Ensuring integrated water resource management in river basins

Water abstraction is the main threat to freshwater ecosystems in the Mediterranean. From 1967 to 2011 available per capita freshwater resources in several countries fell by an estimated 60 percent due to increasing human population, destruction of freshwater ecosystems, and decrease of precipitation.

While unsustainable water infrastructure development is rampant throughout the region, hydropower, channelization, and diversions are particularly acute in the Balkans, Turkey, and the Iberian Peninsula. Despite their serious ecological impact, hydropower infrastructures continue to be developed at a high rate in the region, with destructive consequences on the overall ecological flow.

With this action plan, we aim to ensure that the minimum required flows of water to sustain rivers, lakes or wetlands are agreed upon by key stake-holders, towards maintaining and rebuilding full functionality of the region’s freshwater ecosystems.

“This action plan provides the opportunity to establish a solid partnership to promote large-scale initiatives of integrated conservation of river basins in the region, through the sustainable use of water resources and the maintenance of ecological flows.”

Luis Costa, Manager, MAVA Mediterranean Basin Programme

We selected three pilot river basins illustrating unsustainable water abstraction for agriculture purpose and the proliferation of unsustainable water infrastructures. In each case different conditions are present:

1 - A transboundary basin with major dam development projects on one side of the border and dam decommissioning on the other that could benefit from a basin-wide approach

2 - One of the last free-flowing rivers in Europe threatened by dam construction and for which we will promote an alternative green development

3 - A basin where agriculture is the main sector demanding water where we will promote integrated water resource management through the establishment of a water fund with local authorities and stakeholders
HOW WE THINK CHANGE WILL HAPPEN

The strategies and their key results, also called "results chain" in technical terms, were defined according to the Open Standards - a recognised methodology in the conservation field. A summary is presented below.

**KNOWLEDGE**
- understand river basin ecology and environmental flow

**ADVOCACY**
- mobilise public pressure & influence policies and legal framework

**PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT**
- promote stakeholder engagement through integrated river basin management

**DEMONSTRATION**
- showcase the benefits of restoration and protection of river basins

**EXPECTED KEY RESULTS**
- Water is used sustainably for agriculture, tourism, and domestic purposes
- Environmental flows are restored and sustained
- Impact of new dams is minimized
- Existing dams are decommissioned
- Minimize the impact of the construction and management of dams and other infrastructure on river basins
- Significantly reduce the environmental impact of water abstraction

HOW IS THIS ACTION PLAN BEING IMPLEMENTED?

In Iberia, GEOTA work together with other NGOs and universities to prevent dams from being built in the Douro and promote decommissioning of existing dam at basin level.

In the Vjosa/Aoös basin, RiverWatch and EuroNatur work together with Albanese and Greek organisations to prevent the construction of new dams and consequently sustaining the ecological flow.

In Morocco, WWF coordinate the work for integrated river basin management in the Sebou valley.

Two platforms are established to support the activities in the pilot river basins and at regional level. RiverWatch coordinate the partner organisations in using campaigning actions with sound arguments against the proliferation of dams in the region. Wetlands international coordinate the promotion of integrated management of water resources across the Mediterraneán.

Exchange of experience and cross-replication are promoted between pilot sites and basins where MAVA has provided long-term support such as Neretva and Prespa basins.

WHAT IS THE ANNUAL BUDGET?

The annual budget of the action plan has been estimated at € 2'443'000 per year.

**MAVA annual allocation**
- € 2'443'000

LINKS WITH OTHER MAVA ACTION PLANS

- M4-M5, Marine and Fisheries: in the hydropower cases, the disturbance of migration of fish of commercial value
- M6, Cultural Landscapes: cultural practices promoting sustainable use of water and river basin management
- M7, Species: integration with the threats of collision and electrocution on energy infrastructures
- WA5, Infrastructure development: impacts on critical ecosystems
- SE2, National Green Economy planning and practice integrate the conservation and restoration of natural capital
- SE3, Sustainable infrastructure is financially viable and becomes the preferred option for governments, policy makers and investors

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