision Makers' which distills the lessons learned from a synthesis of water discourse over four decades of UN Declarations.

The report is a contribution by the Institute to the process leading up to Rio+20 - a global meeting of leaders in Brazil next June on the 20th anniversary of the landmark Earth Summit of 1992.

"We hope this study will facilitate the efforts of Ministers and policy makers to both build on and avoid unnecessary overlap with work done at previous meetings," says Dr. Bielak. "The findings of the report should assist drafters of future UN Declarations to ensure their outputs are effective, robust and reflect mindful and cumulative deepening of work undertaken at previous high-level meetings."

More information: The study can be downloaded here:

[www.inweh.unu.edu/River/docume ... epWords_ShallowWords %20_Mount&Bielak_FINAL_pdf_Oct_26_2011.pdf](http://www.inweh.unu.edu/River/docume...epWords_ShallowWords%20_Mount&Bielak_FINAL_pdf_Oct_26_2011.pdf)

and the Summary for Decision Makers here:

[www.inweh.unu.edu/River/docume ... pdf_Oct_28_2011.pdf](http://www.inweh.unu.edu/River/docume...pdf_Oct_28_2011.pdf)

Provided by United Nations University

Citation: Deep words, shallow words: An initial analysis of water discourse in 40 years of UN declarations (2011, October 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2011-10-deep-words-shallow-analysis-discourse.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.