



EU Water Initiative – State of Play After WSSD

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was a great success for the water sector. In particular, the adoption of the sanitation target – to complement the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on water supply – is one of the important concrete outcomes. But the adoption of the target to develop Integrated Water Resources Management plans by 2005 is also a big step forward.

The EU Water Initiative has been broadly recognized as one of the important political commitments to implement the agreed targets. At the WSSD the European Union and Africa signed a new strategic partnership on water affairs and sanitation at the Head of State level. A partnership between the EU and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) was also endorsed during the WSSD at the ministerial level.

Challenge to Achieve the Targets

The three agreed targets on water supply, sanitation and integrated water resource management are a big challenge for the international community. By the beginning of the 80s, the international community had already agreed that, through the framework of the "international water decade," everybody should have access to safe drinking water by the year 2000. The international community, however, failed to achieve this target. The EU Water Initiative wants to contribute to avoiding again by 2015 such a failure, with the associated severe effects on human health, poverty, economic development, peace and security.

Governments have an important responsibility, particularly those of developing countries. But it is now clearly agreed that it is everybody's business to achieve the targets – public and private sectors, civil society, local governments, etc. It became also clear that business as usual in development assistance of all bilateral and multilateral donors is not an option. With the EU Water Initiative, EU Member States and European Institutions give the strongest attention to these challenges.

To address these challenges the EU Water Initiative will:

- develop an overview of the situation in the different countries and regions, with an analysis of the biggest gaps and financial needs
- prepare a co-ordinated action program with a long term financial strategy that gives concrete stepping stones until 2015
- establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism in order to measure progress in implementation and to steer further action

The lack of governance in a large number of developing countries is a major threat for fast and effective action. Moreover, a piecemeal approach exists in development assistance without sufficient effective co-ordination mechanisms of the donors in place.

The EU Water Initiative started to develop approaches to overcome the outlined challenges and problems with a view to the Commission and the Member States, the partners in Africa, and the EECCA countries

as well as the involved stakeholders. Thus the EU has taken a leading role to push for a paradigm shift in developing policy and the implementation of the targets.

Approach of the Water Initiative

The vision is for the initiative to grow into a major driving force in achieving the targets and to contribute to poverty reduction, economic development and peace and security throughout the world. Under the initiative, the EU will work with its partners to:

- Reinforce political commitment to action and raise the profile of water and sanitation with a view to poverty reduction
- Promote better water governance arrangements, including stronger partnerships between the public and private sectors and local stakeholders and build institutional capacity
- Improve co-ordination and co-operation moving towards sector wide approaches, establishing multi-stakeholder processes to reinforce partnerships for action, and promoting South-South collaboration and co-operation
- Develop regional and sub-regional co-operation by assisting in the application of Integrated Water Resources Management, including transboundary waters to contribute to sustainable development and conflict prevention
- Develop additional and innovative funding mechanisms and catalyze additional funding

Priority Regions

Africa and the Newly Independent States

(NIS) were identified as first priority regions, and for each region thematic priorities were established. The Mediterranean became the third priority region at WSSD. The modular approach enabled the initiative to develop appropriate responses for different geographical regions and their priorities.

Moreover, close contact with the partner regions was established in order to ensure that the initiative is shaped through response to demand rather than being pre-determined. The initiative was shaped in a transparent way and is centered on a policy of equal partners working toward common objectives and targets. The initiative seeks to encourage the expansion into other geographical regions. As the initiative grows it will provide a mechanism to learn from existing partnership initiatives and to encourage replication of successful factors in other geographical regions and thematic areas.

Major Phases Defined

Two major phases were defined for the initiative: a design and an implementation phase. After the launch at WSSD, the design phase of the initiative will continue during the lead up to the 3rd World Water Forum to be held in Japan, March 2003 and the following month. This period will be used to complete the identification of building blocks, to identify gaps, to formulate action programs, and to consolidate partnerships. Recommended financing strategies for identified components will also be developed during this design phase.

The period between the WSSD and the 3rd World Water Forum provides an opportunity for other stakeholders and partners to commit to the principles of the initiative and to come forward with potential building blocks (projects, programs, partnerships and alliances) which reinforce the overall goals and those of individual components.

Organization

The development of the initiative is organized in a transparent way with a Multi-Stakeholder Forum as the main body to shape the EU Water Initiative. The forum is an informal working body chaired by the European Commission and open to all relevant stakeholders and the international financing institutes, UN agencies, further governments and other stakeholders.

Working groups for all components, which are under the leadership of a Member State, were established to work directly with

the partners in the regions. The working groups are responsible to develop the action programs for the regional components and report to the Multi-Stakeholder Forum.

The core regional working groups are currently led by Denmark (Working Group for the African water supply and sanitation component), France (Working Group for the African IWRM/Transboundary component), and Greece (Working Group for the Mediterranean component).

The development of a Latin American component is being considered together with Portugal and Spain. The working groups are open to all partners and will promote the establishment of multi-stakeholder processes in the partner regions, in close cooperation with existing organizations. For example, in Africa the working groups liaise with the African Water Task Force under the umbrella of African Conference of Water Ministers (AMCOW).

Moreover, the two working groups on the two important cross cutting issues finance and research have been established. They are led by the United Kingdom (Working Group for development of the financial strategy) and the European Commission's Directorate for Research Trade and Development (Working Group for the research component).

Finance

The EU, being the largest donor in the field of water with an average 1.4 bn /year, wishes to serve as a major driving force to meet the Millennium Development Goals related to water. In responding to the priorities of partner countries and recalling its commitments made in Monterrey, the EU is ready to increase and deliver these resources over the following years within the context of countries' efforts to reduce poverty in the framework of sustainable development.

In addition to better co-ordination for improved efficiency of water-related activities, the Initiative will also develop innovative funding mechanisms to attract additional financial resources and partners, as a basis for sustainable financing for water.

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International Year of Freshwater in 2003

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater in its resolution 56/192. Activities for "WaterYear2003" are being coordinated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNESCO and UNEP. The Year seeks to raise awareness and promote action regarding the vital importance of freshwater issues in today's world. Access to water and the improvement of water management are directly linked to poverty eradication, biodiversity, public health, agriculture and world gender issues. Water is a critical element that ties together all areas of sustainable development.

The issue of access to water resources was widely discussed at the recent World Summit of Sustainable Development, and is in fact regarded as one of the success stories of the Summit. However, there is still much to be done on disseminating the important messages surrounding wise water use and preservation of the world's water resources.

Through the establishment of partnerships with specialized agencies, civil society actors and private sector participants the Year aims to raise awareness of water issues through distribution of materials to schools and museums, organizing freshwater related events, producing informative brochures, websites, etc. The activities of the Stockholm International Water Institute will be part of the International Year of Freshwater.

The launch of the International Year of Freshwater, will take place December 12, 2002 in New York. It is being co-hosted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Division for Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information, who are seeking to mobilize support from various groups throughout the world for important activities such as production of educational materials, support for water projects and publicity campaigns, among others.

Contact wateryear2003@un.org or wateryear2003@unesco.org for more information about participating.

