

Report on GWA representation in the Regional Workshop on Optimisation for Sustainable Water Resources Management (OPTIMA).

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13 June 2007-CS

Introduction

The OPTIMA workshop was held on 28 and 29 May 2007 in Qawra, Malta and hosted by IRMCo. (Anna Spiteri and Dirk De Ketelaere)

Aims and Approach of OPTIMA

The main aim of this EU sponsored FP6 research project is to develop, implement, test, critically evaluate and exploit an innovative, scientifically rigorous, yet practical approach to water resources management. The approach equally considers economic efficiency, environmental compatibility, and social equity as the pillars of sustainable development.

The research is carried out in 7 case studies across the Mediterranean and involved river basins in the following countries: Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The Workshop

Aims

With the project nearing its end (July 07) the OPTIMA regional workshop was held to draw attention to comparable or similar river basin management issues, and how these have been tackled through an active process of participatory stakeholder involvement.

The GWA was invited to address the importance of gender involvement in water resources management through 2 presentations and the roundtable discussions.

Participants and Programme

The 31 participants (9 female) of the workshop consisted of the OPTIMA partners and the stakeholders, the invited speakers and organising staff.

The partners were professors from universities, heads of research centers and consultants from private companies, who provided all the necessary data to test and run the basic water simulation model, while the stakeholders came from related ministries, universities and NGO's who were instrumental in the identification and prioritization of main problems and issues, and observed if the performance of the basic simulation model structure did indeed reflect the problem statements.

The invited speakers held the following introductory presentations:

- ‘What’s at Stake: Managing Stakeholders or Stakeholding Managers?’, by Hakan Tropp, Project Director, UNDP Water Governance Facility, SIWI, Sweden.
- ‘What is Gender, and why is it important in water management’, by Chrisje van Schoot, Gender and Water Alliance, The Netherlands
- ‘UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project – trans-boundary co-operation, nutrient reduction and WFD implementation’, by Peter Whalley, DRP, Austria
- ‘Optimisation of technical, social-economic and environmental efficiency in irrigation management: the role of new technologies’, by Anna Osann Jochum, UCLM, Spain.
- ‘How to mainstream Gender in water management’, by Chrisje van Schoot, GWA, the Netherlands.

Apart from an on-line demonstration of the computer simulation water model, partners and stakeholders presented their research work and conclusions on drawing up the Problem Statement, the Baseline Scenario and how stakeholders were involved in developing the Alternative Scenarios in relation of the model in the 7 different river basins. During the three roundtable discussions the issues centered around the methods of engaging the stakeholders and the relationship between the partners and the stakeholders; the legislative and socio economic aspects and the gender perspective; and the dissemination strategy during and after OPTIMA.

The GWA input

Introducing and creating awareness for Gender, explaining gender concepts, drawing attention to its importance in water management and indicating practical ways how to mainstream gender in the water sector, during this highly technical workshop with mainly water scientists, and engineers, was indeed a big challenge. Since the start of the project, when the idea of involving stakeholders had been questioned, they had come a long way and the organisers of the workshop took the big leap of including gender in the workshop’s programme. The reactions on the presentations were mixed, ranging from high acclaim that the issues had been brought forward and explained, new things had been learned, how sad it was to hear about the effect of gender imbalances with water management, to polite listening or the denial the gender issues did exist in the area where that particular participant came from. Other comments were that Gender issues were too simple for scientists, that there were hardly any examples of gender inequality of the western world being presented, that in the Middle East women are very much and more respected than in Europe and that more specific suggestions of mainstreaming gender particularly appropriate for the participants working life would be welcomed. During the informal gatherings outside the conference room, gender was regularly brought up in conversations and a hot topic in passionate discussions.

After the workshop, the organizers concluded that the inclusion of the gender topic had been a success as they stated that: “the presentations made certain discussions possible for the first time in OPTIMA and emails are flying around trying to grasp what still could be done in the context of gender and water in the last month of OPTIMA.”

All participants took copies of the CD roms (Gender in Water Management/Resource Guide; For Her it's the Big Issue, GWA Publications and Background Documents; Why Gender Matters/Tutorial for Water Managers; Effective Gender Mainstreaming in Water/ From Guidelines to Practice) and the GWA leaflet. Many of them expressed surprise and joy with most of the materials being available in Arabic and French.