



NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

issues in the spotlight...

Collaboration between FAO, the Government of Italy and the Nile Basin countries

Managing transboundary water

Since 1996, FAO and the Government of Italy have been collaborating on an ambitious project along the basin of the world's longest river. The "Information products for the Nile Basin Water Resource Management" was the sum total of three consecutive projects carried out with ten countries in the Nile Basin.

In October 2011, the project officially concluded and was handed over to the Nile Basin Initiative, an intergovernmental organization created in 1999 and headquartered in Entebbe, Uganda.

Dr. Wael Khairy, Executive Director of the Nile Basin Initiative Secretariat, speaking at an informational session at FAO Headquarters in November 2011, remembered that when FAO began in 1996 there was "no data, no information, no knowledge. FAO started with exploring the untapped potential of the Nile water, of the Nile Basin, and started to do maps for the potentialities – land use, land cover, topography, meteorology, hydrology, the stream flow and levels – and they took us from knowing nothing, to a very good database and information system present in the Nile Basin countries. And from that stage we went one stage farther, which is, transferring this to knowledge, which came up with the communication products and knowledge products, which helped very well with the planning, taking decisions for how to do transboundary projects on water."

This complex transboundary project involves ten Nile Basin countries – Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. South Sudan did not participate as it was established after the completion of the project. But as it is becoming a member of the Nile Basin Initiative, it will benefit from the project. The Nile basin population is growing rapidly. Its current population of 200 million is expected to increase by between 61 to 82 percent by 2030, according to an FAO project report. This long-term project emphasized collaboration, capacity-building and knowledge sharing between the countries. According to Dr. Khairy, a protocol signed by the Nile Basin countries ensures that "legally [we can] share the data between all the countries, Ministries of Food, Agriculture, Environment and even the research centres and universities who are interested in water and the Nile issues."

This data sharing and collaboration are crucial to countries along the Nile basin trying to increase the efficiency and productivity of water use and to adequately account for water and to weigh the costs and benefits of water policies.

The Italian Government provided overall investment of 16 million US dollars for the project. Minister Plenipotentiary Pier Francesco Zazo, Chief UTC, Directorate General for Development Cooperation, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was on hand at FAO Headquarters for the Nile Basin event to discuss the importance of transboundary initiatives such as this project. "This is a success story. Italy has always maintained a foreign policy that pays attention to areas where risks of conflict are very high. Most of the countries in the Nile Basin area are priority areas for the Italian Cooperation. This is a very successful story of how to better use the scarce water resources and how to foster the cooperation of the Nile Basin countries."



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Alexander Müller, Assistant Director-General of FAO's Natural Resources Management and Environment Department agreed that the successful collaboration between countries was a key element in the realization of this project. "We know that the management of transboundary water will be the key challenge of the 21st century and what we can learn from this Nile project is that we have to start collaborating with all countries right from the beginning. So, it's not only to provide technical data, we have to, in parallel, involve all the countries in capacity development, and in bringing countries together in a platform where all countries can work together. If we go to other areas of transboundary resources, collaboration among the countries is key."

Pasquale Steduto, Deputy Director of FAO's Land and Water Division was involved in the project up to its completion in October 2011. He explained how the participants experienced a progressive increase of confidence building, which was lacking at the start of the project. He described the changes he observed between countries once they began sharing information and devising solutions to their water needs together. "Water was a common resource and each country couldn't make their own development plan, without accounting for what the neighbor countries were doing. This would have completely blown up their individual plan. So countries understood the value of the cooperation, and over time, not only did the people involved in the project become friends, but also politically, the dialogue became much smoother than at the beginning."

Mr. Steduto is also optimistic about the lessons learned in the region and how they can be applied to other transboundary projects. "This was a very important project for us because we have learned a lot. It is not only the countries that have benefitted, we as FAO have benefitted by understanding and building our own capacity when we deal with transboundary water. And interestingly, while we are finishing the Nile Basin project, the Italian Cooperation has provided funds – about 4.5 million dollars – to address the lower Mesopotamia Basin, which is another transboundary situation. And definitely, we will go there with this strong luggage of knowledge, of information and of experience that definitely will allow us not to start from scratch."

WEB SITES:

Nile Basin project web site

www.fao.org/nr/water/faonile/index.html

FAO Water web site

www.fao.org/nr/water/index.html

Nile Basin Initiative web site

www.nilebasin.org

VIDEO:

Video interviews from the Nile Basin project ceremony

www.fao.org/nr/water/infores_video_nile_basin.html



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