IWRM Action Hub

CASE STUDY

The Bahamas: The Experience of IWRM Planning Process

Summary

The Bahamas are threatened by over-abstraction, misuse and pollution of water. In the past, water management has been conducted through a single-sector approach. To address its issues, actions have been taken to move towards IWRM and a multi-sector approach. In particular, attention has been focused on improving stakeholder participation and advancing political commitment. Presently only being partially successful, IWRM implementation in Bahamas highlights that it is a long term process.

Background

The Bahamas is a water scarce country and as such faces challenges of water supply and ongoing scenarios of a lack of potable water supply. The control and administration of water resources of the Bahamas rests with the Water and Sewage Corporation (WSC) governed by the Ministry for Public Enterprises. WSC owns, operates and manages 83% of the country's water systems, while the private sector accounts for the remaining 17%.

The water resources of The Bahamas are in a perilous position, threatened by over-abstraction, misuse and pollution. One of the biggest concerns however has been the financial costs associated with producing water and the affordability of water by consumers.

The need to improve the management of water resources was becoming more and more urgent as issues become more complex. Like most of its Caribbean counterparts Bahamas practices a single sector approach to water whereby matters related to water remain within the sole remit of the WSC.

Actions taken

In The Bahamas IWRM has been considered important as the country seeks to reach a balance between protecting and sustaining the water resources on the one hand and to develop and use them on the other. The decision of the WSC to take concrete steps to adopt and implement an IWRM Plan for the Bahamas was born out of the strong realization that the way business was being undertaken in the water resources sector was in need of remedy.

Efforts to establish an IWRM Plan began in 2002 with a national stakeholder meeting and later a workshop organized by The Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission (BEST) in 2004. However, the process languished until WSC underwent institutional reform and at its completion, there was a renewed interest in IWRM. In September 2007, the WSC retained a consultant to assist in the planning process.

The overwhelming criterion for decision-making at least in the absence of actual alternatives to consider was the ability of the Plan to protect the environment, and to promote “sustainability”.

This criterion was voiced unanimously by the Management Committee and stakeholders alike, outranking cost in importance. IWRM in Bahamas has been considered crucial as country seeks to reach an appropriate balance to protect and sustain water resources on the one hand and develop and use them on the other.

Outcomes

Actions have been taken in the following areas with the commitment to pilot IWRM forward:

- Improve stakeholders' participation with the inclusion of governmental and private sectors, local communities and the general public
- Develop firm IWRM policy -Advance political commitment to the IWRM process
- Recognize the role and program linkages between all sectors and IWRM.

Specific key actions were taken to put the commitment to IWRM into operation:

- A draft Plan that includes project activities to support IWRM and agreed to by all relevant sectors.
- Individual, sectoral and national consultations to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Agreement to monitor progress of IWRM. IWRM is not an end in itself but an ongoing transaction carved out by stakeholders as a means of achieving effective water resources management.

Lessons Learned

The WSC is the statutory body responsible for country's water resources management. The entity underwent institutional reform during which it became clear that need to increase water supply was a pressing concern; advancing a renewed interest in IWRM.

Despite having a National Stakeholders Meeting and Workshop organized, the momentum of adopting an IWRM plan was not maintained and the need to improve management of water resources

continued to become more and more urgent and more complex to resolve.

Earlier effort to establish IWRM was attempted as an in-house activity and did not reap the intended results. Thus in 2007 the WSC sought an independent Consultant which minimized bias, bridged conflicts that may exist among agencies.

Although IWRM has been set on a good footing in The Bahamas the elements of the change have not been fully operationalized. It is obvious that the IWRM process is a long term agenda and requires a strong political support.

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Related IWRM Tools
National IWRM Plans, Public sector water utilities, Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

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