

World Water Council

Founding Congress of the *United Cities and Local Governments* organization

Conclusions and proposals of the WWC workshop on
local management of water

Paris, May 3, 2004

The importance of local authorities

According to one of the Dublin principles adopted in 1991, water must be managed at the lowest appropriate level. Local authorities are therefore the most appropriate institutions to assume the responsibility of providing water supply and sanitation. To do so, the existing decentralisation programs implemented by several countries must continue and local authorities must be provided with the means to attract and reinforce the necessary human and financial resources.

In a more general way, the workshop insisted on the needs for a good coordination between the various institutional levels. The country level must provide a general legal, financial and political framework, while local authorities should focus on the implementation at the local level. A general framework such as that of river basin organizations is important in order for the various actors to be able to arbitrate between the various uses and the protection of the resource.

Governance

All speakers agreed on the need for a good governance of water. Different mechanisms (including various forms of public-private partnerships) have been tested by local authorities and are feasible under the following conditions:

- The management of the resource is inalienable and remains under the control of the public sector.
- Water supply and sanitation services must also remain under the control of the public and political sector, the only authority entitled to arbitrate the different usages in a legitimate way. Also, the public sector can usually have access to the capital at a lower cost.
- Public authorities or their delegates must ensure a transparency of the costs and recovery. Water (and in particular provision for maintenance) must also as much as possible finance water.
- All local actors, consumer communities, water professionals, elected representatives must be involved.

It was suggested that the new organization United Cities and Local Governments should prepare and promote a charter, which would manage the relationships and the roles of the different water actors.

Financing

Financing difficulties are at the top of the problems encountered, especially by local authorities. The mobilisation of additional resources to reach the Millennium Development Goals is necessary and it is important that financing mechanisms that are appropriate and accessible to local authorities be developed.

Local authorities can act, first of all, by establishing sustainable and socially acceptable mechanisms of cost recovery. Systems of crossed subsidies, the richest subsidizing the poorest have already been established by a great number of local authorities and can still be developed. Furthermore, specific mechanisms of North-South solidarity should be developed following the example of the mechanism of the water cent proposed by French senators or innovative taxation systems, such as on military expenses.

Improving management and increasing the importance given to sanitation

The management of many water supply and sanitation networks still leaves a lot to be desired, which generates significant losses in the case of sanitation higher rates of pollution of resources. An improved management must be among the priorities of the managers and the local authorities in charge.

It is also essential that sanitation get the recognition it deserves. Too often it is not sufficiently recognized despite the importance it represents for health of populations in particular the most disadvantaged.

Recommendations for the newly formed Local Authorities World Organization

The workshop firmly supported the need for an improved representativity of local authorities within international institutions, in order to enhance their importance and role. In this objective, the workshop recommends the establishment of a Commission dedicated to water within the new organization of United Cities and Local Governments. This Commission should facilitate the exchange of experiences between local authorities and contribute to increasing their role.

The World Water Council invited all the participants and especially the new organization of United Cities and Local Governments to actively contribute to the preparation of the 4th World Water Forum, which will be held in Mexico in March 2006.