



NOSTRUM-DSS - INECO Joint Event Executive Summary (25th October 2007, Cyprus)

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The contents of the document are the summary of the contributions of all the participants of the Joint Meeting held in Cyprus on 25/12/07, reported and written by: D. Assimacopoulos, Y. Depietri, C. Giupponi, J. A. Sagardoy, M. Tamborra.

Executive summary

1.1 Preamble

The EU Water Initiative - Water for Life (EUWI), officially launched at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, was designed to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to the targets of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) for drinking water and sanitation, within the context of an integrated approach to water management. Since then a great wealth of research projects has been financed by the European Commission in order to contribute to the aims of the WSSD and to the MDGs, in particular Goal 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability) and more specifically Target 10 (Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation) and 9 (Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources).

Recently, a review of EU supported International Cooperation in the field of water research from FP4 to FP6¹ has shown that there is an increased role in raising awareness among societal actors of the challenges facing political leaders, policy-makers and water users, and that integration of science with policy priorities is being enhanced. Projects tend to place more emphasis on the impacts (environmental, societal and economic) of research. Furthermore, and thanks to the stronger interaction and cooperation between the EU and third countries research teams, new approaches in water policy and policy-relevant water science are emerging.

However, the uptake of research outcomes is still unsatisfactory for various reasons, including the inefficient communication between the science and policy spheres, which limits a wider exchange of information and experiences. As a result, research often does not respond to societal and policy-making concerns and needs. These themes were recently debated at a dedicated workshop at the 2007 Stockholm World Water Week² and a joint effort in this direction has been launched also by two coordination actions financed by the EC: Nostrum-Dss³ (Network on governance, science and technology for sustainable water resource management in the Mediterranean. The role of DSS tools) and INECO⁴ (Institutional and economic instruments for sustainable water management in the Mediterranean Region). These efforts culminated in the “Nostrum-Dss & INECO Joint Event” (25 Oct. 2007, Larnaca, Cyprus) specifically aimed at contributing to the EUWI through the identification of common strategies for strengthening the research impact on policies and society.

1.2 State of the art

Research efforts are commonly concentrated on very specific issues or areas, and are not eventually integrated to produce widely applicable outputs. Thus, despite the efforts undertaken in the recent endeavours of EU-funded research towards the development of a knowledge base on tangible water management problems, the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the attempts to establish a two-way feedback and dissemination of experiences and research outputs, a number of problem areas still exist:

¹ Gyawali, D. et al. (2006). “EU-INCO water research from FP4 to FP6 (1994-2006) - a critical review”. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

² Networking and Twinning Initiatives to Improve the Uptake of Research Results at the Local Level – Consolidating the EUWI Research Component (http://www.worldwaterweek.org/worldwaterweek/2007_list.asp).

³ See www.nostrum-dss.eu for details.

⁴ See <http://environ.chemeng.ntua.gr/ineco/> for details.

1) **Fragmentation in project activities:** there is a multitude of different programmes and projects operating with similar objectives, but a differential and uncoordinated time schedule of research activities, which limits the potential interaction between projects; moreover, there are no mechanisms facilitating continuity on the issues examined in previous research efforts and in terms of the partnerships established. **Difficult communication between projects:** exchange of information, and collaboration between projects require first identifying other projects as potential collaborators. However, information regarding past, ongoing and future activities of projects is not systematically available. Internet remains the only effective means of accessing such information, but information is often rather incomplete, not easy to retrieve, and only partially updated and available/accessible.

2) **Limited effectiveness in the dissemination of research results,** including:

- Limited stakeholder participation in project activities due to lack of interest or insufficient contact or resources;
- Limited impact of the project results at grass-root level, due to the existence of various barriers: in particular linguistic and digital divides;
- Difficulties in engaging into a sharing process with the local communities due to significant cultural differences among the involved parties;
- Lack of financial resources for capacity building as a means to disseminate methodologies and know-how;
- Lack of mechanisms to provide sufficient momentum for a significant impact of the projects to reach the general public after the completion of the work, through the networks of potential users established during the project.

3) **Limited exploitation of research results,** mainly due to:

- The short duration of activities, which can result in limited scope for the exploitation of project results;
- Project-driven research, which does not integrate with societal and policy-making concerns especially at the local level;
- Difficulties for stakeholders to select among the many available initiatives and approaches that are proposed by projects with similar objectives/case studies;
- Difficulties in reaching the intended end-user: even if knowledge may be widely disseminated and may be readily available it is not necessarily taken into consideration by decision makers, who are especially hard to reach, if not through their own networks of advisors, consultants, etc.;
- Resistances and slowness at the institutional level, when the adoption of research outputs requires implementation in official document, regulation or legislation, under the pressures from interest groups and political lobbying but also from international and national institutions.

1.3 Recommendations

Coping with the three problem areas described above requires a series of coordinated efforts to be implemented in ongoing and future research activities. Even if not comprehensive and systematic, a series of recommendations developed within recent activities are described below.

1) Regarding the problems related to the **fragmentation and communication problems of research activities**, the need emerges for supporting interactions and integration among different projects and of their respective results, in order to offer greater potential for the exploitation of complementarities and synergies. Such coordination efforts would create

good opportunities for long-lasting actions, including case studies, while at the same time reducing the degree of overlap and duplication. Furthermore, a greater integration among projects would allow for a coordinated and integrated message for the local stakeholders and end-users who might otherwise receive a multitude of varying information from a number of sources, thus promoting the uptake of project recommendations and their translation into policy.

Potential measures towards coordination include:

- Active promotion of the development of voluntary clusters among projects that are interested in common activities and outputs;
- organization of joint international events;
- Development and enhancement of coordinated online resource centres for projects information and for specific thematic issues (e.g. IWRM and stakeholders involvement in the Mediterranean countries);
- Strategic collaboration with different bodies (i.e. NGOs and other institutions and initiatives, such as the MED-EUWI⁵) involved in the implementation of the IWRM principles in the Mediterranean Region;
- Setting up of follow-up activities (e.g. established permanent links among projects and funding arrangements) including the development of regional exchange networks to continue the transfer of know-how; in particular, the establishment of an integrated Mediterranean network that could constitute a first step towards better integration of research and concerted actions with the adequate multidisciplinary competences.

2) Regarding the **science-policy communication interface and dissemination of the projects products**, a crucial issue is the adaptation to the local contexts, taking into account the diversity of ethical and cultural issues in IWRM (e.g. religious beliefs). Continuous cooperation with the local stakeholders since the beginning of the project, and the establishment of an effective collaboration with the allocation of significant resources should be established also with the objective to build trust of people. At this regard it is important to:

- Make clear what are the objectives of the projects products (e.g. clarifying the role of research vs. consultancy; clarify the role of the scientific community in the IWRM and public participation projects; or demonstrating their policy relevance);
- Make clear who are the targets of the products and plan to have different formats for different audiences;
- Guide different users with different technical backgrounds to the available resources;
- Develop best practices and good examples referred to national/regional/local targets;
- Carefully consider the linguistic barriers: technical documents may be provided in English only, but materials targeting policy makers should be in the local language;
- Consider the inclusion of training and demonstration as part of the products to be delivered, in order to facilitate the appropriate use;
- Avoid duplications of previous efforts (i.e. previously published guidelines, toolboxes, manuals, etc.), preferring instead to build upon already existing materials, filtering the usable results of past projects and case studies;
- Focus on activities that promote replicability of results.

⁵ <http://www.minenv.gr/medeuwi/> .

More specifically regarding the **dissemination strategies**, there is the need to communicate in a targeted and specific manner, adopting alternative dissemination means for different audiences, and, in particular, developing more effective, simplified and comprehensive languages. The contribution of projects representatives at the Joint Event allowed to identify a number of enhanced dissemination activities and approaches:

- Internet-based technologies are considered the most convenient and affordable mean for dissemination of project results. However, their shortcomings and limitations should be bared in mind: language, digital, cultural divides and long term maintenance after completion of projects;
- Policy briefs, national seminars with clear policy issues and proposals, the involvement of press, radio and TV staff in project relevant activities (e.g. regional meetings and field work) are relevant means to convey project results to decision and policy makers;
- Links already established between the scientific institutions and the governmental and non-governmental organizations, small and medium enterprises and other stakeholders, during the project implementation should play a central role in the dissemination of projects outcomes and should possibly find an institutional setting for long-term perspectives;
- The dissemination of projects results should include the organisation of presentations at high level meetings in collaboration with national and international NGOs and competent authorities

3) In most cases the **exploitation of the research results** introduced by projects needs follow up. Therefore, it is important to:

- Use specific projects and follow up activities for supporting the exploitation of results at the regional and international level. New funding mechanisms should be designed in order to facilitate the establishment of long term networking activities and follow-ups;
- Create regional exchange networks to continue know-how transfer;
- Enforce much closer links between research and EU frameworks. For instance the MED-EUWI is a political initiative were many activities are carried out and represent an opportunity for EU research projects to convey political messages that may have an impact beyond the project life. Synergies with this programme should be sought; while the establishment of links with the EUWI-Eranet programme SPLASH⁶ may facilitate the dissemination of the main achievement of the EUWI research component;
- Strengthen the communication between the EU-projects and other organisations active in the Mediterranean Area such as the Coordinating Unit of the UNEP/MAP (MEDU) and some subordinate structures as BP/RAC (<http://www.planbleu.org/>) and INFO/RAC (<http://www.inforac.org/>). Project and follow-on activities should be clearly in line with the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable development (MSDD) as prepared by the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) (<http://www.unepmap.org/index.php?module=content2&catid=001017002>);
- Identify measurable indicators of effective communication and develop a wide range of soft indicators to assess the communication impacts and have feedback from end users with effective means.

⁶ See <http://www.splash-era.net/> for details.

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