

€200 million boost for water and sanitation in developing countries announced at EU Water Initiative forum

Representatives from all over the world presented results and discussed future developments of the EU Water Initiative (EUWI) during the multi-stakeholder forum, held in Stockholm under the umbrella of the World Water Week. European Union development aid to the water and sanitation sector has doubled since 2002, and the European water facility has been boosted with an additional €200 million focusing on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

A third of the world's population does not have access to safe drinking water and has poor or non-existent sanitation. The EU is strongly committed to improving access to water and sanitation all over the world. The new 2009 EU water initiative (EUWI) Annual Report shows that European institutions have doubled their support to the sector since 2002 and that there is a changing trend from assisting large water supply and sanitation systems to basic systems (from 22% of the aid in 2007 to 37% in 2009), signalling an increased focus on the most in need of water and sanitation. The average amount spent in the sector by all EU donors is over one billion euro annually.

During the multi-stakeholder forum, EU Member States, partner countries, civil society, the private sector and local governments from more than 30 countries reviewed progress made by the EUWI and during round-table discussions outlined priorities for the future. The European Commission announced phase two of the ACP-EU Water Facility, setting aside €200 million to help to tackle the water and sanitation problems in the ACP countries. It will begin a call for proposals at the beginning of 2010.

Antonio García Fragio, chair of the forum and Commission representative, opened the discussions by stating that "in view of the current situation of economic crisis and climate change challenges, it is only if all concerned actors work together that we will achieve economically and environmentally sustainable development. We have to act now to help the poorest people on the planet and to prepare for future generations".

Prof. Kairu from the Africa Civil Society Network on Water & Sanitation (ANEW) commented that, "the EUWI grant has allowed ANEW to bring together hundreds of representatives from African civil society to discuss critical water and sanitation issues". He added, "we look forward to collaborating with EUWI to manage the high demand from civil society to deal with the challenges ahead".

The Swedish EU Presidency, represented by Mia Horn af Rantzien, deputy Director General of Sida, also stressed the increased need for management of water resources in the face of climate change and emphasised the importance of making aid more effective.

One of the main aims of EUWI is to improve aid to help the poorest countries of Africa, where internationally agreed goals are far from being reached. During the forum, Mr Bai-Mass Taal, Executive Secretary of the African Minister Council of Water (AMCOW) underlined that, "we want EU to wholly embrace Africa's needs for water and sanitation, and to improve and strengthen the partnership that already exists between us".

The forum also brought attention to one of the major challenges in the Mediterranean countries, waste water management, which directly affects health, economy and agriculture in the region. Concerning the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region, discussions focused on promoting good governance of river basins in the context of climate change to prevent droughts and floods.

An important part of EUWI implementation, and essential tools for effective knowledge management among the international water community are the new information systems, <http://www.euwi.net/> (EUWI) and <http://www.aquaknow.net/> (Aquaknow) developed by the European Commission's in-house Joint Research Centre, JRC. The European Commission, its JRC and the EUWI partners will issue on Aquaknow Water Guidelines for practitioners which will be used by the African and Latin American Centres of Excellence on Water.