

Mutual trust and understanding the real needs of communities are key to achieving water cooperation

10 January 2013, Zaragoza, Spain – Mutual trust and understanding the real needs of communities have been emphasized as key factors for successful water cooperation by the participants of the International UN-Water Conference on water cooperation which took place from 8 to 10 January in Zaragoza, Spain.

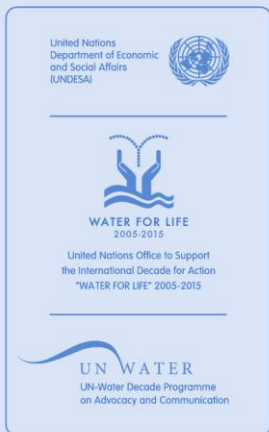
The participants shared a wide range of initiatives, including experiences in rural and urban areas, and cases at country and basin level, to identify lessons learned and key success factors. The need for cooperation was highlighted as critical for sustainable water management.

Micro-irrigation practices and experiences from water user associations and small communities in Peru, Kenya, Guatemala, Bolivia, Madagascar, Ethiopia and India, examples of multisectoral collaboration in different cities around the world, and partnerships between public and private actors have been discussed.

Cases from Kenya and Bolivia demonstrated that the existence of a legal framework to support the creation of collective water management is important but it is implementation which is determinant. To actually realize cooperative water management, the implementation of a system of incentives and penalties is also required. While political will enables the development of laws and regulations, implementation should come from local organizations and institutions.

Identifying appropriate solutions can be hampered by differences in perceptions, as demonstrated by specific cases in Peru and Kenya, where projects failed because irrigation technologies were imposed without taking into consideration traditional practices and perspectives.

While financing is important and water user associations are often created through development cooperation funds, it should be complemented by cooperation and mutual support between sectors and users to become sustainable.



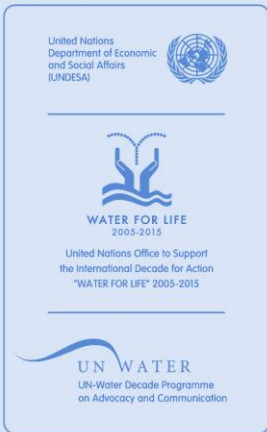
“Trust forms the foundation on which the house of water cooperation can be built. We should invest in generating trust” declared Victor Viñuales, director of the Spanish NGO Ecology and Development (ECODES), who has participated in this conference.

Overexploitation of aquifers was one of the other main themes in which the collective management by organizations such as water user associations has been recognized as essential. In cases such as the aquifer of the Bajo Llobregat in Spain, the fact that all stakeholder felt the urgent need for cooperation was the key success factor for sustainable basin management. Presenters of this and other cases emphasized the importance of building relationships between water user communities and authorities based on mutual respect and avoiding paternalistic attitudes.

According to Brice Lalonde, Executive Coordinator of Rio+20 at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs “We are entering the era of water reuse. Particularly in cities, water reuse is imperative”. Learning how to cooperate to recycle water among different users and sectors is crucial for providing access to safe sanitation to the 2.6 billion people who are currently lacking this basic service.

On the last day of the Conference, the Spanish case was analyzed. International participants gained insights on participatory processes implemented in the Ebro River Basin with the Basin Authority model as an example which can inspire other countries. Other shared examples of cooperation and collaboration between organizations included the Spanish Cooperation Fund for Water and Sanitation, and a number of solidarity projects and participatory processes in the regions of Aragon and Navarra in Spain.

Political will, legal frameworks, accountability and institutional structures provide a solid foundation for water cooperation. “Achieving water cooperation is the result of a long term process which requires time, patience and mutual trust” summarized Josefina Maestu, director of the UN Office to support the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ 2005-2015 when closing the Conference.



The Conference was organized by the United Nations Office to support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015/UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC).

The Water for Life Decade 2005-2015. *The primary goal of the 'Water for Life' Decade is to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments on water-related issues by 2015. These commitments include the Millennium Development Goal to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015, and to stop unsustainable exploitation of water resources.*

www.un.org/waterforlifedecade

The United Nations Office to support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015 based in Zaragoza, Spain, implements the **UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC)**. UNW-DPAC facilitates and implements communication, information and awareness-raising activities in the framework of the 'Water for Life' Decade. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) hosts and leads the Office www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/unwdpac.shtml

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