

Civil Society Session: Civil Society and water quality and protecting and preserving ecosystem services

Session report, 16 January 2015

Civil Society and water quality and protecting and preserving ecosystem services

The Session was convened by Stefano Barchiesi, from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The focus of this civil society session was on developing countries and on the protection of ecosystem services as an important aspect of water quality preservation.

On a global scale, 2 million tons of sewage, industrial and agricultural waste is discharged into the world's water bodies annually, making water quality a prime concern for both developed and developing nations. The challenges of water quality need to be addressed with the participation of Civil Society. The water quality challenges including those for reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials; improving wastewater management and the recycle/reuse; protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems; achieving environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste throughout their life cycle and significantly reducing their release into air, water and soil to minimize their impacts on human health and the environment; preventing the introduction and significantly reducing the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems, and controlling or eradicating them.

Session structure

- Overview presentation, Stefano Barchiesi, IUCN
- Panellists
 - Elisa Colom, Eje de Agua de Fundación Solar, Guatemala
 - Maria Teresa Gutierrez, ILO, branch EMP/INVEST
 - Cristina Monge, ECODES, Spain
 - Rudolph Cleveringa, Global Water Partnership (GWP)

Introduction

Stefano Barchiesi, IUCN introduces the session. Healthy ecosystems are essential for human well-being and economic prosperity. The increasing depletion and pollution of water resources and its negative effects on our ecosystems present one of the greatest challenges for achieving sustainable development in which no-one is left behind. While water is essential for ecosystems, at the same time ecosystems provide multiple benefits and services that contribute to water security such as natural freshwater storage, water flow regulation, water purification, replenishment of groundwater aquifers, climate regulation and reduction of risks associated with water-related disasters.

The detrimental effects of massive water pollution increasingly threaten the self-cleaning capacity of the world's ecosystems. Concerted action at all levels is needed to curb these negative trends. The challenges of water quality need to be addressed with the participation of Civil Society.

Indigenous people traditionally play an important role as guardians of their living environment. Including indigenous people will help gaining from their knowledge.

The introduction was followed by the presentation of the session cases.

Fundación Solar's IWRM and participation projects in the rural areas of Guatemala

By Elisa Colom, Eje de Agua de Fundación Solar

Since 1999, Fundación Solar has lead several IWRM projects in the rural areas of Guatemala, where woman and man have been consider as equal, such as the facilitation of gender networks, the use of alternative energy, the adaptation to climate change, among others. The last one in 2014 consisted of the design and evaluation of a river basin restoration plan, through a participatory process comprising the local government, 9 rural communities and national sectorial representatives. The integrated water resources management approach was adopted as the framework, enabling the approval of a restoration and management plan in October 2014, in the San Luis Jilotepeque, Jalapa, Guatemala, micro basin. Fundación Solar is also a founding member of GWP at the regional (Central America) and national (Guatemala) levels.

South-South Cooperation on water management and sanitation in indigenous and dispersed rural communities, with a gender perspective and an inter-cultural approach (MDG-F projects on water and sanitation in Panama, Nicaragua, Paraguay).

By María Teresa Gutiérrez, ILO, Nicaragua

This is an initiative developed with the ILO coordinators of the Joint Programmes MDG-F (JP) involved in the formulation and implementation of the water and sanitation projects in Nicaragua, Panama, and Paraguay, under the Democratic Economic Governance. The aim of these projects was to strengthen the government's capacity to manage water provision and water quality, including the poorest and excluded populations. ILO's technical expertise to these projects comprised capacity building on labour based techniques and rights (Convention 169). Each project was in a different level of implementation and a participatory mechanism was needed to share community based experiences and discuss technical issues to incorporate a gender and inter-cultural approach along the project cycle. Panama and Nicaragua had already started the implementation and Paraguay was in the planning stage, consequently, Paraguay would incorporate and develop the lessons learnt from the other two projects under a South-South Cooperation knowledge sharing scheme.

It focused on three main topics: planning and consultation with Indigenous communities, as a way of communities' prioritization and identification of local knowledge on water provision (Paraguay); management and empowerment through the management of water systems and sanitation (Panama); and technical capacity building in construction and maintenance to participate in the local labour market (Nicaragua).

River Contracts.

By Cristina Monge, ECODES

The "River contract" is a management and participation tool born in France around 1990, as a means for river restoration, improvement or conservation through joint actions by users and the public administrations. This tool has proven effective for river management and restoration and thus maintained after the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It is based on a wide participation process where all stakeholders get engaged and committed. It was first implemented in Spain in the Matarraña basin, which encompasses three Autonomous Regions and 27 municipalities within the Ebro River Basin. In spite of the complex political framework, the inhabitants of the Matarraña river basin are an example of dialogue and water related conflicts solving, making them a perfect pilot experience of a participation process for the improvement and sustainable development of a river.

Session Discussion

How to monitor the impact and the social, economical and technical outputs of the project?

ILO undertakes a different evaluation for each project and an evaluation on capacity development. They are also working with UN- Water and in the process of developing working areas in relation to water and jobs. Concerns in relation to indigenous groups and their marginalisation were expressed. In the ILO project the Coordinator in Panama is an indigenous professional. The invisibility of women contributions and women being left out of mainstream activities were equally raised.

How to deal with issues related to capacitation and water quality control in agriculture?

The issue of pollution by agricultural water use and the question of training farmers were raised. In this respect the importance of monitoring water pollution and making this information accessible to the public were highlighted. They were also linked to the question of how to bring new technologies like waste water treatment to the poorest regions.

Here the tool of 'River Contracts' presented by Cristina Monge, ECODES, Spain, has proven effective for river management and restoration and thus maintained after the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It is an example of dialogue and water related conflicts solving, making them a perfect pilot experience of a participation process for the improvement and sustainable development of a river.

Challenges and tools

Given the evident importance of ecosystem preservation and the added value of involving the local population, civil society contributions in this field should be further developed and strengthened. These amongst others needs:

- **Financing** that ensures conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, and that pay adequate attention to the needs of local actors so that they effectively contribute to the sustainable management of the watershed. Governments, financing institutions and civil society should help with the effective application of natural infrastructure options through ecosystem management and restoration together with capacity building and support for reforms of natural resource governance. Enabling-through-funding is an effective mechanism to building capacity of local civil society and is successfully practiced by women's civil society all over the world; tailor made to the specific local circumstances and absorption potential.
- **Technologies** that combine traditional and indigenous knowledge with the insights of research and innovation. Financial institutions and governmental agencies should make financing available to local initiatives for watershed management through decentralized funds and credit schemes that integrate clean and adequate water for all, ecosystem services, livelihoods and economic development. Water utilities and private sector water users should then participate in the development and implementation of technologies that combine engineered and natural infrastructure as part of these schemes. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is an increasingly popular conservation and resource management tool in developing countries. PES can help to reduce poverty, and to satisfy environmental and watershed preservation needs. But the insecure land and resource tenure of many poor people remains a key obstacle to them participating in and benefiting from PES schemes. Other obstacles many PES schemes face are the complex and often bureaucratic project procedures and high project transaction costs.
- **Capacity Development** at all levels to ensure an integrated approach from national to local level, including transboundary cooperation for shared water bodies and their supply systems. Building the capacity of local civil society to take up their role should be given due attention and adequate means are needed to ensure the meaningful participation of marginalized groups.

Capacity building for communities is important to eg. ensure that future economic activity in a basin — especially hydropower and agriculture — is regulated to take into account river dynamics, flows, climate change and other water uses affecting the quality of the resource. Together with governance, capacity building is a critical element to empower stakeholders to negotiate trade offs and build consensus on priority management actions for ecosystem management and restoration.

- **Governance** that includes partnerships between State and non-State actors and is structured in a way that inclusion of watershed inhabitants and their meaningful participation is ensured. Local people are the ones directly affected and their traditional knowledge, in particular of indigenous communities, will be most useful in the development of natural infrastructure options. The key is to identify priorities that can benefit social equity in development, and then what is needed to empower the relevant stakeholders to undertake implementation. Investment in natural infrastructure options eg. for water quality regulation is best made through linking planning and decision making to implementation.

Session Photos:



Session panel: from left to right: Maria Teresa Gutiérrez, Cristina Monge, Nini Thein Khin and Rudolph Cleveringa.