

Session Report

Session Title: Pan European Local Partnership Initiatives – adjusting policies to local needs in NIS and Eastern Europe
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1. Key Issues

- Polluted drinking water in Eastern Europe in NIS. Health effects of well water pollution from nitrates, pesticides and e-coli bacteria and fecal-streptococci caused by latrines, waste dumps and agriculture. Health effects are both long term (thyroid and brain dysfunction) and immediate (blue-baby-disease, diarrhea, hepatitis) which are in some cases lethal to small children. This affects 7 million people in rural areas in Romania and 11 million in Ukraine.
- In urban areas a main problem is lack of proper waste-water management and pollution control
- Substantial water loss from leakage at network and domestic level and a 'culture' of inefficient water use is a second main problem in urban areas.
- Involvement and strengthening of local communities in resource management.
- Gender mainstreaming and equal participation of women.
- Lack of and need for local low-cost efficient multi-stakeholder solutions to reach the MDGs.
- Organic agriculture and eco-sanitation to protect drinking water sources are the most viable, efficient and cost-effective solution.

2. Actions

The NGO Medium&Sanitas has developed a replicable pilot project showing how with low-cost local efficient multi-stakeholder solutions implementing ecosanitation and organic agriculture combined with education and awareness raising which have an immediate positive effect of the drinking water and health of the local population. Connecting 50% of the rural population to conventional central drinking water and sanitation system largely surpasses the Romanian government's budget possibility. But by using the solutions developed by Medium&Sanitas the MDG's could be reached.

MAMA-86 works towards the prevention of water spillage through independent research, awareness raising and education, legal support and pilot projects using water-meters as an economic instrument and installation. MAMA-86's activities have immediate results and large impact. NGOs like MAMA-86 start to play a key role in consumer's rights protection and water sector reform.

WECF, Netherlands Council of Women, Business Professional Women International and NetWWater Sri Lanka have initiated activities on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). GRB will enable governments, NGOs, donors and multi-lateral agencies to execute and be accountable to their commitments for gender equity, poverty eradication, sustainable development and rights-based governance.

3. Commitments

A Pan-European Local Partnership between Romanian, Ukrainian, Dutch and German women's organisations, environmental NGOs, small water companies, local authorities and universities will implement 4 replicable pilot projects to develop low-cost efficient solutions alternative which will guarantee good quality drinking water for rural areas until 2006.

The partnership includes: WECF, MAMA-86, Medium&Sanitas, NVR, Technical University Hamburg-Harberg Waste-Water Institute, Provitec, AgroEco, Femconsult, Local Authorities of Garla Mare, Yaremche, Nizhin, Poltava, Water Supply Consultants Yaremche

4. Recommendations

1. The European Commission has started the water partnership "water for life" including an NIS component for the reduction of the number of people without access to water and sanitation by 50%. The projects and programmes developed as part of the EU water partnership should include regional priorities for the NIS such as:
 - Promote affordable efficient sustainable solutions such as eco-sanitation, organic farming, rainwater-harvesting and decentralized waste-water treatment
 - Design and implement all projects on multi-stakeholder equal partnership basis
 - Include funding for local communities to develop awareness raising, education and practical projects on ecologically sound and affordable technologies, the health impact of water pollution and a healthy way of life.
 - Develop Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) at all levels and include a building block on gender with a well-balanced representation of civil society grassroots women's organizations.
 - Include Gender-impact analysis in monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects
 - Provide free high-quality legal services to local authorities, national authorities and civil society organisations to fully understand the consequences of public-private partnership contracts.
2. Establish a global convention on access to information, public participation and access to justice on environment and water, similar to the regional Aarhus convention.
3. Oblige international financial institutions to ensure social, environmental and economical sustainability of their loaning schemes, especially in the water sector.

4. All the water and sanitation institutions should adopt and implement a gender equity policy in order to ensure that gender has been mainstreamed in their institutions, policies, programmes, budgets and projects. This should also include gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems.
5. Water services should not be included in the WTO and any other trade agreements. Water accessibility and quality can be achieved without making it a commodity for privatization by multi-national corporations.
6. A formal and regular inter-ministerial dialogue on gender should be established. Such a focus should be incorporated into the already existing ministerial networks. This should be supported by regular contacts between the public sector and civil society in order to have an on-going exchange on the progress made on the gender agenda in the context of integrated water resources management.