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KEY NOTE SPEECH IN CITIZENS SPECIAL SESSION

Nowhere in the world is there a single manager who is solely responsible for the governance of freshwater resources, their related structures and services!

If the national administrations and their specialized agencies enable to define the institutional framework, to implement and manage the main structuring infrastructure and then to mobilize part of the funding, the regional and local authorities, like the States of a federation, the Provinces or municipalities, but also farmers, companies, fishermen and other economic stakeholders play a key role with the associations for mobilizing the citizens and carrying out many local projects that contribute to the success of the River Basin Management Plans.

The implementation of many decisions is only possible when there is a strong commitment and if all public and private, collective or individual stakeholders concerned are mobilized.

Water resources management should be organized everywhere with a participation in decision-making, at the side of the concerned government administrations, local authorities, representatives of different categories of users and environmental protection associations or groups of collective interest.

In each country, a clear legal framework should specify the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved, the possible levels of decentralization, as well as the procedures and means necessary for good freshwater governance.

The participation of all stakeholders and the civil society should be organized to enable the genuine mobilization of all partners.

INBO recommends that this participation be organized in the form of Basin Committees or Councils.

More and more examples, and some of them for several decades, have shown that there is much interest in associating with the representatives of the Governments, those of the States of the Federal Countries, the Regions or Provinces, the Municipalities, the different categories of water users, as well as the representatives of associations of collective interest, especially within Basin or Sub-basin Committees, Councils or Commissions, when they exist, as well as with the work of working groups or subcommittees in International Transboundary Basin Commissions or Authorities.

These Basin Councils must be fully involved in decision-making on water policy in their respective basins, with procedures that clearly define their role.

They should especially be involved in:

- Defining the long-term objectives for having a common vision of their basin future!
- In the development of Master Plans or Management Plans for the Basin.

- In the choice of priorities for the management and optimal use of the available resource.
- In the implementation of the Programs of Measures and the multiannual priority investments.
- In the setting of the financing methods and in the calculation of the taxes and tariffs which concern them.

There is a need for strong inter-sector relationships that facilitate the exchange of information and experience, as well as the coordination of actions in each river basin.

Lastly, important resources must be mobilized to raise awareness, inform and involve the general public, children and women in particular, and to train their representatives in the decision-making process.

It is essential that the national legislative framework gives the Basin Committees real opportunities to participate in decision-making, otherwise their members will have little interest in attending the meetings.

Committees do not work when their role is reduced to that of a mere chamber recording decisions made elsewhere...

Significant means should be available to:

- Raise awareness and educate stakeholders on the principles and means for sustainable water resources management.
- Foster the establishment of truly representative bodies of public and private users.
- Develop decision-making capacity in this water sector.
- Establish integrated and transparent Water Information Systems.

Water resources management should be organized, based on integrated information systems, which allow knowing the resources and their uses, the pressures of pollutants, the ecosystems and their functioning, to follow up evolutions and to assess risks.

"We cannot manage what we do not know how to measure!"

Access to information is essential to build trust between the partners involved and serve as an objective basis for their consultation, negotiation, decision-making, evaluation of actions and coordination of funding between the various donors.

However, this information is often dispersed, heterogeneous, incomplete, difficult to access... And the data are not always comparable, nor adapted to the needs of the different stakeholders.

The various public, para-public organizations and service providers often have the information, but there is no sufficient means for the exchange, sharing, harmonization, synthesis and capitalization of this information among them, and for their broad dissemination to their partners.

These are true information "systems" that must be designed and developed.

To be useful, the information must not remain in the form of raw data, but must be presented in a form that is understandable and usable by the different categories of users.

In addition to water professionals (engineers, technicians, civil servants, etc.), new participants are appearing whose direct or indirect role will be more and more important. Those are:

- Individual decision-makers: such as entrepreneurs, industrialists, farmers and fishermen, etc.
- Collective decision-makers: mayors of town councils, local managers, community leaders, leaders of syndicates or cooperatives, representatives of associations, etc.
- And also information relays, especially journalists, teachers, association facilitators, popularizers, health workers, etc.

They have several things in common: water is not their profession and they have not been prepared to play a role in this sector.

It is very important to implement specific means to make them aware and to give them the information they need in the most appropriate form for each category.

With the quick development of the Web, new "smart" online services are developing and will allow for answers in real-time to the most frequently asked questions of different categories of managers and the general public.

Practical examples of implementation of such participatory processes are in the "Handbook on the participation of economic stakeholders and the civil society in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers", published on the occasion of the 2018 Brasilia World Water Forum and translated into French and English, which can be downloaded from the websites www.riob.org or www.inbo-news.org

An unprecedented mobilization is essential to win the water battle and prepare the future of humanity!

The organization of river basin management on such a scale is an effective solution that deserves to be developed and supported by involving all citizens.

It pays to invest in water management: In all our countries, we must be at the forefront of the fight for protecting water resources!