

Greece - Contribution to the Governing Council Meeting of UNEP at Ministerial level (Jeju, Korea, March 2004), in view of the 12th Session of the UN CSD (New York, April 2004)

Theme: Integrated Water Resources Management - IWRM

The Pinios Pilot River Basin Project

1. Description of the Initiative

Since December 2003, a new legislative and institutional framework has been put into force in Greece. It consists of Law 3199/9-12-2003 (OJG 280A/2003) on the "protection and the sustainable management of the water resources" with which the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC) is transposed into the national legislation. This new framework Law foresees a radical reorientation of the respective administrative capacities and introduces an innovative and holistic approach concerning water management that recognizes explicitly the ecological function of water. It lays emphasis on management of water on river basin level as well as on water pricing so that it reflects its full costs. The 3199/03 Law also incorporates the 'polluter pays principle' and the objective of maintaining or reaching a 'good ecological status' for all water resources through control of pollution by use of thresholds levels and standards. It also introduces innovative approaches concerning protection of water quantity and cooperation on transnational level. According to Law 3199/03, Regional Water Directorates and Councils, supervised by the National Water Agency, will be established for each one of the 13 River Basin District / Water Region (RBDs) of the country, aiming at co-ordinating water policy activities and implementing specific Programmes of Measures and Action Plans for achieving the environmental objectives of the WFD for each RBD. Representation of interested parties in regional Water Councils ensures an active public involvement in the process.

Within this innovative institutional and legislative framework, the **Pinios Pilot River Basin Project** (Pinios PRB) is being implemented; The overall aim of this Project is to identify the technical and management problems that may come up in real cases of the WFD implementation in the country and to develop pragmatic solutions for their addressing, to test the practicability and efficiency of the technical and supporting Guidance Documents on key aspects of the Water Framework Directive before they are widely applied in the country, to attain a concrete example of the application of these technical Guidance Documents and to inform the interested parties on the implementation of the WFD, through real circumstances, allowing the stakeholders (including local and regional authorities) to learn and be involved in the process from an early stage. The project commenced in mid-2003 and is expected to run for 4 years (until the end of 2006).

Pinios River (216 km) is located in the central section of mainland Greece, in Thessaly (Thessalia) Water Region. The total surface area of Pinios River Basin is 10.550 km². The number of inhabitants in the area is about 700.000. The main economic activities are agriculture, industry, tourism, breeding, fisheries and forestry. Water used for irrigation reaches 96% and for water supply 3,3% of total water consumption. Total water availability is about 3.209 hm³ and consists of 2.596 hm³ surface water and 613 hm³ groundwater.

Pressures in the surface, coastal and ground waters in Pinios river basin are being exerted from point and diffuse pollution sources, the over-exploitation of groundwater during the summer irrigation period, the water abstraction for irrigation purposes, channels for flood protection and tourist infrastructure in the coastal area. The surface water quality in the river basin is generally in good condition and only in a few sampling sites the nitrites and the pesticides show elevated levels. Concerning the groundwater, nitrate and ammonium exceed, in some cases, the critical value for drinking water.

The institutional and legislative framework

The objectives

The context

Pressures

The Hellenic Ministry for Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works is supporting the Pinios Pilot River Basin project (directly or through other on-going projects) financially with the amount of around 1,000,000 €; 600,000 € are part of the overall budget for implementation tasks of WFD in Greece whereas additional funds from other on-going and scheduled activities /projects, at national and regional level, will also be allocated.

The Hellenic Ministry for Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works and the Regional Directory of Planning and Development in Thessaly are jointly promoting and implementing this project. Active involvement of all stakeholders throughout project implementation is ensured through the participation of all local and regional authorities, NGOs, Educational Institutes, scientists, the Greek Biotope-Wetland Centre, WWF, MedWet, regional agricultural administrations etc, in the working group that has been established.

Such a holistic and participatory approach is expected to add real value to national efforts for IWRM through introduction of innovative schemes, both from an administrative but also from a scientific and social-participatory point of view. Through implementation of this project the capacities and understanding of both local and central governments as well as of stakeholders is expected to be further developed, having a significant contribution to reaching the Johannesburg targets and the MDGs.

2. Mainstreaming - Sustainability

The targets of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) (2002), regarding the management of water resources, are set out in the National Strategy for Water Resources (NSWR) (2002) and aim at the sustainable use of water resources, the efficient protection of water ecosystems and the attainment of high quality standards for all surface and ground water bodies by the year 2015. The basic objectives of the NSWR, include: promotion of an integrated approach for water management at river basin level (nation and transboundary) and protection of water quantity, decentralization of water management authorities-bodies, upgrading and expanding of infrastructure (including monitoring, data banks, modelling etc), incorporation of socio-economic considerations in water management as well as protection of water resources against pollution.

In line with these broad objectives, the Pinios Pilot Project has been fully mainstreamed into national planning as a front runner effort, with secured funding (see above) that will provide valuable experience and know-how for applying innovative approaches for IWRM, throughout the whole country, as a next step.

3. Replicating the Initiative

Once the project is completed, the results will be readily applicable to all other river basins in the country. Moreover, experience gained from implementation of this pilot project is being widely diffused both within Greece and amongst other partner countries of Greece's broader geographic region, through bilateral cooperation and experience sharing.

The lessons learned from this project are many and, broadly, regard identification of deficiencies or lacks in the existing mechanism for IWRM and for implementing the WFD in Greece. More specifically, during the first phase of the WFD implementation in Greece, the main problems encountered were related to compatibility issues with current administrative bodies and lack of information and data, especially for biological quality elements. This, consequently, has created difficulties in the definition of reference conditions and the development of classification systems. However, the passing on of Law 3199/03, the establishment of new operational monitoring networks and, most importantly, the implementation of Pinios PRB Project, as a pilot for trouble shooting, will be the best way to identify problems and develop sustainable solutions for their addressing, at an early stage.