

Brussels Declaration : Water Without Borders

28 November 2019

Water is vital to life on Earth and directly or indirectly supports all socio-economic activities in modern societies. Water-dependent services include drinking water provisioning, health and sanitation, food and energy production, and ecosystem stability. Managing water resources in a sustainable way is therefore a prerequisite for sustainable development. Water-related objectives are therefore underpinning multiple targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) program and is explicitly considered in the SDG-6 for water.

Anthropogenic activities and climate change exert many pressures on water resources. These pressures negatively affect vital water-related functions and services, constraining the sustainable development of societies all over the world. This impacts particularly the least developed societies in the global south. Water security in these regions is often low and societies in the least developed regions of the global south are extremely vulnerable to water stress. The likelihood that poor water security and water-related risks in these regions will negatively impact the global economy, stability and security, and, hence, the global sustainable development agenda, is very high. This urgently calls for specific and adequate responses in the least developed regions of the world to preserve and/or restore the freshwater resources and to strengthen sustainable and integrated water resources management. This also calls for international water solidarity to support the least developed regions by international cooperation and increase awareness of water consumers for the global water crisis.

Water has no borders and the water crisis in the global south is multi-dimensional. Specific and adequate responses for addressing the water crisis in the global south calls for a strong engagement of local and regional communities and should be built on a strong capacity (technical, institutional, financial, socio-economical) in the water domain. Given the very likely global impacts of the water crisis in the global south, specific and adequate responses should also be built on principles of solidarity and on a strong development cooperation strategy in the water sector. The Belgian capacity in the water sector is very strong and should be leveraged to support development cooperation in the water sector in the global south.

Given the abovementioned critical context, we, participants of the Water Without Borders event, organised in Brussels on 28 November 2019,

- recall the urgent need to address the water crisis in the least developed regions of the global south as a prerequisite to meet the targets of the UN-SDGs, in particular the goals related to water and sanitation (SDG-6) and the ones directly and indirectly related to them: poverty alleviation (SDG-1), food security (SDG-2), health and well-being (SDG-3), energy security (SDG-7), sustainable cities (SDG-11), climate action (SDG-13), and life on land (SDG-15) ;
- stress the need to maintain and even strengthen cooperation in the water sector for the least developed regions in the global south;
- support the international water solidarity by decreasing water consumption in the north;

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- emphasise the strong and complementary potential and expertise of the different Belgian actors to contribute to effective, efficient and sustainable cooperation programs in the water sector with the least developed regions of the global south;
- recommend the establishment of appropriate structural platforms for supporting and leveraging the strong Belgian expertise in the water sector in development cooperation;
- suggest to define a clear, coherent, effective and efficient Belgian strategy for development cooperation with the global south in the water sector.