

COOPERATION AS KEY TO SUSTAINABLE WATER SERVICES

In a globalized world faced with global challenges, nobody can go it alone, least the water sector with its staggeringly complex network of stakeholders and interests. We are all aware that we need to cooperate. But who should cooperate with whom, and to what end? This session explored examples of cooperation at differing levels, and in differing circumstances, providing valuable lessons and inspiration.

Session chairs Patricia Lopez, Senior Infrastructure Finance Specialist at the World Bank, and Kelmend Zajazi, Executive Director of NALAS presented panelists from three model initiatives of cooperation.

The network of cooperation

First, panelist Daniel Bruderer, Deputy Head of SECO Swiss Infrastructure Financing presented the SECO philosophy of holistic, systemic project support in urban development and infrastructure services. Taking a long, hard look at the complex mesh of stakeholders in the water sector, he asks, “who should cooperate, and with whom?”

The answer is a long list, beginning with cooperation between development partners, the line ministry and associations to pool resources and improve the system. Cooperation amongst municipalities and their public utilities drive regional infrastructure improvement, especially in wastewater treatment. Cooperation across national borders share best practices and coordinate regional projects. Mr. Bruderer concludes that, while cooperation beyond administrative borders depends on the political will and support by authorities, it is, without any doubts, key for creating sustainable water services.

The Albanian rollercoaster ride

Zooming in on a specific cooperation on the national level, Elisabeta Poci, Executive Director of SHUKALB, and Lindita Sotiri, Director of Development Programs on Water Supply and Sanitation in the Albanian Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy take the stage, sharing the success story of SHUKALB.

Founded 20 years ago, the Water Supply and Sewerage Association of Albania had to build up its working relation with the line ministry from scratch. Ms. Poci remembers:

“In the beginning we were essentially a nobody. But staying true to our mission, starting small, but always delivering, we managed to gain credibility and grew into the role of partners of the ministry.”

During the last five years, SHUKALB succeeded in winning ministerial support for two important projects, a national training and verification program, and an integrated asset management program in the frame of D-LeaP, the Danube Learning Partnership.

Speaking from the perspective of the ministry, Lindita Sotiri remembers this process as a bit of a rollercoaster ride, punctuated by altogether four changes at the head of the ministry and characterized by an ongoing competition against other investment-hungry sectors like energy and transport. “It was a bit challenging to stay in the focus of the minister”, she says.

“What you need to keep this kind of cooperation going is flexibility, ownership and leadership. You need a good, but short story to raise awareness and get everybody on board, and at the same time, you have to lead and make decisions.”

In the end, both agree, the relationship between institutions boiled down to personal relationships: “Institutions are made of people”, says Lindita Sotiri.

“Everybody in the sector should be aware of the value of interpersonal skills. We should get training in telling a story and making people understand what they have to gain from a project.”

The Montenegrin example

Contributing the local point of view, Dusan Raicevic, Mayor of Bar in Montenegro and Vice President of NALAS reported on the ongoing improvement of water supply and sanitation along the Adriatic coast, a multi-stage project that involved the Government of Montenegro, the Municipality of Bar, neighboring communities and the KfW Development Bank. The project is now involving into a regional water supply company, connecting Bar and the neighboring municipality of Kruce. Mr. Raicevic asks:

“Was cooperation the key to success? Yes. Absolutely.”