

Workshop for the Effective Use of the Potential of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Authorities in the Countries of the Former Soviet Union and the EU in the field of Environment and Water

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Beneficiaries: Governmental Institutions and NGOs in EECCA Countries

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Abbreviations

EECCA	Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia
GWP	Global Water Partnership
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PWH	Protocol on Water and Health
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WECF	Women in Europe for a Common Future
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Project context

The “Protocol on Water and Health” (PWH) of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was signed at the third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in London in 1999.

The PWH is the first convention under international law that aims to protect public health related to water borne diseases.

Among others the PWH promotes the cooperation between the administration and the civil society at national and local level as well as in the field of water resources management and water protection.

Since 1999, 24 States in the European UNECE/WHO-Region (Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia) have signed the PWH.

The Protocol on Water and Health puts great emphasis on access to information and public participation, recognising public involvement as a vital prerequisite for successful implementation of its provisions. According to the PWH, the public should be given the opportunity to express its concerns and public authorities should be enabled to take due account of such concerns.

The Protocol underlines that, as a counterpart to their rights and entitlements, natural and legal persons and institutions, whether of the public sector or the private sector — thus including NGOs and the public — should contribute to the protection of the water environment and the conservation of water resources.

The basic principle for the implementation of the PWH is access to information and public participation in decision-making processes according to the principles of the Aarhus Convention of 1998. Article 6 of the PWH is devoted to public participation and article 10 to access to information.

The process of information exchange and the involvement of civil society is a bilateral process. Therefore, civil society must actively be involved in the decision-making process and in the procedures how to provide access to information. The environment, water, health and human rights NGOs should act as a link between the public and the administration and activate their role and rights through public work and through lobby work.

Though, in different countries, who have signed the PWH, this process has not sufficiently been initiated and implemented up until now. The cooperation of the national administration with the civil society and the NGOs is still underdeveloped in many places and through this the potential offered by the PWH to the public sector and NGOs is not perceived and utilised yet, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

This project was an independent project part that was carried out under the lead of WECF in the framework of the required public participation during the implementation of the PWH.

2. Project aims

Objectives

- Improvement of environmental protection, especially water protection and public health;
- Strengthening of the cooperation between authorities, the public and NGOs in the implementation of the PWH in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA-Region).

Project aims

- Organisation of a workshop in Bucharest in order to exchange experiences between government officials responsible for the implementation of the PWH and NGOs from the EECCA-Region;
- Awareness raising in the public sector and the authorities of the link between health, the environment and the management of water as well as other relevant sectors (i.e. agriculture, rural and urban development, tourism, etc.);
- Exchange of practical experiences and methods between the workshop participants for the management of the challenges of an improved access to information, a strengthened public sector involvement and cooperation in the implementation of the PWH;
- Provide an overview about existing instruments, techniques and concepts for the improvement of the environmental conditions, particularly water protection, access to safe water and sustainable wastewater management as well as for the promotion of access to information and public participation;
- Provide a strategic document (10 pages) based on an elaborated overview of public participation during the implementation of the PWH.

Expected results

The workshop takes place in Bucharest, Romania, during two days. About 36 government representatives from 18 countries of the UNECE/WHO-EURO Region and 15 NGOs mainly from the Former Soviet Union countries took part in the workshop.

With regard to the contents the following results were expected:

a) Information and exchange

- The participants inform and exchange each other concerning the environmental and water situation as well as about decentralised solutions for rural areas of the EECCA region;
- The participants inform and exchange each other about aspects and methods of public participation in relation to environmental topics;
- The participants discuss and plan the cooperation at national and bilateral levels between authorities, the public and NGOs for the implementation of the PWH.

b) Planning and development of strategies

- For at least 10 countries, i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary,

Uzbekistan and Belarus, strategies for the implementation of the PWH are worked out.

c) Capacity building

- Increasing the expertise related to environment of NGOs and the national authorities in the WHO-EURO Region

3. Project implementation

At the start of the project (end of May 2010), the workshop was announced in the entire EECCA region. From WECF's side, all NGOs which are known by WECF in these countries were contacted by e-mail and asked to spread the announcement. On the basis of the feedback, WECF invited 22 NGOs from 11 EECCA countries. The NGOs which could prove that they are active either in the fields of public participation, water and public health or connected in their countries to the work of the PWH were particularly considered as well as those suggested by UNECE and GWP. It was taken care to invite two persons from NGOs from each country of the target region if feasible.

WECF elaborated the programme and the course of the workshop in cooperation with UNECE. Speakers were selected so that Government as well as NGOs representatives could give presentations and also that a balance between countries was ensured. The presentations were coordinated with the NGOs so that they were well prepared and the presented slides were translated into Russian. During the workshop the English and Russian slides were shown on 2 different computer screens. Before the event, the simultaneous interpreters were instructed and special wording and technical terms were explained.

WECF drew special attention to the interactive character of the workshop and that all participants got actively engaged. Therefore, the moderator Simon Koolwijk was contacted, who came up with ideas and suggestions for an interactive participation of most of the participants despite language barriers. He was also engaged as moderator for the workshop. His advice for bilateral short discussions after each presentation as well as for group work were first of all discussed and accordingly implemented. The questionnaires for the working groups were also intensively discussed before in order to reach an active discussion and to achieve good results.

The strategic document on public participation („Concept Note on Access to Information and Public Participation under the Protocol on Water and Health“, referred to as “Concept Note” hereafter) was developed by WECF including the results of the workshop and sent to UNECE, the NGOs, the Romanian Ministry of Environment as well as to the consulting expert Kitty Bentvelsen, FEMCONSULT, in the middle of August for discussion and annotation. WECF finalised the document until the beginning of September considering the feedback, comments and proposed amendments so that the Concept Note in its final version is available since the 6th September 2010, see Annex 3. It will be presented as official background document for the next “Meeting of the Parties” in November 2010 in the 3 official UNECE languages for discussion as basis for future guidelines of public participation.

In cooperation with GWP and the Romanian Ministry of Environment, WECF coordinated the visa application for all participants from the EECCA countries and their travels. WECF was also actively involved in the logistics as well as in the local organisation, the accommodation and the provision of the meals.

4. Project results

Organisation and development

The workshop was held in Bucharest on 15 and 16 June 2010.

Totally 63 participants from 19 countries as well as from the institutions UNECE, WHO and EBRD participated (see Annex 2 or also http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/Public_participation/for_web/LoP_Bucharest_final.pdf). Altogether, there was a good representation of NGOs as well as of authorities of the entire EECCA region which can be seen in the following detailed list:

Stakeholders:

Armenia: NGO 2; governmental 4
Azerbaijan: NGO 2; governmental 0
Belarus: NGO 1; governmental 1
Germany: NGO 2; governmental 1
France: NGO 1; governmental 0
Georgia: NGO 2; governmental 2
Italy: NGO 0; governmental 3
Kazakhstan: NGO 1; governmental 1
Lithuania: NGO 0; governmental 1
Moldova: NGO 1; governmental 1
The Netherlands: NGO 2; governmental 0
Romania: NGO 4; governmental 8, University 2
Russia: NGO 2; governmental 0
Sweden: NGO 0; governmental 1
Slovakia: NGO 0; governmental 1
Tajikistan: NGO 2; governmental 0
Ukraine: NGO 2; governmental 2
Hungary: NGO 1; governmental 1
Uzbekistan: NGO 1; governmental 1
UNECE: 4
WHO: 1
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD): 1
Moderator: 1

11 NGOs shared their experiences and recommendations related to access to information and public participation through their presentations during the workshop in English and Russian. The presentations were in balance with respect to NGOs and governmental speakers; see in the programme (Annex 1) and the different European regions were represented with a focus on the EECCA countries.

All presentations of the workshop can be found on the website:

http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/public_participation_protocol_workshop.html.

Crucial for the success of the workshop was the professional moderator. The bilateral discussions after the presentations ensured that the participants got actively involved. The group work was also very positively taken up and went very well. The working groups were split accordingly to English or Russian speakers.

At first, a draft of the Concept Note (see Annex 3) as well as guiding questions for the implementation of the PWH, related to access to information and public participation as a basis for the discussion in the working groups were provided (see Annex 5).

During the workshop, UNECE distributed a questionnaire to all participants, cf. results in Annex 9. The working groups were respectively led by UNECE or WECF and discussions developed around the guiding questions. Within each working group rapporteurs were appointed.

Within the working groups, there were lively discussions and the participants intensively exchanged information and experiences in their countries. The results were integrated in the Concept Note.

Results of the workshop with regards to content

The workshop showed that the access to information in the fields of water, environment and health is very important for the participants.

a) Information and exchange

The participants discussed the situation concerning the environment and water in the respective countries and about different approaches (cf. here “Joint session: NGO experience in working with authorities and communities – good and bad lessons”), as well as about different approaches and methodologies in the fields of access to information and public participation (cf. here the presentations of the Centre for Health Education and Disease Prevention of Lithuania, the Asian Alliance for Water from Kyrgyzstan and Eco-Tiras from Moldova).

Access to information

In some countries, information is widely disseminated but the quality of the published data was partially criticised. The data are qualitatively insufficient or not comprehensible for the citizens but rather for the experts. As a good example of alternative data collection, the water safety plan approach was mentioned, as already practised by the Greens Movement Georgia for example (cf. Concept Note, pp.9 for this).

Many participants recommended the increased use of media for the dissemination of information as well as modern technologies, particularly the internet. However, the challenges were mentioned as well: reaching the rural population, because they often lack internet access and also the capability to read (cf. in details Concept Note, pp. 8).

The involvement of young children, pupils and schools were also considered as an important component for the dissemination of the PWH. It was clearly stated that well-informed population and authorities are the most important supporting pillars for the implementation of the PWH.

Public participation

Some NGOs highlighted that ministries and authorities communicate and cooperate too little with each other. For example, it was reported by Ukrainian NGOs that the information policies of the Ministry of Environment is very good, but the Ministry of Health does hardly make any data available.

The identification of all stakeholders and their organisation were seen as a particular challenge depending on the region, the national tasks and the national targets in the

execution of the PWH. Particularly vulnerable groups are often difficult to reach and to address – also for NGOs (cf. in details Concept Note, pp. 10 ff for this).

Some participants presented very good experiences with citizens' participation, others had not any clear idea of how the involvement of citizens could be organised. The participants expressed the need for an intensive exchange between the parties involved in the subject of citizens' involvement. This could be realised through international fora, like for example in the framework of the Aarhus Convention, but also at regional level. Some participants from EU-countries said that in combination with the Water Framework Directive, mechanisms for public participation were developed which could be applied in the work of the PWH.

Finally, many participants retained that a consistent understanding of the concept of public participation and the political will for an active involvement of civil society are required to successfully implement public participation in the framework of the PWH.

b) Planning and development of strategies

In addition, to learning from others, the participants wanted to develop strategies for better financing of public participation processes. The international cooperation was also stressed by means of cooperation with the newly created "Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making" of the Aarhus Convention. Moreover, all participants were convinced that the elaboration of guidelines for the practical implementation of access to information and public participation in the framework of the PWH would be of great benefit.

c) Capacity building

The experiences of the participants from different European countries – from governmental and NGOs side - were shared through the presentations. They were about access to information, e.g. in real time on the website of the bathing water quality in Italy or the information sites for children in Romania, for public participation for example from the sector-spreading development of strategies for water resources management in Sweden and for technologies, e.g. for sustainable sanitation supply in Europe, cf. Programme in Annex 1 or the presentations under

http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/public_participation_protocol_workshop.html.

Beyond the contents, the interactive approach was introduced to make the relatively uninspiring topic more interesting and was directly tested by the participants. Many participants mentioned that they will make use of the methods for their own meetings.

5. Measures towards a long-term impact of the project

Sustainable project results

- The participants were informed about the importance of water protection and the necessity of citizens' participation and received helpful indications to apply the method in their countries.
- The participants have seen that workshops with a relatively "dry" subject can be organised interactively. UNECE and some participants have mentioned that they will use the here tested moderation style for other meetings accordingly.
- Via internet and e-mail all NGOs of the EECCA countries whose contacts are known to WECF will be motivated and supported to actively promote the implementation of the PWH in their countries.
- NGOs who could not attend the workshop were informed and asked to fill in the UNECE questionnaire about the "Implementation of the PWH and the Access to Information and Public Participation", cf. Results in Annex 9.
- The workshop delivered valuable information on the elaboration of the Concept Note on public participation during the implementation of the PWH that were integrated to the final version. The expert Kitty Bentvelsen, FEMCONSULT, Consultant on Gender and Development, provided further helpful recommendations.
- All documents and presentations of the workshop are available on the website http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/public_participation_protocol_workshop.html.
- The PWH and the results of the workshop were presented to more than 50 NGOs at the WECF network meeting in Ukraine in September 2010 who showed a great interest to an active participation in the implementation of the PWH in their countries, for example to contribute to the target-setting process.
- The workshop showed that financial means for further financing of the work of NGOs in the framework of the PWH are missing. For a higher participation of NGOs to the meetings of the state parties financial means should be provided by the European Union (e.g, EU-Core-Programme for environmental NGO), with the target of supporting a direct cooperation of the NGOs and the national authorities.
- The UNECE/WHO-EURO invited WECF to participate in the next meeting of the parties and to actively implement the PWH work programme for the years 2011-2013 on the issue of "Access to Information and Public Participation". At this Meeting the Concept Note will also be discussed.

Further use of the Project results

- The network of the participants established by the workshop will further be used in the framework of the PWH and also for other water-relevant themes.
- The participants of the workshop spoke about the proposition of a cooperation between the PWH and the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making of the Aarhus Convention to the Working Group of the Aarhus Convention in July 2010. The Working Group agreed on the cooperation and the Task Force took it up at its first meeting in October 2010 in their work programme. In 2012 a common workshop on the subject of public participation is planned.
- The Meeting of the Parties of the PWH is scheduled for November 2010. There the participants will discuss the Concept Note and if necessary the parties will conclude

to develop Guidelines for the Public Sector Involvement on the basis of that document.

6. Project evaluation by the project coordinator

Preparation and execution of the Workshop

The cooperation with the project partners UNECE/WHO-EURO, the Romanian Ministry for Environment and Forestry and GWP Romania was very good and intensive. The workshop was a success despite the very short time available for the organisation. The participants were open and active in the discussion which was successfully supported by the methodology and moderation of the workshop (bilateral discussions after the presentations, sufficient time for questions, discussions in the working groups).

The issuing of the Romanian visa to the non-governmental participants from the EECCA region was very time-consuming and not always successful. Due to visa problems only 17 NGOs from 10 EECCA countries attended the workshop (instead of 22 NGOs from 11 EECCA-countries). NGOs from Kyrgyzstan did not attend because of the severe political situation at the time of the event and from Moldova, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan respectively only one NGO was present.

Evaluation of the workshop according to the contents

The expected project results were achieved to a large extent. The active participation and the input of the participants made it very clear that the governmental participants and the NGOs were made aware of the need and importance of public participation within the implementation of the PWH.

The exchange of practical experiences and methods on the subject of access to information and public participation between the participants took interactively place at different levels and resulted in an overview of existing practices and specific challenges in this field (cf. Concept Note). The Concept Note is available in three languages for the "Meeting of the Parties" in November 2010 for discussion and further elaboration (http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/public_participation_protocol_workshop.html).

Without this project, this area would not have been covered and the decisive step for the development of concrete guidelines for the implementation of public participation in the framework of the PWH would have been lacked.

The feedback of the participants during and after the workshop respectively on the contributions and discussions as well as on the moderation was mainly positive. Apparently a better understanding was developed during the workshop between governmental and NGO representatives, e.g. Armenia.

However, the project's aim of developing a strategy and concrete work plans for the implementation of the PWH in different countries was not reached. This was due to the fact that the workshop was not as extensive and the participants were not well enough informed about the PWH in advance. In any case, the workshop provided the prerequisite and showed the government representatives opportunities for cooperation towards further steps in this direction.

7. Project evaluation by the beneficiaries

The participants provided very positive feedback during and also after the workshop. The discussions and the experiences of the participants contributed to raise awareness on this subject.

In the workshop, it became clear that there are partly communication problems between governmental representatives and NGOs in some countries. This workshop showed exemplary how the inclusion of civil society can be realised. During the workshop, the understanding between governmental representatives and NGOs was improved; particularly this was the case for Armenia, which will hopefully be carried on further.

Following the workshop, WECF was invited from NGOs from Moldova to the yearly scheduled Dniester-Conference in October 2010, which aims at sharing the experiences about water protection in the Dniester river basin in order to present there the Concept Note (cf. Annex 7 and <http://wecf.eu/english/articles/2010/11/dniestr-conference2010.php>). Beside the NGOs, government representatives from Moldova and Ukraine who did not participate at the workshop also took part so that the topic was further discussed.

During the WECF network meeting in the Ukraine in September 2010, where more than 50 participants from NGOs of the EECCA region participated, the PWH and the mechanisms of public participation were presented. Within the network, there is great interest to take an active part in the implementation of the PWH.

The UNECE/WHO-EURO invited WECF to the “Meeting of the Parties” in Bucharest in November 2010. WECF was also offered to organise a “Side-Event” during the meeting in line with the subject. The draft of the programme is meanwhile available, cf. Annex 8.

In addition, UNECE/WHO-EURO invited WECF in a long-term arrangement to actively coordinate and implement the PWH work plan for the years 2011-2013 about access to information and public participation.

8. Project Documentation

All workshop presentations can be found on the attached CD and as well as on http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/public_participation_protocol_workshop.html.

Annex 1a) Programme of the Workshop in English

Annex 1b) Programme of the Workshop in Russian

Annex 2 a) List of participants

Annex 2 b) List of participants attending the Workshop

Annex 3a) Strategic paper “Concept Note on Access to Information and Public Participation under the Protocol on water and Health” in English

Annex 3b) Strategic paper “Concept Note on Access to Information and Public Participation under the Protocol on water and Health” in Russian

Annex 4a) Project information sheet in German

Annex 4b) Project information sheet in English

Annex 4c) Project information sheet in Russian

Annex 5) Central questions for the Work in working groups

Annex 6) Pictures documentation

Annex 7) Paper for the Dniester Conference “The Importance of Public Participation as stipulated by the Protocol on water and Health for the Implementation of the Human Right to water and Sanitation” cf. <http://wecf.eu/english/articles/2010/11/dniestr-conference2010.php>

Annex 8) Draft Programme for the Side Event at the Meeting of the Parties in November 2010.

Annex 9) UNECE-questionnaire and summary of results