

EU Water Initiative – Research Component

Review of international S&T cooperation projects addressing integrated water resources management – Lessons to be learnt Terms of Reference

Background

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) became an influential concept over the last 10 or more years due to increasing understanding of global/climate change, ecosystem functioning, impact of water resources management on poverty and social welfare, public awareness etc.

Among others, the Global Water Partnership defines IWRM as ‘a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.’

The different definitions of the basic concept have in common that they recognise that water’s natural and socio-economic functionalities transcend sectoral approaches to planning, intervention and management and thus also disciplinary boundaries of knowledge. The concept borrows thus heavily from the four dimensions of sustainable development, ecological/natural, social, economic and institutional that need to be addressed concomitantly, if durable solutions are to be achieved.

These principles are enshrined in the water-related objectives of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), when reference is made in Art. 25 through 29 to the development of integrated water resources management and national water efficiency plans by 2005 (Art. 26). Many of these principles should be developed and applied at basin level, and in the case of ‘virtual water’, perhaps even beyond. They also imply participation of diverse social actors, if not, in principle, all citizens, in integrated water management processes. These principles and associated targets are supported by the EU Water Initiative.

Despite the highest level of political endorsement, translating IWRM in practical terms faces considerable difficulties due to potentially substantial conceptual and organisational adjustments, financial investment and capacity building it entails across the board. Collaborative research and development projects are no exception in regards to this. Adequate institutional frameworks to plan and manage the ecological, economic and social dimensions of common public goods, such as water, are either insufficiently developed or lack integration. The study, development and management of these goods do not yet systematically rise to the challenge of integrated analysis and commonly agreed proposals for action.

Conversely, in the face of a localised problem of a well-defined nature, such as a point source of water pollution, it might not be necessary and even wasteful to evoke a full set of IWRM activities mobilising stakeholders from across the basin. Rather the point source should be attacked at local level. However, even minimal understanding of basin ecology indicates that a simple storm or flash flood may be sufficient to generate considerable impact of diffuse pollution, not to mention public health and economic effects.

Objectives of the review

The Community and others have made large investments into IWRM research at full or partial river basin level both in Europe and with partners from other parts of the world. It is time to take stock of where we stand by now, what we have learnt and what are likely to be the most useful and cost-effective ways to invest in this arena at least until 2015, the target year of the JPoI and the EU Water Initiative.

The objectives of the review are to:

- Review approaches, results and impacts of collaborative research projects aiming at IWRM with emphasis on EU framework programme projects;
- Analyse the lessons learnt and the strengths and shortcomings identified during the review, with particular emphasis on barriers for implementing IWRM principles in the interfaces between creation of knowledge and its use;
- Derive argued orientations on where future investment, research and innovation efforts and policy actions are likely to have the highest impact by building on identified strengths and addressing weaknesses;

Impact can take different forms ranging from pushing the knowledge frontier and influencing education and training of future generations of teachers and scientists to helping to solve societal problems associated with water use, allocation and management. It is often difficult to attribute such impact to a single project and impact times can be quite long. This review may thus not be able to develop this point in great depth, but should address it to the extent possible.

Expected Results include

- a technical report
- a policy brief
- a brochure for wider public dissemination

in order to facilitate better structured learning processes at various levels.

Scope and implementation modalities

The scope of the review covers up to 50 international collaborative research projects which have either been completed or are in an advanced stage of implementation with documentation readily available. In a parallel development, a collaborative research project (NeWater) funded as part of the thematic priority 'Global Change and Ecosystems' will focus on in depth analysis of mostly European collaborative research projects. Cross-fertilisation between the two efforts will be ensured.

The review will be mostly based on desk analyses, with limited consultation of selected project partners and other stakeholders. The most significant of the collaborative research projects focused on other parts of the world are candidates for forming the basis of the review process.

The review team will be composed of recognised personalities in various fields related to IWRM, five each from Europe and from other regions of the world. If required mirror groups in other parts of the world can be convened to help scrutinise and refine the analyses and orientations. Professional, geographical/cultural and gender diversity is considered an important precondition for a solid output. At least one person with a journalistic background will also be 'embedded' in the team to facilitate the reporting.

The review team will have four to five opportunities for direct cooperation through meetings

- two meetings of one working week, up to two meetings of three working days respectively in Europe - these should enable finish the bulk of the panel's reporting by end of 2005;
- one meeting in March 2006 at the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico to present the results and interact with Forum participants.

Details of working methodology to ensure effective and efficient organisation of the review process will be established at the very beginning by the team in agreement with the sponsors.

The panel is invited to seek interaction with a mirror group of personalities active in IWRM in different parts of the world to validate their findings and recommendations. This mirror group is to be set up at the beginning of the review process.

It is desirable that staff of different interested services of the supporting institutions, in particular the EC and the EUWI Research Group, but also interested Member States, interact with the review panel in order to support its work, but also have the opportunity to learn from the process for their own work to the extent possible. To this effect, two half day meetings at the end of the first and second one-week working meetings may be set aside for such interaction, if considered useful by all concerned.

It is intended that the team will present and discuss its reports and findings in a session at the 4th World Water Forum in March 2006 in Mexico together with the findings of the European study.

The Commission will cover a standard honorarium, travel and per diem costs for the review team as well as the publication costs.