

15th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA)

18 to 22 April 2016

Written Statement from HYDROAID Water for Development Institute

Today, more than ever, administrations are called to focus on environmental and climate issues, in spite of critical financial and political conditions. However, the real possibility of approving and eventually implementing policies that concretely address the environmental crisis, fight climate change as well as match development needs, is limited. Local institutions, in particular, tend to be motivated only if economically convenient or under considerable pressure. More frequently, dealing with major environmental problems requires large investments in terms of time and money, although it produces benefits that will be measured for generations to come.

Hydroaid – Water for Development Management Institute was founded in 2001 with the mission of contributing to the consolidation of efficient, integrated and sustainable water resources management systems in developing and emerging countries through training and capacity building in areas characterized by severe environmental and climate vulnerabilities. As an Association, it is composed by both public and private members – including local and regional administrations – and this particular structure provides it with precious insights on the processes that link commitments on water cooperation to actions, and actions to results, within public institutions and partners. This point of view and the experience developed on the roadmap to the Millennium Development Goals brought us to formulate 5 directions where public institutions could expand their reach in order to facilitate the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with a special focus on SDG 6.1 (By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all) and 6.b (Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management):

1. Empowering participation opportunities of local groups and entities in the proposal, discussion and formulation of development policies. Participative processes find a productive ground in the work that has been carried out so far by proactive organizations and their networks, which represent both a background and an asset for increased accountability and commitment. Enhanced engagement and sense of responsibility of the entities involved - and of the administrations that must coordinate them - derives from feeling a part of a larger forum and has positive outputs on the improvement of life quality standards through the protection and effective management of threatened natural resources, such as water.
2. Targeting beneficiaries in an effective way to address all local interests and needs, stimulate community participation and sense of project ownership that facilitate the realization of cooperation efforts. Appropriately targeted groups become active members of decision making mechanisms and of the development processes tackling the criticalities of their living environment. Moreover a better management of natural resources inevitably begins from a better management of human resources and their ability to disseminate acquired best practices and know-how. Targeting can be improved through proper monitoring and impact evaluation of activities, particularly by the setup of an inclusive and circular feedback harvesting system where the inputs collected are used to increase the efficiency and stakeholders' involvement of future initiatives.

3. Improving engagement and communications among experts and scientists in support of development policies and interventions such as in the case of integrated planning and governance of environmental resources that require interdisciplinary expertise and flexible approaches. The creation of dialogue and sharing platforms should be intended as a tool for supporting capacity development processes in which knowledge is transformed into skills that are, in turn, converted into actions.

4. Promoting jobs for sustainability as a goal of institutions supporting the employment sector and improving the governance of natural resources. This is a loop system that allows public administrations to provide more opportunities to citizens, and an opportunity for administrations themselves to optimize their services and the state of local environment. Both employment and environment are facing a crisis as well as sustainability challenges that could find at least a partial solution in the activation of such a system and its ability to produce benefits in the long term. Effective management of water resources and urban solid waste are examples of areas where investments could be greatly developed and bring even higher advantages, turning a weakness into strength. Considering the rapid evolution of technical and technological solutions in these fields as well as the needs for sound organization, coordination and monitoring, training is a key issue here too. Professional training, in particular, is the tool that paves the way for new jobs where the acquired skills find a concrete application, thus completing the circle.

5. Developing preparedness and disaster management strategies to cope with humanitarian and environmental emergencies. In view of the current events and transformations – such as droughts and conflicts, causing local instability and increasingly frequent migration waves – precautionary planning and prompt action are able to reinforce institutions while protecting natural resources at risk. Policies for promoting leadership approaches inspired to resilience and responsibility are the basis for responding to uncontrolled or unpredicted trends. In addition to this, setting up specialized staff for monitoring, prevention and emergency action is a way to do so, while at the same time creating new opportunities, inclusion and stability at the local level.

These are some of the reasons why Hydroaid strives to support development processes with managers and technicians as beneficiaries. Among our training participants were operators of municipalities, utilities and public administrations – ideal target groups to maximize the impacts of the transferred knowledge and know-how – committed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their institutions and communities.

Policies for sustainability can drive institutions towards better management of resources and communities; similarly, individuals and groups orient their behaviors according to a shared vision that can be inspired by them. Solid administrations with the support and engagement of local communities, public/private partnerships and stakeholders are more likely to withstand shocks and pressures caused by human or environmental stress while contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.