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From 7 to 9 June 2007, 217 delegates coming from 46 Countries, representatives of governmental administrations in charge of water management, of Basin Organizations, already existing or being created, and from interested bi and multilateral cooperation agencies, met in Debrecen in Hungary, during the seventh General Assembly of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO).

The delegates reaffirmed that freshwater resources are limited and threatened all over the world and that their better governance, respectful of the environment, is one of the main keys to sustainable development.

However, findings are alarming over the world.

Climate change, pollution, wastage, destruction of ecosystems : the situation is serious in many countries and requires urgent implementation of ambitious reforms.

The Millennium Goals for drinking water supply and sanitation can only be achieved with significant and simultaneous progress made to introduce Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), organized on the relevant scale of basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers, either local, national or transboundary.

Integrated water resources management at the level of river basins is obviously essential worldwide !

The basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers are the relevant natural geographical territories in which to organize water management.

Indeed, river basins are the natural territories in which water runs on the soil or in the sub soil, whatever are the national or administrative boundaries or limits crossed.

Significant progress has already been made since the 1990s :

River basin management experienced a quick development in many countries, which made it the basis of their national legislation on water or try it in national or transboundary pilot basins and the acquired experience allows today to say that integrated water resources management at the level of river basins is a real advantage for governance.

Water resources management should be organized in geographical areas where the problems occur, i.e. :

1) on the scale of local, national or transboundary basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers ;

2) based on integrated information systems, allowing knowledge on resources and their uses, polluting pressures, ecosystems and their functioning, the follow-up of their evolutions and risk assessment. These information systems will have to be used as an objective basis for dialogue, negotiation, decision-making and evaluation of undertaken actions, as well as coordination of financing from the various donors ;

3) based on management plans or master plans that define the medium and long-term objectives to be achieved ;

4) through the development of Programs of Measures and successive multiyear priority investments ;

5) with the mobilization of specific financial resources, based on the "polluter-pays" principle and "user-pays" systems ;

6) with the participation in decision-making of the concerned Governmental Administrations and local Authorities, the representatives of different categories of users and associations for environmental protection or of public interest. Indeed, this concerted participation will ensure the social and economic acceptability of decisions. Decentralization is

the basis for effectiveness in water policies.

Legal and institutional frameworks should allow the application of these six principles.

It is especially necessary to take into account the particular situation of the 263 rivers or lakes and hundreds of aquifers, the basins of which are shared by at least two riparian countries.

Cooperation agreements need to be initiated or signed between these riparian countries to achieve indispensable common cause at the basin level.

It seems necessary to support the creation of International Commissions or similar organizations and to strengthen those already existing.

Such international organizations allow better dialogue, the exchange of useful information, the solving of possible conflicts and the sharing of benefits from better joint management and the strengthening of transboundary cooperation.

Agreements for transboundary aquifer management should be developed in particular, taking their fragility into account.

Adaptation of water management to climate change

Global warming cannot now be avoided and fresh water resources will be directly affected in the coming years, with announced consequences :
* increase of extreme hydrological phenomena, such as droughts and floods ;
* melting of glaciers, reduction of the snow cover in mountains, which will not be able to regulate flow in the large rivers which are born there ;
* modification of the plant species and soil cover, which will result in increased erosion,
* rise of sea and ocean level, which is likely to drown coral islands, coastal lowlands, polders areas and river deltas and mouths, the flow of which will be changed ;
* salt water intrusion inland and in coastal aquifers,
* significant move of populations.

It is thus essential to adapt water resources management policies, by taking into account the new elements of the climate change in the coming years.

A priority : to make up for lost time as regards urban sanitation !
85% of the anthropogenic pollution is discharged into the natural environments, without any treatment.

The effects on human health and hygiene, on economic development and the degradation of natural environments are very significant and will worsen with the lack of sufficient measures.

The time lost with sanitation is extremely alarming and will require urgent reforms, several decades of constant effort and huge financial resources.

The renewal, maintenance, operation and management of installations are also a challenge to meet to ensure full effectiveness of the investments.

Vocational training of the employees of the sector will have to be organized on a large scale.

The reduction of non-point pollution is a prerequisite to maintain or recover good water status.

INBO recommends that agricultural practices be adapted to limit pollution risks (use of fertilizers and pesticides).

Users’ participation should be organized in Basin Committees or Councils for a real mobilization of partners.

These bodies should be involved in decision-making, within procedures that clearly define their role which should be facilitated by the setting-up of integrated water information systems as objective basis for dialogue, negotiation and decision-making.

Significant means should be devoted to public awareness and participation, especially for women and young people.

Funding by the users is the logical consequence of their participation.

The investments necessary for the sustainable management, conservation and control of water resources and ecosystems and for the exploitation, maintenance and rehabilitation of public utilities require huge financial resources.

Therefore, it is necessary to set up everywhere complementary financing systems that are based on the users’ participation and common cause.

These arrangements should be an incentive to limiting wastage, to controlling pollution and to reducing discharges, by changing the users’ behavior.

INBO recommends the progressive and wide use of the cost recovery principle, through the establishment of basin water taxes, which have shown their efficiency everywhere they have been applied, while ensuring common cause between the categories of water users, between upstream and downstream, and between generations.

Improving knowledge of water resources, aquatic environments and of their uses is essential for good decision-making.

Systems for warning against floods, droughts and pollution should be developed and coordinated.

It is essential to specify the institutions responsible for the organization and the permanent operation of such systems and to guarantee sufficient means for investments and their continuous operation on the long term.

INBO recommends that the concerned multilateral institutions and national Authorities take into account the specificity of water and environmental management in insular environments.

It is necessary to support the creation and strengthening of Basin Organizations over the world !