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Subject: Innovative practices to be considered by the Ministerial Consultations of the eighth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF), Jeju, Republic of Korea, 29 – 31 March 2004

Project “Lebende Flüsse – Living Rivers”

Description of Initiative

The project aimed at preserving rivers with a high ecological potential, re-structuring/restoring ecologically degraded rivers or river stretches, increasing of awareness and understanding of the public of river ecosystems by 2000. The goal was to revitalize 500 river stretches, create 500 ha new flooding areas, initiate 500 ha new riverine forest, and establish 500 ha of new vegetative strips along the banks. In total 1 289,5 km of river stretches of national wide importance had been selected for the project. The initiative was carried out by the national administration in close co-operation with NGOs, thus contributing to a considerable awareness raising of citizens at local level.

The initiative was innovative as it was the first large scale re-structuring project in Austria. Additionally it was one of the first projects in Europe, where administration and NGOs succeeded in awareness raising at regional and local level, as well as in achieving considerable improvements in densely populated areas.

It addresses the environmental issues of the MD goals and WSSD target as it is directly related to the ecosystem IWRM by tackling the ecological functioning of river systems in a sustainable way. In addition, it combines river restoration and flood protection.

Mainstreaming / Sustainability

The initiative was included into national sustainable development planning, which will further be maintained by the provisions of the EU Water Framework Directive. A particular role of the project within the mainstreaming process represented the co-operation with NGOs, public awareness campaigns and the involvement of the public.

The project was financed by provincial/local as well as federal funding.

Replicating the Initiative.

The applicability of the project is given as 74 river stretches were successfully restored in Austria, in the meanwhile the restoration of rivers has already been carried out in other European countries as well, and is a requirement by the WFD, if quality objectives are not met.

Lessons learned: A systematic approach to raise awareness of the general public, has proven to be indispensable to achieve success.

In the past, Austrian rivers were significantly degraded in their flow due to the mountainous character of country and the considerable high population density, now being restructured and restored with high costs. Countries with an intact water environment should plan and carry out structural measures in a sustainable way, considering the environmental consequences in advance.

More details see publications “The book of Austrian rivers” and “The future of Austrian Rivers”, (publications of the BMLF, BMUFJW, WWF), and the attached BMLFUW contribution produced in relation to the Bonner Umweltkonferenz.