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Reviewers recommend constructive engagement of water researchers in FP7

The EC entrusted the review of some 60 international scientific cooperation (INCO) projects related to integrated water resources management to a panel of 10 eminent scientists. The review aimed at learning about strengths and weaknesses of past research and guide future investments. The panel found that INCO had a structuring effect on water research in tune with evolving understanding of the political processes underlying allocation of increasingly scarce resources. There is evidence of positive impact on strengthened human and institutional capabilities in partner countries and regions. The panel recommends to prioritise research in FP7 that addresses the need for constructively engaged integrated water resources allocation and management. Such research should investigate why societal perceptions that drive water allocations are out of step with fundamentals in ecosystems and the economy and what could be done to support more sustainable strategies.

This review is part of the EU Water Initiative's support to the water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve the proportion of people without access to safe water and basic sanitation in the context of an integrated approach to water resources management. The panel developed an innovative analytical approach to deal with about 60 projects dealing with such problems in different continents and regions of the world, including Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Latin America, Mediterranean, Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The greatest strength of the research investment was increasing and structuring effects on the type of research invested in. By emphasising integration across disciplines and participatory approaches engaging other social actors in society, INCO research had good potential to becoming more relevant to difficult water allocation problems than ordinary disciplinary-based research. Positive impacts were most visible on build up of human and institutional capabilities in partner countries, but also in Europe. Economists recognise that human 'capital' is a central precondition to bring about any form of development. But feedback on impact of projects also show that this takes more time than generally imparted to individual projects. The best impacts became visible, when successive projects driven by a core of excellent researchers integrated more teams and disciplines to address more dimensions of sustainable water use under scarcity conditions. Social roles of women and men differ greatly in their relations to water in most societies and these are becoming better addressed in recent projects.



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The greatest weakness of the research investment was its relatively low capability to connect the research through suitable communication and constructive engagement with social actors in society. These, ranging from government, private sector to social society movements, are often found to have perceptions of the water problems which are at variance with the underlying environmental and economic fundamentals most researchers study. Communication was found weakest with governments and private sector.

Addressing this gap more explicitly should be a priority particularly of international scientific cooperation in FP7, but even more in general. This would be crucial to increase the research contribution to the EU's Strategy for Sustainable Development of Europe and in the world.

Contacts for further information: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/water-initiative>
DG RTD Press Officer: Mr. Michael Wappelhorst (Michael.wappelhorst@cec.eu.int)
DG RTD Scientific Officer: Dr. Cornelia E. Nauen (cornelia.nauen@cec.eu.int)