

Learning to Share Water

With over 263 water basins shared by countries worldwide, cooperating over water is not an option, it is necessity. And it pays to share. It's an important lesson learned early in life but can be quickly forgotten once politics and resources become involved. Shared watercourses influence regional politics and should lay a foundation for social and political stability as well as for sustainable economic prosperity and poverty reduction.

Water stimulates cooperation far more often than it generates conflict. But co-managing watercourses across borders is not easy. Accomplishing the first step, simply getting everyone to the table to discuss the sharing of benefits and responsibilities over water bodies, is hard in and of itself. Knowing how to best manage that water equitably and sustainably is the next challenge. Finally, all actors have to be convinced and agree on the best path forward. And this is all before the real work gets started – the implementing, monitoring, and following-up process still must be done.

Transboundary Water Management (TWM) requires highly capable professionals. Expertise in water resources management is not enough. Knowledge in politics, negotiation, and regional social contexts are essential. In developing and water scarce regions, both the challenge and urgency for successful collaboration is magnified. To help build needed capacity and knowledge, SIWI, Ramboll Natura and regional partners offer International Transboundary Water Management Training Programmes

“We regard the individual participants as a vehicle to implement sound and realistic water-solutions in their organisation and region,” explains Anton Earle, Project Director of Capacity Building at SIWI. In addition to a global programme, TWM training courses are offered for the Lake Victoria area in East Africa and for the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. Especially in the MENA-region, where people from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and West Bank and Gaza can participate in the programme, politics are highly sensitive and collaborations between states are problematic.

The TWM programmes aim to improve the situation. “The program’s impact is noticeable; cross-border collaboration is being initiated, university curricula are being updated, and outdated perspectives on water and development are being revised,” said Klas Sandström, Programme Director of TWM-MENA.

The TWM Programmes involve more than lectures and discussions. Participants gain practical experience through



Photo: Manfred Matz, SIWI

individual project work that applies their training to a water-issue in their home country and organisation.

In 2006-2007, around 50 participants attended the TWM-MENA-courses. There, international experts led workshops, lectures, panel-discussions and interactive sessions on negotiation tactics, hydro-politics, environmental water requirements, and a host of related topics in TWM.

Immediate Impact in the Middle East and Northern Africa

Experiences of former participants show both the necessity and effectiveness of the programme. According to 2007 participant Mr. Muath Jamil Abu Saada, a Hydroinformatics Specialist from Ramallah, the TWM course was very useful, "I could enrich my experience in Transboundary Watershed Management and considered the presentation of different case studies in both the Arab world and Europe as very helpful. The programme will have positive impacts on my organisation and the water sector in the Palestinian Authority." Saada is employed at the Research Sector of the Palestinian Hydrology Group, a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working in developing water resources and environment issues in the West Bank and Gaza. He heard about the programme from friends and appreciates the ongoing exchange with other participants, "I have now new friends from most of the Arab world countries and we can help each other with both technical and social issues."

He dealt with the application of international law in the allocation of the Jordan River waters among its five riparian states Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian areas. As no real tangible improvement, despite bilateral discussions with the Government of Israel during the Annapolis process, could have been achieved, Bateh hopes that in the future the Swedish TWM-officials will be politically supported by the EU to reach better results. He regards Gaza as an important area to focus the TWM programmes on, and hopes that with more Gaza-professionals taking part there will be a stronger political involvement.

Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges

These are not the only difficulties and challenges TWM-officials face in the MENA-Region. In her former job as a project coordinator at Friends of the Earth Middle East in Jerusalem, Alice Nassar Jaraiseh of SIWI participated in the 2006 TWM MENA-Programme and missed a personal supervisor at the start-up workshop, "Be-



Photo: Mats Larnerstad

cause of the tense political situation in Palestine and Iraq, supervisors who support the participants with their projects won't travel to those countries," she noted.

In Northern Africa, countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia also participate in the MENA TWM programme. Sihem Jebari from the Tunisian National Research for Rural Engineering Water and Forestry in Ariana is one of the former participants of 2007.

She dealt with siltation caused by soil erosion at the Mellegue water-reservoir between the semi-arid regions of Algeria and Tunisia. "Siltation is not only reducing the reservoir capacity rapidly, but also has direct negative, economic and environmental consequences on society. Less siltation means more water for irrigation, water supply, and better flood control," said Jebari.

As a result of her TWM-training she is now able to predict erosion and reservoir capacity decrease as well as flood mitigation

and the fluvial management for the next decades. "Specialist lecturers could enlarge my knowledge and enlighten me about the basic negotiation rules crucial to manage water issues. We could open a new research path in which my institution wasn't involved directly," said Sebari, stressing the ongoing cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia.

Over the next two years and beyond, the programme initiators hope to broaden their influence. Having experienced a TWM-course herself, Alice Nassar Jaraiseh knows what she speaks about when she highlights the importance of TWM. "Water is too often regarded as a technical issue, but the TWM Programme can overcome this thinking by illustrating the influences of social, economic or legal aspects. An environmental problem has not necessarily an environmental solution."

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International Training Programmes

Established in 2006 by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency Sida, the programmes offer mid-career professionals from around the world who are working or researching in the water-sector to increase their knowledge about international water resources processes and show them new views and possible solutions concerning water-issues in their home country.