

EU APPROACH TO WATER MANAGEMENT

THE EUWI INITIATIVE

ANDREJA ZULIM

World WATER DAY, 22 MARCH. EVERY YEAR WE CELEBRATE the day, every year we try to see what has been undertaken. Meetings were held, policies were written and projects were initiated. Where are we and what has been accomplished?

The statistics are worrisome; 71% of the Earth is covered by water and we still do not have enough; 1.1 billion people have no access to clean drinking water; when flushing the toilet we use approximately 47.7 litres a day; when taking a shower we use around 31.7 litres each time.

Various studies show differences between the usage of water in developed and developing countries. They question the way we use water, the reasons behind water scarcity, and its consequences. These three queries are currently the hot issues in the 'world of water'.

On 8 September 2000 the UN formed a declaration in which it calls for action in different fields promoting sustainable development, among which is the goal to establish environmental stability. More specifically, one of the goals is to "reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water".

However, there are doubts regarding how realistic and sustainable it would be to achieve this goal by 2015. Even if we achieve this goal, there will still be more than half a billion people without access to clean and potable water. The European Union (EU), a union of twenty-seven countries, decided to follow one of the UN Millennium goals and put it into practice through many projects.

EU Water policy has been changing since the Seventies and the most recent EU Water Framework Directive was introduced in 2000 as an answer to the UN Millennium goals.

The 'new' approach to water policies encompasses not only basic water policies but also approaches water problems by simultaneously integrating other policies, such as agriculture or navigation, into one framework.

The new model for managing water is based on river basins. Each basin is to be monitored and updated every six years on the criteria of minimum ecological protection and minimum chemical standards for all surface waters.

The Water Framework directive requires these criteria to be met in all EU countries by 2015 and includes a new regime for clean waters and minimum ecological and chemical standards.

Various organisations, such as European Trade Union Confederation or World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) demand access

to water as a fundamental human right. Demands are also directed at different authorities in the EU, asking for strict regulations in the agreed frameworks and the highest standards in the implementation of policies.

In order to achieve the objectives proposed by the UN concerning sustainable development in the world, the EU launched a Water Initiative (EUWI) in 2002 at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Thus, the EU Water directive was followed by the Initiative to help not only the EU countries, but also the world in general, based on the concept of river basins.

Integrated Water Resource Management is put into practice through diverse projects addressing problems in the 'water world' in order to achieve sustainable water management and meet UN Millennium goals by 2015.

The EUWI is based on a participative multi-stakeholder approach. It includes not only those directly involved, but also other members of civil society, govern-

ment, and the private sector. After the project was launched, working groups with different focuses were formed based on regions or specific themes.

Furthermore, working groups established goals that are to be met by the EUWI:

- ☞ Reinforce political commitment towards action and innovation oriented partnerships;
- ☞ Promote improved water governance, capacity building and awareness;
- ☞ Improve efficiency and effectiveness of water management through multi-stakeholder dialogue and coordination;
- ☞ Strengthen co-operation through promoting river basin approaches in national and transboundary waters;
- ☞ Additional financial resources and mechanisms to ensure sustainable financing identified.

● | IN BRIEF

WATER PROVERBS

“ Fire, water and government know nothing of mercy (Albania). ”

“ Gone water does not mill anymore (Mexico). ”

“ Blood is thicker than water (Italy). ”

To be able to implement EUWI goals, a great amount of funding is put into different projects, many of which are research projects. The EU funds them through Framework Programmes for Research and Development. Projects usually involve partners from different regions of the world, researchers, members of government, civil society and enterprises.

In both Bolivia and India, the EU project NEGOWAT tried to support and develop discussion which would lead to a fruitful solution for the all parties. NEGOWAT is just one of the examples of the many projects within the EUWI framework, many of which are very successful. Through these projects the EU does not give instant solutions to the problem, but instead tries to



Pouring clean water in Eritrea.

Other projects are funded within the EuropeAid framework and the ACP-EU water facility, as well as through different country partners.

One of the many projects funded through EUWI was a project aimed at facilitating negotiations over land and water conflicts in Latin American and Indian peri-urban upstream catchments and combining agent-based modelling with role-playing. France, UK, the Netherlands, Brasil, Bolivia and India were the involved partners. The project was undertaken in Chennai, India and Cochabamba, Bolivia. In India, they had a serious problem with domestic water supply to the area, and in Cochabamba, water was seen as a part of a conflict. This project tried to reconcile the parties involved, sitting them together around the same table and helping them negotiate the solution.

Cochabamba lacked a sewage system until 2001, when the US decided to invest in a water and sanitation project between two parts of the city. Communities in the city were not happy with the project, having water distributors on the one hand and irrigation users on the other hand. The conflict began in 2004, involving the army on both sides.

In the case of Chennai, the area needs a lot of work on water infrastructure and services on the one hand and on the other shows imbalance between water users and water providers. Large amounts of water are brought by tanker to the city by both public and private providers and due to water market differences problems arose.

involve all stakeholders in order to find the best solution for all those concerned. The constructive engagement of stakeholders is vital for the functioning of different regions and providing better solutions to water management problems.

EUWI projects, many of which are research projects, not only present research results to academia, but by involving the whole society, also provide an image of the social, economic, environmental and political situation as well.

We may say that the EUWI and other EU initiatives are too ambitious. They expect full commitment of all parties involved, regardless of whether they are in the EU or any other part of the world. However, without serious commitment, it is not possible to find solutions to the problems that are continuously arising. By investing both human and financial resources the EU demonstrates its important role and serious commitment to improving communication and enhancing cooperation leading finally to fruitful and successful solutions. ▣

S O U R C E S

United Nations Environment Programme.
 United Nations Development Goals.
 European Parliament, News on Health and Environment.
 EUWI - European Union Water Initiative.
 Directing the flow, a new approach to integrated water resource management.