FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL WATER OBSERVATION MECHANISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

SUMMARY NOTE ON THE STUDY

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Stakes related to water resources and demand management in the Mediterranean countries have always been huge. These stakes are continuously increasing, faced with risks related to climate change, such as the development of prolonged drought and water scarcity.

In such a context, access to reliable and relevant information is increasingly essential to support any water resources management and risk prevention policy, whether at the national, international or local level.

After 10 years of successful collaboration between the Euro-Mediterranean countries on the sharing of information on know-how in the water sector within EMWIS, the Water Directors of the Euro-Med countries requested a feasibility study, with the interested countries, regarding a **"regional water observation mechanism in the Mediterranean region** for monitoring the indicators towards the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals related to water and sanitation (MDG 7) in the Mediterranean, as well as on the implementation of the "water" related section of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development[i] -MSSD-, based on information coming from the national water information systems, when they exist."(ROME, 2005).

The feasibility study was launched in the 2nd half of 2006 and is ending in December 2007. The 1st results relating to the analysis of the current situation and the expectations, were validated during the conference of the Water Directors of the Euro-Mediterranean countries and of South-East Europe in Athens, November 2006.

During the study, the national consultants' expertise was mobilized to work with the national and local stakeholders in 7 countries (Morocco, Spain, France, Tunisia, Cyprus, Malta and Jordan). In the Mediterranean area, most of the international water-related initiatives were interviewed and some of them participated in a regional workshop, held in July 2007, with experts and representatives of the national institutions. This workshop allowed to carry out a technical assessment of results achieved and the analysis of data acquisition processes on some key topics: access to drinking water supply and sanitation (one of the Millennium Development Goals -MDGs-); water component of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development; water and agriculture; drinking water supply and sanitation utilities; drought/water scarcity; impact of climate change. After the workshop, a detailed analysis of the production processes of the 5 priority indicators on Water and Sanitation of the MSSD[ii] was carried out in collaboration with 5 voluntary countries and UNEP/MAP/Blue Plan.

An international Steering Committee monitored the study implementation and provided advice. A Website was created during the study to facilitate exchanges between experts and to demonstrate some functionalities of the mechanism: www.semide.net/medwip a short demonstration will also be available during the Bled conference on 10-11 December 2007.

This note summarises:

- Problems based on findings on the current situation and on the stakeholders' expectations
- Constraints and opportunities
- A vision of the Mediterranean water observation mechanism project

1. Stakes

Quantified data are essential for many stakeholders; however the **values of some national indicators often vary according to i**nternational or national **sources**. This leads to confusion, to the questioning of some processes and a climate of mistrust. A more detailed analysis shows that the main causes are:

- Multiplicity of the actors producing and managing water data at the regional level or in each country;
- The large **diversity of indicators,** produced and used by the various stakeholders on similar topics but with seldom similar definitions and calculation methods;
- Problems in identifying the official sources for each type of data, accessibility, heterogeneity, completeness and data quality;
- **Ad hoc rather than systematic data gathering processes** often based on enquiries or specific assignments carried out in the countries from different perspectives (statistics, agriculture, health or environment). This led to duplications of data gathering efforts by many initiatives.

Beyond national indicators on quantitative management of the resource and of its uses, integrated water resources management often requires **more detailed information, which remains difficult to mobilize**, for example: sectoral assessments (e.g.: industrial uses, etc.), specific topics (climate change, drought, water quality, performance of urban utilities, etc.), calculation of indicators at sub-national level (assessment per administrative unit or assessment per river basin).

Significant progress can be made, as:

a. No tool currently enables **to easily identify the existing data and information** on the various topics related to water management and to obtain information on the processes used for the production of these data (gathering and calculation);
b. Calculations of the indicators required by regional institutions often **use common basic data**[iii], thus there are possible synergies within the data gathering processes;
c. The difficulties met in obtaining these indicators are more often related to **organisational problems** (insufficient or different definitions, lack of an organisation responsible for the regular production/dissemination of data) rather than to a real absence of data.

2. Opportunities and constraints

2.1. Opportunities

The study showed that the current context is favourable, owing to the stakeholders' mobilisation at all levels:

- Strong overall demand for a regional water observation mechanism in the Mediterranean (or equivalent) to favour and build capacities for the regular production of and access to aggregated and comparable data between the countries;
- Co-operation policy in the Mediterranean water sector is being currently reviewed;
- Mobilisation of the countries on the 2 sides of the Mediterranean for developing water information systems at national level or trans-national level even (e.g. European system).

2.2. Constraints

However, the development of such a system must take into account the Mediterranean context:

- Lack of legal framework for the reporting obligation, contrary to the EU where the Water Framework Directive is a catalyst for data standardisation and the implementation of a Pan-European system;
- Intervention of many stakeholders, in the whole or part of the Mediterranean region, within very diverse political processes, and whose products and activities must be promoted;
- The concept of international « observation » is often perceived as intrusive at the national level.

3. A tool for the regional policy in the water sector

3.1. Objectives

The analysis of the proposed objectives to meet expectations shows that the observation concept should be replaced by the concept of information or follow-up. The table below summarises the expected objectives, products and the concerned stakeholders.

Objectives	Products	Stakeholders
Facilitating identification and access to quantified data	Internet portal allowing identification and access to national and regional information sources	Providers of data and indicators
Having comparable data allowing the production of quality indicators	Methodological guidelines (standardisation, interoperability, sharing)	Organisations defining/collecting indicators Data providers
Assisting countries in the management of quantified water data	National Water Information Systems	National data providers/users International organisations providing technical assistance Donors
Carrying out additional regional analyses	Sectoral analyses upon request	National and international institutions in the sector concerned

3.2. Proposed priority topics

With a concern for pragmatism, the mechanism will gradually deal with water sector topics according to priorities. Thus, in a first phase, the mechanism could focus its actions on a limited number of basic data necessary for IWRM and regional indicators (MDG, MSSD, drought/water scarcity, climate change), such as:

a. Assessing renewable water resources;
b. Assessing exploited volumes by sector (domestic water, irrigation, industry) and by source (surface water, groundwater);
c. Assessing coverage for drinking water supply and sanitation;
d. Assessing pollutant discharges into the Mediterranean.

3.3. Governance

The **Forum of the Water Directors of the Euro-Mediterranean countries and of South-East Europe** could direct this mechanism, especially with regard to the choice of topics and the validation of produced analyses. Its role in this mechanism will be defined during the Ministerial conference on water planned at the end of 2008.

The geographical area should prioritise all the **Mediterranean countries as well as countries having Mediterranean hydrological characteristics (Portugal, Jordan).** But the countries' participation is voluntary and opened to any national or local institution dealing with water data.

The 13 Water Directors, members of EMWIS Steering Committee, proposed that **the co-ordination of the implementation** of such a programme be entrusted to EMWIS, which already has a suited governance mode, a technical co-ordination body, agreements with various regional organisations (European Environment Agency, Med-EUWI, World Water Council, International and Mediterranean Networks of Basin Organisations, UNEP/MAP, etc.) and a suited geographic coverage (Euro-Med, Balkans, Libya)[iv]. This would imply, in a first step, that EMWIS scope shall be extended to data management (quantified information) on water resources and their uses (the initially targeted field being that of information on know-how).

A 2-year action plan is prepared to initiate this mechanism for dealing with the proposed objectives and topics. To ensure its sustainability, it relies on co-operation with:

- National and local organisations, producing/managing water data, and users of these data;
- International organisations working on targeted topics (UNEP/MAP Blue Plan and MedPol; UN-Water: FAO, Joint Monitoring Programme, World Meteorological Organisation; European Space Agency, Eurostat/MedStat, etc.) for data standardisation and sometimes technical or financial assistance to the national level;
- The existing technical infrastructures in terms of federating tools, in particular:
    - that implemented at the European level with WISE which could incorporate a Mediterranean module with EMWIS support,
    - that emerging from the National Water Information Systems.

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[i] The MSSD, formulated by using the Blue Plan work on the environment and sustainable development, was adopted in November 2005 by the contracting parties of the Barcelona Convention together with the priority indicators allowing its follow-up.

[ii] 1. Index for water efficiency; 2. Water demand; 3. Index for renewable resource exploitation; 4. Access to drinking water supply; 5. Access to sanitation;

[iii] Example: Assessing the volumes abstracted for irrigation which are required by several organisations (FAO, Medstat, MSSD, etc.)

[iv] Decisions made during the conference of the Euro-Med Water Directors in November 2005 in Rome, in which participated the Balkans countries and Libya.

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