

Resolution of the 14th German Bundestag, adopted at its 208th Session on 13 December 2001

Printed Paper 14/7484

Water as a public asset and the significance of water in German development cooperation

I. The German Bundestag notes:

According to recent estimates, 1.3 billion people in the world today do not have access to clean drinking water. Forecasts indicate that this figure will reach one-quarter of the world population by 2050. Over thirty countries on Earth are now suffering from water shortage. Contaminated water is one of the primary causes of infectious disease (80%) worldwide and the leading cause of child mortality in developing countries.

The question of access to water, or satisfying basic needs, is becoming a pre-eminent issue in many countries. The increasing occurrence of "water crises", particularly in developing countries, and most severely in specific regions, can be attributed to the following factors:

- Continuous population growth,
- The process of urbanisation,
- Non-sustainable utilisation in industry and agriculture,
- Increasing contamination of groundwater and soil due to a lack of purification and inadequate treatment.

The state is responsible for safeguarding and providing vital water resources. In many developing countries (DC), the state is not adequately fulfilling this responsibility.

The technical facilities for obtaining, storing, transporting, purifying and distributing drinking water, and for collecting and treating waste water can, but need not necessarily be, publicly owned or operated by public institutions. We have an effectively functioning water infrastructure in Europe, which cannot be said of the poor countries to date. Many industrial and developing countries, primarily the latter, are increasingly using the financial strength, management skills and innovativeness of private enterprises for these purposes, although supplying people with water can be viewed as an inherently public task. However, what is ultimately decisive for efficient water supplies is not the decision concerning private or public ownership, but rather the decision as to which legal and institutional framework conditions can ensure a socially tolerable and ecologically sustainable supply, particularly for the poorest segments of the population. This issue must be resolved separately for every developing country, federal state and municipality.

Because nations are increasingly competing for the use of natural water resources, e.g. rivers that usually have several bordering states, this situation is showing signs of becoming a potential source of international conflict. Access to clean water, above all, is a question of power between countries. Answering this question is of paramount importance for the development opportunities of countries. Unfair distribution and a lack of cooperation in dealing with transborder waters is already leading to distribution conflicts that harbour great potential for violence.

Water must not become an ordinary economic commodity. It must not belong to markets or governments. The right to development is threatened, if water is not treated as a public asset. In his water manifesto published in 1999, Riccardo Petrella said that "the risks lie not only in the

shortage, contamination and waste of water, but also and above all in that water is (again) becoming what its conversion to a public asset prevented or at least mitigated: a source of inequality, injustice, armed conflict and disunity between human communities and generations."

The Federal Government is aware of the significance of the water issue and accordingly gears its policy to the sustainable handling of water resources. At DM 600 to 800 million a year, Germany is the largest European donor in the water sector of development cooperation. Numerous projects, particularly those of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, bear witness to the great importance attached to this issue. Worthy of special mention in this context are the Petersberg Process on transborder waters, established in 1998 in a cooperative effort of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Safety (BMU) and the Federal Foreign Office (AA) with the participation of the World Bank and the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), the multilateral and bilateral political dialogue, and the promotion of the World Commission on Dams.

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development places primary emphasis on the issue of water management. The European Water Framework Directive adopted recently by the European Parliament abandons the purely national view of European waters. With its comprehensive and integrative approach, it could certainly be used as a model for effective water management that can and should be publicised outside Europe. The extent to which this directive can be applied outside Europe probably depends on the circumstances of the individual case and the situation of the affected countries.

The major international water forums - the 1st World Water Forum in Marrakech in March 1997, the 2nd World Water Forum held in The Hague, Netherlands, in March 2000, and the 3rd World Water Forum that will take place in Japan in March 2003 - underline the high priority of this issue. The Federal Government will be holding a worldwide freshwater conference in Bonn in December 2001 in order to integrate into the Rio+10 process the global issues relating to the sustainable handling of freshwater and, in particular, to the urgently necessary access of the poor to clean water.

The current commitment of the Federal Government shows that it is fulfilling its global responsibility.

II. The German Bundestag calls upon the Federal Government to

further support international agreements and regulations on the protection of water resources, and to continue development cooperation projects on a high level:

[A Ecological dimension]

1. To promote the concept of the cyclical economy in water management, and to intensify the promotion of research in the field of waste water treatment and disposal,
2. To push for the sustainable management of water resources within the framework of development cooperation, so that no more water is taken from the water cycle than can be regenerated naturally,
3. To work towards a situation where those who discharge pollutants into open waters are held responsible on the basis of the "polluter pays" principle,
4. To examine water supply projects with regard to their impact on biodiversity, the conservation of wetlands and their desertification effect,

5. To more intensely protect fossil groundwater resources according to the criteria of sustainability,
6. To use the findings and recommendations of the World Commission on Dams as a basis for evaluating dam projects, particularly with regard to the granting of bank guarantees. In this connection, to also advocate using the WCD as a guide in the World Bank and the regional development banks.

[B Economic dimension]

7. To recommend fee-charging systems that are commensurate with social conditions, in order to also achieve long-term and fair economic efficiency of supplies,
8. To give measures that help reduce excessive water consumption, particularly in agriculture, industry and residential areas, priority over the development of new water supplies and the transport of water over long distances,
9. To support restructuring measures in agriculture (keyword: conversion), which ensure utilisation that is appropriate for the soils and existing water resources, and simultaneously safeguard the livelihood of rural populations. According to experts, increasing efficiency in agriculture can potentially lead to savings of 45 to 80% on water consumption,
10. In developing countries, to support the strengthening of state institutions in the water sector with the goal of improving consumer protection,
11. To work together with the water industry in the framework of public-private partnerships in order to take advantage of its experience in the application of cost-efficient best practices,
12. To support public-private partnerships in water supply/waste water disposal in developing countries where favourable framework conditions exist in terms of the improvement of supplies for the poor population.

[C Social dimension]

13. To make the fight against poverty a guiding principle of the involvement in the water/waste water sector in the context of development policy in developing countries,
14. To use the subsidiarity principle as a basis for water management in developing countries, i.e. to gear sustainable supply systems to individual households and the users; particularly in developing countries, to also support adapted and water-saving technologies,
15. To support public campaigns and education in partner countries on handling water in a manner that conserves resources,
16. To promote the training of experts who can contribute worldwide to the spreading of integrated water resource management in the water sector,
17. In the framework of development cooperation, to specifically recruit female experts, who can be expected to have greater sensitivity to water management problems that relate specifically to women,
18. To continue to pursue a decentralised, participative approach that includes the local population in the evaluation processes that accompany and conclude projects, and to thus strengthen civil society.

[D Political dimension]

19. To promote political dialogue and regional cooperation on water utilisation issues, this applying in particular to regions on transborder waters,
20. To support the implementation of the "human right to water" on an international level,
21. To support the strengthening of the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, which explicitly recognises the limits of national sovereignty rights in reference to waters.
22. To encourage developing countries to ratify the convention,
23. To publicise the core concepts of the European Water Framework Directive as a model for new solutions in international water management that are founded on international law,
24. To actively support the principles of the Framework for Action and the World Water Vision becoming a guideline for the public and private use of freshwater,
25. To campaign worldwide for the fact that a clear legal framework, suitable institutions for the water industry and strong, independent quality control agencies are just as necessary as groups to represent the interests of the people who use water,
26. To campaign on an international level for more coherence and coordination in the UN. In this context, to pay particular attention to better coordination and division of labour between the various UN organisations,
27. To integrate the subject of sustainable water management in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10),
28. To give developing countries, as the primary victims in current and future water crises, extensive representation at international conferences,
29. To continue to coherently exploit the knowledge of implementing organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and churches, and, above all, to continue to acknowledge the value of their work in promoting public awareness.