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Mexico : the setting-up of regional water information centres 2001 - 2003

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Date de mise en ligne : 2008

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Via the National Water Commission (Comisión Nacional del Agua –CNA : 20,000 people, yearly budget of 5 billion French Francs), Mexico has undertaken a thorough reform of the water sector including, among other things, the creation of River Basin Councils, Commissions and Committees at the level of the country's main river basins, sub-basins and aquifers.

These organisations which gather federal, State and municipal authorities and representatives of the various water users allow for dialogue and planning of actions to be carried out to solve the problems encountered in the management and sharing of resources between the users.

With the decentralisation of water resource management, the "Basin Councils" created in Mexico have quickly felt the need to access to the information required to enable them making the appropriate decisions.

In order to meet this demand, the GCC ("Gerencia de los Consejos de Cuenca"- a unit of the CNA) in charge of co-ordinating the setting-up of these "basin councils", has been studying in 2001/2002 the possibility of **developing information centres, called CICAs (Centros de Información y Consulta sobre el Agua) in each basin.**

In the preliminary phase of the creation of these information centres, the "CNA" had wanted to take into consideration the French know-how and experience in the management of water data and information.

Therefore, various experts of IOWater carried out assignments in Mexico in 2001 and 2002, financed by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and WMO (World Meteorological Organisation) to assist "CNA" with the "conceptualisation" of the three main tasks of these centres :

- 1- Management of the Information System for integrated water management at the level of river basins (SIGIAC), with the creation of databases, a geographic information system, a documentary information system and Website ;
- 2- The technical secretariat of the Basin Council with, on one hand, the organisation of the production of information needed for decision-making, and, on the other, a logistics support for organising meetings ;
- 3- The organisation of communication and education activities on the topic of water at the river basin level, with, among other things, the creation of information and dialogue centres including libraries, showrooms and awareness raising facilities, etc.

At the beginning of 2003, the "GCC" proposals, **relative to the "CICA" and "RMIA – Mexican Water Information Network"** projects, were positively accepted at the local and national levels :

- validation by the "CNA" of the conceptual draft prepared with IOWater ;
- the first co-ordination meetings inside the "CNA", and inter-institutional ones with INEGI, SEMARNAT and IMTA, with a view of preparing co-operation protocols between them ;
- introduction of the "CICA" and "RMIA" concepts in the new water law passed by the Parliament ;
- **unanimous adoption by the Basin Committees of the Yucatan Peninsula and Mexico Valley (a basin which includes Mexico City), of the technical and financial projects proposed for launching the pilot "CICAs".**

The Governor of Quintana Roo already designated a full-time engineer to contribute to the development of the Yucatan "CICA".

Along 2003, the French-Mexican co-operation, financed by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and CNA, dealt with the following actions, led by IOWater :

► **Planning**

In order to improve the Mexican planning tools, a conceptual and operational methodology is needed at the national level and at the level of the **two pilot basins** : Mexico Valley and Yucatan.

French assistance dealt with the analysis of the planning documents provided for by the Mexican Authorities, the preparation of proposals to improve their documents using the French experience (the method applied in the French SDAGEs and SAGEs), emphasising successes and correcting weaknesses and taking into account the specific aspects of the Mexican context.

Two pilot basins were used for the preparation of experimental Basin Master plans in accordance with the recommendations of the National Hydrological Program (2001-2006) : the Mexico Valley Basin twinned with Seine-Normandy ("urban" basins) on the one hand, and the Rio Panuco basin twinned with the Loire-Brittany Water Agency ("agricultural" basins) on the other.

► **Application of the "user-pays" principle**

No integrated water resource management policy can really be effective without any mobilisation of sustainable financing. The financial participation of users is essential and based on the application of the "user-pays" principle.

The assistance focused on analysing the successes and failures of the current Mexican tax recovery system (basic principles and application), on preparing proposals for improvement, taking into account the French experience and that of other European countries.

Year 2003 has thus been a study of the practical and effective implementation of the "CICAs" and "RMIA".

It also enabled :

- the creation of the first "RMIA" working groups ;
- the organisation of a co-ordination unit for the "CICAs" in the "GCC" ;
- the mobilisation of the funds and staff required for the first two "CICAs" ;
- the training of the people in charge of the 2 pilot "CICAs" and of the "RMIA", during a study tour in France for analysing the French experience in the management of water data and information ;
- the technical organisation and the launching of activities of the first 2 "CICAs" ;
- the promotion of the first results to other basin committees.

Each "CICA" should indeed play the role :

- **of a database on the basin water resources,**
- **of a documentation and information centre gathering all the available documents on the surface and ground water resources in the basin,**
- **of a centre for the education and awareness of the water users and local population,**
- **of the head office for the Basin Committee secretariat.**

All "CICAs" now adopt common frames of reference and work methods, made consistent at the federal level to feed the "RMIA".

In order to achieve these objectives, the CNA/IOWater co-operation already enabled :

- the preparation of a short-term action plan ;
- the preparation of a provisional website ;
- the preparation of a model for the "on-line" management of information on the organisations, stakeholders of water resource management at the level of each basin.

The expertise provided by IOWater in 2003 led to :

- the definition of the architecture and specifications of the information management and processing system (directory, data, books, articles, studies, etc., either hard-copy or in an electronic form on the basin scale) ;
- the development of technical and managerial tools with the corresponding training materials ;
- the drafting of partnership conventions with all the relevant information and documentation producers (universities, associations, private companies, schools, etc.) ;
- the drawing up of operational rules for the "CICAs" ensuring dynamic management.

A quick implementation of the "CICAs" was requested by the representatives of the Basin and Groundwater Councils during their second national meeting, which took place in Mexico DC at the end of October 2003.