

Report on the working group meeting on Water Use and Management. May 10, 2005-05-11

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All participants : Round table of self introduction

Agenda of the meeting:

- General discussion onto Water Use and Management (WUM)
- Definition of themes to be addressed by the so-called Centre of Excellence (CoE), definition of CoE
- Addressing the questions submitted to the working groups by the Nepad secretary
- Addressing specifically the mechanisms and processes which would guide the establishment of CoE

General discussion onto Water Use and Management

Current context of WUM:

Decentralization, public sector withdrawal, need for new public-private partnerships, need for more users' participation, a concern on cost recovery, demographic and industrial growth, plus urbanization trends result in more users, and increasing diversity of uses, while water resources do not grow as fast, need for proper data sets, measurements on what has to be managed, i.e. resource and demand.

Reasons / societal motives that back up the need for research onto WUM:

- There's often not enough water for all users; this calls for water sharing and allocation strategies, trade-offs, negotiations; this sometimes triggers conflicts;
- Human activities and infrastructures are exposed to water-related hazards (droughts, floods, economic risks); this calls for forecasting approaches, risk evaluation, monitoring and management;
- Some users cannot afford water and water-related services, whereas water supply has a cost, and water use results in benefits that vary much between users / sectors; this calls for strategies, financial management economic evaluation, tariff system setup, etc.

WUM can be addressed through the following framework:

Different uses (extractions, consumptions):

- Domestic
- Agricultural
- Industrial

Plus a series of non extracting uses (ecological reserve, international obligations, leisure, fishing, stream flow reduction, storage etc.).

Different sustainability concerns:

- social, employment, equity and participation concerns;
- economic growth and efficiency concerns;
- environmental concerns

Different stakeholders:

- users, citizens and tax-payers
- decision makers
- operators, managers

Three concepts have been clarified:

Water demand: amalgamation of all needs expressed by users

Water consumption: water used that is not released in the short term into the overall water cycle (e.g. evaporation, evapotranspiration)

Water extraction: water used which is released back in the environment in the short term (e.g. domestic use, most industrial uses)

Principles of the Dublin conference 1992 are also reminded as background principles for WUM:

- Access to clean water for domestic purposes is a basic human right
- Users should have a word and participate to WUM decisions
- WUM should be more gender-sensitive, owing to the central role of women in developing countries
- Water should be considered an economic good, since it is an input to many productive processes, and water supply comes at a cost which has to be covered.

Discussion onto the proposed sub themes on WUM (document provided by Nepad secretary) The sub theme on water productivity appears to be out of scope. It is at the moment heavily agriculture-oriented, and supposes that CoE should address the issues of improved crop varieties (drought resistant, etc.). First, other sectors must also increase their water productivity, second, the group felt that such investigations should be carried out by other entities, and not by the CoE on water S&T.

Besides, some other topics are not mentioned at the moment, and should be included:

- Water economics and institutions
- Rainwater harvesting and management, runoff management
- Global changes and WUM, adaptations, etc.

Then the group shifted to a discussion on CoE (afternoon)

The group first recapped and reformulated the initial ideas around CoE, as expressed by Nepad:

- some form of networking already in place
- viability as a prerequisite, in financial terms, on equipment and staff matters,
- academic and scientific soundness
- yet, openness to civil societies

As a consequence the group confirms that this supposes to rely on existing centers and networks. Yet, these existing centres cannot be taken as is, and stand alone as new Nepad CoE. They must network further. WUM calls for multidisciplinary.

A key question remains then as to what would be the incentive, what would be the benefits / advantages of those organizations to join another level of networking?

The group agreed that first and foremost the network of CoE must share a community of interest, common goals, projects and objectives.

Further more, these projects must not remain general (e.g. WUM, data collection), but rather must be unpacked, focussed and clear (e.g. rainwater harvesting, water economics, impact of global changes, etc.)

Another aspect is that all individual organizations should also see immediate benefits in grouping / networking further.

This can include equipment sharing (saving and economies of scale), documentation and data sharing (those with libraries and databases can help those less endowed), staff exchanges (for skill acquisition, capacity building purposes).

These aspects, plus the fact that WUM issues vary a lot throughout Africa, calls for a regional approach to the establishment of networks of CoE.

In terms of the necessary means to achieve such establishment, the group acknowledged the current lack of sufficient information in term of funds availability.

The group suggested to operate on a scenario basis:

- base scenario may involve the mere strengthening of existing networks of CoE (e.g. just allowing for increased communication, exchanges, workshopping, common websites, etc.)
- intermediate scenario might include some communication or capacity building innovations (e.g. setting up short courses, curricula, training sessions, distance education schemes, etc.)
- then more ambitious and costly scenarios, including equipment acquisition, possibly buildings, etc.