

MOP2 PWH: Key conclusions from the side event on public participation organised by WECF and MAMA-86 as issue group coordinator of the European Eco-Forum

The side event on “Needs and Financing of Public Participation under the Protocol on Water and Health, linking to the EUWI and NPD” was organised by the NGOs from the WECF, MAMA-86 and European Eco-forum networks.

The side event included speakers from NGO, from governments and from the Aarhus Convention task-force on public participation.

The NGOs presented recent experience in participating in the target-setting process under the protocol on water and health in their countries. Anna Tsvetkova, Water Issue group leader of European ECO-Forum presented experience of public participation in Protocol targets setting process in Ukraine, initiated by NGO “MAMA-86”, which has been involved in the Protocol on water and health since 1997. Tsvetkova reported about the regional and national consultations with stakeholders, and the very concrete and constructive public input into the draft of the National targets for Ukraine to the Protocol on water and health. She gave an example of public amendments to the draft, including proposals of specific indicators for vulnerable groups, in particular access to safe water and sanitation in rural schools. Among the main lessons learned from the public consultations in Ukraine is that public consultations need public awareness on Protocol, resources (skilled human resources, time and financing) and facilitation of these consultations. NGO can be a facilitator of this process.

The NGO Eco-Tiras from Moldova presented NGO consultations were organised, which at first stage lead to some friction, but at a later stage has lead to good cooperation with both ministries of environment and health. Also in Moldova, the NGOs insisted on more specific indicators, a.o. for access to sanitation, particularly in non serviced rural areas.

The NGO Armenian Women for Health and a Healthy Environment, represented by Emma Anaksyashan, presented the consultation process for the river basin management pilot project, and preparations of the National Policy Dialogue, which has suffered from lack of coordination between different ministries. She also presented the added value NGOs can bring from their practical experience in providing drinking water and sanitation to vulnerable groups, e.g. schools and low income communities.

Sascha Gabizon of WECF concluded that the case studies from the 3 countries show that public participation has a very positive effect, bringing social aspects into the target setting process, and priorities based on people’s most urgent needs. She also concluded that because of lack of coordination between ministries, public participation has not been as effective as possible, and that it should be avoided that only organisations which work closely with the one of the ministries are involved, but that it is important that this should be a wide consultation open to all of civil society, and where those organisations with most experience, - albeit more critical – should be able to play a leading role in organising the input from civil society. A key recommendation therefore is that:

- funding for NGO participation should be set aside as a percentage of the budget allocated for organising the target setting process from the PWH facilitating mechanism. This can be 5 or 10% of the total budget.

- Funding should be transferred directly to the coordinating body of the NGOs. The NGOs should elect a leading NGO or coordinating body form amongst their own constituency.

The government representative from Georgia and Moldova contributed with their experience, and echoed the conclusion that NGO participation is very valuable and should be strengthened.

The chair of the Taskforce on Public Participation of the Aarhus Convention, Mr Phil Kearney, presented in his conclusion the requirement of parties to also financially support public participation in the implementation of the protocol on water and health.

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