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Organization of water management in France

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Description :

Abundant worldwide, but overexploited and polluted by human activities, water has become a fragile good, both in quantity and in quality. If in developed countries, water pollution by domestic and industrial wastewater is better and better controlled, agricultural pollution remains alarming. As regards the quantitative aspects, the sharing of water resources between uses is becoming necessary more than ever, in the developed countries and elsewhere.

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In the developing countries, the populations suffer, above all, from the lack of safe water and from serious microbiological contaminations : water remains the first cause of mortality in the world with 4 million deaths per year according to WHO.

According to the 2008 follow-up report of the WHO-UNICEF joint monitoring program, about one billion people in the world have no access to drinking water and more than 2 billion people have no adequate sanitation.

One of the Millennium Development Goals consists in reducing by 50% the percentage of people without access to drinking water and suited sanitation (as compared to 1990) before 2015. Insofar as climate change will worsen these situations, good water management is, more than ever, one of the conditions for sustainable human development.

Water management must meet several fundamental challenges

- allowing everyone to have access to drinking water and wastewater treatment ;
- preserving water resources and aquatic environments ;
- preventing permanent and accidental pollution ;
- preventing and managing floods and droughts, fighting against erosion ;
- ensuring agro-food production, while limiting the impacts of agriculture on the environment and resources ;
- allowing the sustainable development of industry, energy production, recreational activities, tourism and inland waterways transport.

These stakes often compete and the problems cannot be solved in a sectoral manner.

A cross-sectoral approach is necessary : it is integrated water resources management (IWRM). The geographical reality of water must be taken into account, at river basin level.

This means defining an adapted institutional and legal organization : regulations, administrative organization, agreements and partnerships, management and action plans, financing, controls, monitoring of the environments, etc.

That also implies the mobilization of significant resources :

I financial resources : to modernize existing plants, create new developments and infrastructures, establish monitoring and analyses networks, ensuring the operation, maintenance and renewal of these infrastructures ;

I human resources : to organize institutions, to manage services and ensure the operation and maintenance of installations, to raise the decision-makers' awareness, to inform the populations, to train men.

The French experience and its positive results can inspire the public authorities of other countries, although the organization must obviously be adapted to each local situation.

The objective of this document is to present the organization of water management in France :

- French water policy and its overall organization.
- Large developments and water control.
- Public drinking water supply and sanitation utilities.