Developing countries, water management: policy and priorities for development cooperation

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PURPOSE : to outline policy and priorities for water management in developing countries. CONTENT : this Communication guides the European Community's support to water resources management in developing countries for achieving the main development goals laid down in the Treaty establishing the European Community - poverty reduction, sustainable economic and social development, integration of developing countries into the global economy. Providing water and sanitation for all in developing countries, now and in the future, is a demanding challenge. It has to be addressed in the broader context of a sustainable integrated water resource management (including e.g. natural aspects of water resources systems, water uses in all sectors of the economy and for all purposes, institutional framework for management of a finite resource, spatial variation of resources and demands, water pollution). One objective of this Communication is to highlight where and how policies surrounding water and development are integrated into EC's development priorities. It emphasises the need to see water resource management as a cross-sectoral issue to be mainstreamed within most development policies of the Community, in the fight against poverty. This paper is set in the context of the higher profile gained by water on the international agenda, resulting in growing international recognition of the pressing need to achieve global water security and of the need to address water in a holistic manner, as a key issue for sustainable development. Water management is a critical issue for many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific and Mediterranean regions. Ensuring sustainable and equitable access to safe water for all its uses, with special attention to the basic needs of the poor, is essential. Responding to this challenge, one of the Communication's objectives is to highlight where and how policies on water and development are integrated into development priorities. The Communication emphasises the need to see water resource management as a cross-cutting part of strategies associated with poverty reduction, such as equitable access to social services, food security and sustainable rural development, regional integration and co-operation. Building on internationally agreed principles and on lessons learned, the Communication outlines a comprehensive and integrated approach that is valid for all aspects of water resources management and for all users of water. It articulates key messages on policy orientation under the overarching policy framework of Integrated Water Resources Management. Lines of actions are recommended, focusing on water supply and sanitation, cross border water management and cross-sectoral co-ordination and integration, providing sustainable water services, expanding sanitation coverage and hygiene education, meeting the urban challenge, achieving water-food security, protecting water ecosystems and managing floods. Furthermore, this Communication addresses the relationship between water and the global challenges of climate change and trade globalisation. This Communication is set in the context of the growing international recognition of the pressing need to achieve global water security, in quantity and quality, and of the need toaddress water in a holistic manner, as a key issue for sustainable development. Thus, this Communication builds on the recommendations for action of the Bonn International Freshwater Conference of December 2001, and supports the development of an EU initiative as a key agenda point for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.