



Solidarity in Water SDG 6 on water & sanitation: how can Europe make a difference in third countries

SUMMARY REPORT

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Adopted in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a comprehensive, universal and inclusive sustainable development framework. SDG 6 particularly underlines the importance of water and sanitation taking into account the need to involve local communities and authorities. SDG 6 addresses the issues relating to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, but also the quality and sustainability of water resources worldwide. Policy-makers and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to further discuss the implementation of SDG 6 particularly focusing on how the EU can assist third countries by providing case studies and insights to ongoing initiatives.

Michel Dantin MEP and Chair of the “Agriculture & Water Management” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” welcomed participants by highlighting the importance of the SDGs and particular SDG 6 which aims to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. It was stressed that the Parliament must do their part in moving the 2030 agenda forward and ensuring its implementation.

François Wakenhut, Acting Director of Directorate C – Quality of Life, DG Environment, European Commission reiterated the EU’s commitment to the 2030 agenda and also outlined that in terms of cooperation the EU has in the past decade spent € 2.5 billion on water and sanitation across 62 countries. The EU is also supporting the water sector within the project NEXUS dialogue programme, which aims to establish regional platforms for water management. It was said that beyond finances the EU adopted on 7 June 2017 a new EU Consensus on Development, which sets out a framework for development cooperation for Member States and have in this context identified a number of priorities also covering issues related to the water agenda. It was said that the EU has a long engagement and commitment to water and sanitation issues mentioning the EU Water Initiative dating back from 2002 which had enhanced the role of water as a driver for sustainable development. It was underlined that the sector is still faced with many challenges but the EU is committed to the implementation of the agenda. Domestically, it was said that the EU has pushed forward some key principles such as integrated water resource management particularly under the water framework directive (WFD). It was said that this has had an impact also beyond EU boundaries and with regards to governance the EU has showcased that solutions can be found through integrated approaches. It was outlined that the EU has delivered a lot through the urban waste water directive. The EU is also working on new ventures on water reuse with a new proposal to be made by the end of the year that aims to make the most



efficient use of water resources. The need to ensure safe drinking water is also pivotal with an ongoing review on the directive to be finalised towards the end of the year. Proposals will be made that look at where our performance can be improved e.g. through tackling such issues as monitoring/the introduction of risk-based management, transparency, investment, or leakages also stressing the importance of innovation. It was emphasised that this agenda was not disconnected to bigger priorities, but can make significant contributions in the context of the low carbon transition, circular economy, and green growth. In 2017, preparations are also ongoing for an overall two-year long evaluation of a range of EU actions in the field of water policy, underlining the importance of stakeholder involvement in this context. It was said that challenges related to SDG 6 still remain particularly finances and priority setting. It was concluded by stressing the need to highlight and promote EU success stories mentioning cases on management of transboundary issues.

Pierre Marie Grondin, Directeur Général Programme Solidarité Eau pS-, Water Solidarity Network reiterated that the SDGs provide a roadmap for the international community for the next 15 years. As SDG 6 relates specifically to water it shall in particular ensure universal and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation and hygiene services (6.1, 6.2); improve water quality by halving the proportion of untreated wastewater (6.3); increase cooperation, capacity-building, and participation of local people to provide better local water management (6.a, 6.b). This is why the "solidarity 1%" mechanism adopted in France since 2005, which operates at these three levels is set out below: Europe can and should encourage the adoption of this type of mechanism in its Member States in favour of achieving SDG 6. It was said that the solidarity moment started in France in the 1970s to help cooperation between French and African cities following great droughts. As a result following decentralisation in the country a law was created in 2005 entitled "Oudin-Santini", which concerns municipalities and local government in charge of water and sanitation. The law allows them to voluntarily allocate up to 1% of the water and sanitation budget to undertake international cooperation actions for access to water and sanitation. It was said that decentralised cooperation provides complementary and independence from national government aid and long term partnership. It was said that law enlarges the competencies of river basin agencies and water and sanitation syndicates, enlarges the financial opportunities for local authorities, and mobilises the competencies of the technical services of local authorities on international actions. It was also informed that there are different degrees of involvement mentioning direct cooperation partnerships or by providing financial grants to an NGO or local authority. It was said that in the past decade around 250 local authorities have financed international actions on water and sanitations. The mechanism helps provide momentum for water and sanitation matters and ensures dedicated and regular funds to help implement sustainable long term services. The outcomes from 2006-2014 show that € 190 million have been mobilised by French local authorities resulting in 4.6 million people receiving improved water service and 0.4 million people with improved sanitation. It was pointed out that 70% of the actions are focused in rural areas and mainly on water supply. Examples of the greater area of Lyon and Evry Centre Essone were presented showcasing how they apply the mechanism and how the funds collected provide cooperation with rural communities and annual improved services. It was reiterated that the



mechanism provides legitimacy and legislative recognition, diversified and regular funds, professionalization and improvement of practices. It was concluded by stating that based on the experience of the 1% water mechanism this is also being applied in other areas of public services such as energy and waste, which should also be introduced to other Member States.

Gari Villa-Landa Sokolova, Spanish Association of Water Supply and Sanitation (AEAS) showcased how AEAS is cooperating with the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID) to achieve SDG 6 in Latin America, particularly providing insights to ongoing work in Ecuador. The collaboration among AEAS and AECID aims to support water service providers in Latin America by identifying the needs of public administrations, supporting management improvement plans, providing operation and maintenance, training and exchange of knowledge, and monitoring and evaluation. A short introduction was provided on how water is managed in Ecuador. The organic law on hydric resources, uses and exploitation of water, and its regulation establishes the legal framework for the country on water management. There are three authorities dealing respectively with hydrological planning, regulation and control, and hydraulic infrastructure. With regards to water services they are of municipal competence by law. It was explained that in urban areas municipalities apply direct or delegated management, but in parishes both urban and rural, as well as rural areas community water management is enforced. Further, water service providers also have to follow the regulatory framework, which includes self-assessments as well as reporting and the need to develop required management improvement plants. It was said that none of the plants submitted last year were approved, which shows the lack of capacity and technical knowledge of those developing the plans. With regards to the specific case of Ecuador the ongoing project aims to improve the affected areas of the earthquake that hit the country last year initiating collaboration with municipalities to provide technical assistance to the affected areas. A multidisciplinary team was organised bringing together experts in different areas together with technicians from the Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities. A workshop was organised as well as field visits in the affected areas. The main conclusions indicated that systemic technical problems were present in all affected municipalities. It was explained that a major challenge is that most of the water is lost and does not make it to the user. It was also found that there is a lack of economic equilibrium of the system, shortages and insufficient sewage system. Apart from technical problems the lack of coordination among administrations was evident. It was also found that that due to lack of knowledge and technical expertise, community management is not adequate. After analysing the affected areas a training proposal was established for the areas focusing on water supply, sanitation, and economy and management models. With regards to management it was said that there was a need of developing analysis of the costs of services to allow cost recovery through tariffs to make the services sustainable, that consortia or groups of communities for community management should be established and the need to develop plans that help understanding and cooperation of the different authorities. Moving forward a call for experts will be launched to develop the content of the training programme for officials in the affected areas.

The discussion with the audience reiterated the importance of water and the implementation of SDG 6 both within EU and beyond its borders. It was underlined that the



EU has in the past been very active on enhancing water services to developing countries but that it is not longer a priority and that the Commission needs to become more active. Water must be seen as a priority for development also in Europe. Reference was made to The United Nations World Water Development Report 2016¹ that highlights the link and beneficial effects that access to water has on job creation and basic services. This also helps improve overall governance. It was said that civil society and MEPs have an important role to play to get water back as a main priority. It was said that the EU Consensus on Development only mentions water under the thematic of people but that it must also be linked to partnership, prosperity and planet. Further water must also be tackled as a peace issue. The question of responsibility was raised with regards to financial commitments. It was said that 70% of aid budget is decided upon at the level of the countries and only 13 countries adopted water as focal sector with most being islands where water and sanitation are crucial issues. The link between water and gender equality was also made. The need to also have a consistent and integrated approach to the SDGs was raised as well as the need to be able to measure the progress. It was underlined that the EU has a duty to inform society about the SDGs and make the issues understandable and relatable to citizens. It was mentioned that EU policies must better take into account adaptation and particularly the costs and effects of climate change. There are many best practices across Europe as well as worldwide that can be replicated. A call for establishing an intergovernmental platform on water was raised. The discussion further highlighted that the work and support provided to developing countries must be long-term ensuring that projects are carried out adequately. The importance of technological knowledge was raised and to encourage trained individuals to stay in their regions to ensure long-term economic development.

Michel Dantin MEP and Chair concluded by underlining the pivotal role of water and its foundation towards achieving all SDGs. The link between climate change and water was reiterated underlining that in order to tackle climate change we must first solve the issues of water availability. The need to learn from different practices, experiences, and know how was raised in order to improve our management systems.

**Maggie White, European Pact for Water was due to unforeseen circumstances not able to attend as a speaker.*

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¹ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002439/243938e.pdf>