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Summary

The Prut River is subjected to cross border pollution. Action was taken by the Eco-Counselling Center to initiate a project to facilitate a regional, trans-boundary approach, to enable the multi-stakeholders involvement and to ensure transparency and participation on the Draft Prut River Management Plan. This case highlights an applicable approach to improving water policy and management through stakeholder integration and cross-border cooperation.

Background

The Prut River, the last major tributary of the Danube before the Danube Delta, joins the Danube just downstream of the town of Galati, about 150 km before the Danube flows into the Black Sea. Its basin area is 28,395 km² and covers parts of Ukraine, northeastern Romania, and eastern Moldova.

By 2003, when the Prut Basin Wide Approach (PBWA) project proposal was developed, the Prut River was significantly contributing to the eutrophication of the Black Sea, due to the high nutrient levels in its water and the proximity to the Danube Delta and Black Sea:

- According to the Romanian Environmental Ministry's 2004 Position Paper on Chapter 22, Environmental Protection, the Prut River Basin registers the most unfavourable situations in the nation and has 35% degraded waters.
- The International Commission for Protection of the Danube River published their Joint Danube Survey Report in September 2002 which states that Prut river discharge is highly polluted with nutrients and significantly contributes to the retarding or toxic effects on phytoplankton biomass in the Danube.

Preliminary analysis has shown that the nutrient pollution (primarily excess nitrates and phosphates) in Prut Basin ground and surface waters result from municipal, domestic and animal wastes and agricultural by-products, the sources being agricultural by-products/wastes (76%) and domestic wastes (24%).

In rural areas, there is little awareness for sustainable agricultural practices. With lack of containment

and usage systems for agricultural and animal wastes, excess nutrients are leached into the soil, ground and surface waters infiltrating the river basin. Preliminary visits to the PBWA pilot project areas indicated that wastes are deposited untreated directly into the streams and rivers, nutrient levels are high, and that, potential eutrophication conditions are present.

Between the Romanian and Moldavian Prut River Basin borders, there is also a lack of a joint approach for reducing nutrients and other toxic substances within the economic and legislative frameworks. There is poor governmental enforcement in developing effective mechanisms for trans-border, regional co-operation, as well as poor communication between authorities and civil society.

Actions taken

In October 2004, the Eco-Counselling Center, Galati Romania, initiated the project to facilitate a regional, transboundary approach, enable the multi- stakeholders' involvement; ensure transparency and participation on the Draft Prut River Management Plan to be developed by the governmental experts in line with the EU Water Framework Directive.

Project Objectives:

1. Awareness Raising: To raise awareness on nutrients, other toxic substances and their negative effects on ecosystems, human health, within the Prut River catchment area.
2. Information Access: To provide access to knowledge regarding ways to avoid or reduce the nutrients and the toxic substances, for ex. Best Agricultural Practices, composting, manure handling, simple systems for waste water treatment, etc.
3. Experts Forum: To establish a forum by bringing together experts from administration, industry, science and NGOs to act as a trans-boundary information network in Romania and Moldova, while the assigned experts' group is developing the Prut River Management Plan.
4. Fostering Government Partnerships: To improve and expand communication and co-operation among the Romanian and Moldovan governmental structures so as to integrate data and information on nutrients and toxic substances in the development plans in the Prut River Basin region.
5. Pilot Project Measures: To support nutrient reduction policies by implementing adequate concrete measures within the demonstration sites. In order to address the needs for this area, a wide range of activities were planned and developed such as:
 - Meetings (joint project team meeting, conference, multi-stakeholder meetings)
 - Collection of specific, topic-related data, (locally-held information on nutrients and toxic substances such as polluters and pollutants, the potential dangerous sites, resource persons, etc.)
 - Project Publications and information Dissemination
 - Implementation of the pilot project
 - Fundraising.

Outcomes

The results are:

1. Reducing the pollution sources in the Pilot areas (Mastacani village, Ro and Baurci Moldoveni, Rep. Md). In Romania the construction of the buffer area is nearly finished and the monitoring shows already a decrease of the nitrate, nitrite, and phosphate concentrations. According to the

measurements done, the preliminary results show that after the buffer area, the stream improved its quality from degraded (category IV) to good (category II). In Moldova Republic, Baurci Moldoveni the construction works are in development and only the first pool is partially working but even in this phase there is already a decrease of nitrate and nitrite concentrations in the river water.

2. Environmental education campaign: a set of materials was developed to support teachers from the pilot areas to address the water pollution issues and not only. During the first 9 months of the project, there were organized several session of training of teachers and environmental education activities with students. In total 170 teachers and 945 students attended the activities.
3. Awareness raising campaign. Over 15,000 people had access to project-related information through a dedicated web-page and the international conference with various institutions and NGOs, experts and other interested persons, from Romania and Moldova Republic.

Lessons Learned

When discussing a pollution issue it is very important to promote information regarding practical solutions, that are affordable and verified in practice, because in this way people will be encouraged to do something about it.

Cross-border partnerships are more complicated than national ones in terms of time, cultural and corporate background and increased difficulties regarding traveling (papers, taxes, infrastructure, etc) and communication.

The difficulties are very important when problems appear during the project and there is a need to react fast to different unexpected situations such as floods, important meetings related to the project, etc.

It is crucial to establish partnerships with the key actors in the area in such a way that partners can complement and support each other, share expertise and resources.

Adequate and flexible resources, both financial and human, must be ensured from the very beginning and should include a reserve that can be accessed for dealing with unexpected events, such as floods.

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