



**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS**

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONSULTATION
ON THE REVISION OF THE EUROPEAN
CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT**

August 2016



ABOUT AQUA PUBLICA EUROPEA

Aqua Publica Europea (APE) is the European Association of Public Water Operators. It brings together 100% publicly owned water and sanitation services, and their national and regional associations. Our mission is to promote public water-management at both European and international level.

Overall, APE members provide water and sanitation services to over 80 million Europeans, covering the rich and varied landscape of our continent - from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, and from capital cities to remote rural areas.

- APE is a platform, facilitating knowledge exchange and joint projects among members to improve performance.
- APE is a forum for public operators to meet and discuss water policy issues with the objective of contributing to international policy-making in the water sector.
- APE is a catalyst, supporting the development of the international water community by promoting a dialogue between public water operators, the business sector, the academic world, and public institutions.

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Aqua Publica Europea, the European Association of Public Water Operators, welcomes the European Commission's decision to launch a public consultation on the revision of the European Consensus on Development.

In this contribution we will stress the importance of an effective management of water resources and of universal access to water services for the realization of the international agendas on sustainable development and climate change. Accordingly, we call upon the European Commission to implement an ambitious development policy in the area of water, based on an active support to capacity-development initiatives.

Access to water and sanitation in the international development agenda: a key condition to ensure human dignity, economic development and international security

Despite significant progress over the last decade, over 600 million people have still no access to an improved source of drinking water (with more than half living in sub-Saharan Africa), while one third of the world population lacks access to improved sanitationⁱ. The need to increase common efforts to address this critical situation is fully recognized by the new 2030 UN Development Agenda: not only is water assigned a specific goal and an articulated set of targets, but the issue of an effective and equitable management of water resources is also addressed in a plurality of other goals, from urban resilience to biodiversity.

In other words, the SDG approach recognises that access to water services is an essential human right, but also that it plays a more general role for socio-economic development: as argued by the WHO, every "US\$1 invested [in access to water and sanitation] would give an economic return of between US\$3 and US\$34, depending on the region"ⁱⁱ.

In addition to this, the specific nature of water resources and their provision, that is, the fact of being a localised common good, make it an important factor in cross-border relations, especially when the resource is scarce but also now that climate change is leading to more extreme events, such as flooding. As a consequence, water resources management, especially in transboundary contexts, is in fact increasingly recognised as an important factor for political stability and international security.

Lastly, the importance of water is further deemed to increase due to climate change. Water being the main vehicle of the earth's climate, climate change will have profound effects on both its quality and availability, as all scientific analyses predict. Thus, it is not a surprise that important international fora, such as the World Economic Forum, identify water crises as top sources of global risksⁱⁱⁱ.

The EU development approach needs an ambitious and specific strategy to address water-related challenges

Appropriately, the strategic approach outlined in the explanatory note accompanying the consultation develops a holistic vision, which tries to address the **interconnectedness of the challenges ahead**: equity, climate change, sustainable development. In this framework, and for the reasons outlined above, particular attention should be paid to the **systemic functions played by an effective management of water resources**.

In its Communication “A decent life for all”^{iv}, the European Commission clearly identifies water as an area of intervention in order to “ensure basic living standards, promoting the drivers for inclusive and sustainable growth as well as ensuring sustainable management of natural resources”. In its “Agenda for Change”^v, the Commission puts the “energy-food” nexus at the centre of its strategy. The present survey reiterates the stress on this nexus, as well as on oceans: **clearly, all these elements are strongly dependent on water resources management**. Yet, no reference to water and its multifaceted relation with other socio-environmental dimensions can be found in this consultation. In other words, the **consultation falls short of recognising the complexity of water resource management, and the consequent need for a targeted approach**. This is all the more surprising if we consider that, in the previous programming period, the European Commission mobilised significant resources and deployed specific tools to support cooperation in the water sector.

Against this background, we **highlight the need that the EU Development strategy encompasses an approach specific to water and earmarked resources for the water sector**. In particular, we emphasise the **importance of deploying intervention instruments specifically aimed at enhancing water management capacities in developing countries**.

The importance of supporting capacity-development programmes and the role of Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs)

The **development of localised competencies and know-how is an essential condition to ensure that investments (be they public or private) are properly managed** and absorbed. It is also important to ensure the ownership of the assistance strategy (and its results) by its beneficiaries, as well as to avoid the replication of dependency conditions on western know-how. Finally, an effective capacity-development strategy, as highlighted by the Accra Agenda for Action^{vi}, is essential to trigger a self-sustained development process, as it facilitates the identification of innovative solutions and technologies that are really adapted to beneficiaries' local needs and specificities.

In this framework, we would like to point out **the potential of not-for-profit Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs)**. Drawing on the experience of many APE members, which have been acting as mentors for water operators in developing countries in several assistance programmes, we can confidently affirm that this approach has proved to be an effective tool to realise sustainable capacity-building actions:

- Mentoring programmes are developed starting from beneficiaries' needs, thus ensuring responsiveness to local necessities.
- These programmes often benefit from the involvement of local communities and non-state actors, thus favouring the ownership of the interventions by beneficiaries, and the understanding of local governance and conditions by the mentors: two essential conditions for successful cooperation.
- The not-for-profit nature of WOPs and the involvement of public companies facilitate the development of trust among partners which, in turn, is the building block for a fruitful exchange of know-how.

The importance of EU support to cooperation in the water sector

In the previous programming period, the importance of Water Operators Partnerships for capacity development was recognized by the EU, which actively supported this approach in the framework of the “**ACP-EU Water Facility**”.

Regrettably, the ACP-EU Water Facility was discontinued, due to “EC human resources constraints” and in order to favour “aid-effectiveness”^{vii} (how cutting support to water cooperation will improve aid-effectiveness is however far from being self-evident). As a consequence, the WASH sector is now supported by the EU in fewer partner countries. This is unfortunate for several reasons. Firstly, according to the OECD, “aid was instrumental in encouraging progress toward the MDG targets on water supply and sanitation”^{viii}. Secondly, a 2012 independent assessment from the University of

Greenwich^{ix} emphasised the added-value and cost-effectiveness of this scheme, finding that projects supported by this instrument were likely to “achieve permanent results” with a strong replicating potential. Therefore, the reasons behind the Commission’s decision to cancel this programme in the current programming period are not easy to grasp.

In addition, we understand the accompanying notes’ emphasis on the need to achieve a greater involvement of private investors in the development strategy. However, we are persuaded that direct support from international institutions also remains crucial. Although ODA can necessarily cover only a small part of the overall financing needs, it is nonetheless precious because it can support those investments in “public goods” that have diffused and long-term positive effects (which do not always provide for the short-term gains businesses pursue), and which cannot be privately captured. In addition, private investment is often not in a position to provide the same kind of capacity building actions than not-for-profit cooperation. As even the OECD has stated, “private sector participation is not a panacea” when it comes to development aid for water^x.

To conclude, we **call on the European Commission to pay greater attention to the importance of water resource management in the context of its development strategy and, consequently, to effectively support capacity-development initiatives in this field, including through WOPs.** This is needed if we want to be consistent with, and achieve, the main objective set out in the “A decent life for all” Communication —that is, “*empowering people to lift themselves out of poverty*”. As the European association of 100% publicly-owned water operators we are ready to take up the challenge and increase our contribution to this objective.

REFERENCES

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ⁱⁱⁱ World Economic Forum, Global Risks 2015. Available at: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2015/#read>

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^v European Commission, *Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change*, COM/2011/0637 final

^{vi} OECD, Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action; <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>

^{vii} European Commission, DG DEVCO, Post-2015 water framework; http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/infrastructure/water-and-sanitation/post-2015-water-framework_en

^{viii} OECD, *Financing Water and Sanitation in Developing Countries: The Contribution of External Aid*. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/water-relatedaid.htm>

^{ix} Lobina, Emanuele and Hall, David (2012) *ACP-EU Water Facility: Partnerships initiative. Project Report*. PSIRU, London, UK. Available at: <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/9430/>

^x OECD, *Financing Water and Sanitation in Developing Countries* [see note 6]