

First International Environment Forum for Basin Organizations

Towards Sustainable Freshwater Governance

UNEP, Nairobi, Kenya, 26-28 November 2014

HIGH LEVEL SESSION - 28 NOVEMBER

Speech by Jean-François DONZIER

Secretary of the International Network of Basin Organizations

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Heads of Delegation, Dear Colleagues and Friends of Basin Organizations.

It is a great honor for the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) to be able to speak before you on the occasion of the 1st Environment Forum for Basin Organizations organized with UNEP.

It is said that "where there is a Will there is a Way".

This is definitely what we need today, *a strong and lasting political will in the long term* to be able to face a *critical situation*.

The overall situation is serious:

- The quality of water deteriorates,
- The aquatic environments are eutrophic,
- The ecosystems are destroyed or in poor ecological status.

Too little polluting waste is treated and the non-point source pollution, mainly from agricultural origin, is not controlled.

Water is already and will be most clearly "the first victim of climate change".

If, as we all hope, an ambitious agreement is reached in Paris in December 2015, at the COP 21, aiming to reduce drastically the emissions of greenhouse gases, the effect will only be visible at the beginning of next century...

By then, the regime of our rivers and the level of our aquifers will be significantly modified!

In just a few decades, climate change will worsen the frequency, the intensity and the seriousness of floods and droughts....

What will we do if...

- For the supply of drinking water, catchments are drying up?
- For hydropower, dam reservoirs are no longer filled?
- For food, there's shortage of irrigation water?
- We remain unable to cool thermal power plants and, even worse, nuclear power plants?
- How can we guarantee waterway transport or the production of fish for food?

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It is right now that we must take an action to adapt to these inevitable changes.

We must organize the management of water and aquatic ecosystems at the relevant level of basins, sub-basins, rivers, lakes and aquifers, either local, national or transboundary.

Aquatic ecosystems are not only an irreplaceable natural heritage and a unique biodiversity reserve, but they also represent a "green infrastructure" playing a very effective role in regulating the water resource and its preservation, as well as in self-cleaning some kinds of pollution.

River basin organizations, in various forms and with different mandates, have an essential role to play in implementing a real integrated management policy in their respective territories.

They must be given clear mandates as well as human, technical and financial resources to enable them to fulfill their role effectively.

You Can't Manage What You Don't Measure!

Available information on the status of water resources and, still more, on aquifer ecosystems, is insufficient to allow real diagnostics, set priorities and implement responsible management and monitoring.

It is necessary to implement a proper information system on water and on ecosystems, with adequate sustainable investment and operation resources.

Nothing can be done, also, without the involvement of representatives of the different economic sectors, local authorities and associations, all working in the field and who are the real agents of change.

A partnership in particular between the sectors of electricity, navigation, mining and agriculture is essential. We must work "out of the water box" and in an intersectoral way.

The creation of "Basin Councils or Committees" in the appropriate forms, appears today as a mean of involving all stakeholders in the management of water resources and ecosystems.

There are 276 rivers, 156 lakes and at least 400 transboundary aquifers:

At transboundary level, the riparian countries establishing joint bodies bring obvious benefits for:

- Ensuring dialogue and avoiding conflicts,
- Sharing information and summarizing it,
- Developing joint action plans,
- Monitoring the effects of projects and producing indicators to facilitate decision making.

Once again, the joint bodies should have a clear mandate and the human, technical and financial resources needed to carry out their mission effectively.

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Finally and in conclusion:

We should not "reinvent the wheel"

- Many successful experiments have already been made in the field.
- Basin management has been working and positively been recognized for over 50 years and in many countries for the last 20 years.
- Transboundary water management agreements are applied without major difficulties, especially under the UNECE Water Convention and the European Water Framework Directive, under the AMCOW policy, but also in all other regions of the world.

We must therefore identify the good practices and disseminate them by mobilizing experts' knowledge, through platforms for the exchange of experience and the training of the staffs of Basin Organizations and of their partners.

The problems are often not technical but mainly institutional and financial.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nothing is possible without a strong political will of all the World's countries.

We must therefore get mobilized to win the water battle and prepare the future for the coming generations.

Integrated management of water resources and aquatic ecosystems in basins is an obligation, but it is profitable for our societies.

We need you!

Thank you for your attention