

Coordinating water research for the developing world

“ *Water research is an important process in tackling the major challenge of providing poor people with equitable access to good quality water and sanitation* ”

More than 1 000 million people do not have access to safe drinking water and more than 2 000 million go without basic sanitation. The international community has decided to reduce these numbers by half by 2015.

This is a very ambitious undertaking requiring the collaboration of many different actors and the availability of lots of resources.

Scientific research must be harnessed effectively to address these issues, and the more resources are pooled together, the more likely it is that innovative solutions will be found that can help the developing world. EUWI – ERA-NET – Coordination of Member State research programmes in water science and technology for the developing world – seeks to build greater co-operation in this vital area.

The international community knows how crucial it is to tackle water supply and quality problems in the developing world. Water is the source of life, and the battle against poverty and related issues such as poor health cannot really begin while so many people are lacking adequate provision. Political leaders attending the World Summit for Sustainable Development, held in South Africa in 2002, called for huge improvements in access to safe water and sanitation. The aim – which is enshrined in the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals – is to halve the numbers of people facing these problems by 2015. The European Union responded by launching its Water Initiative, which includes the priority objective of mobilising research to create lasting solutions.

If this undertaking is to be successful, huge resources will have to be made available and research will be needed to underpin these efforts.

EUWI-ERA-NET was devised within this context. The project will enable EU Member State ministries currently in charge of international development issues to join forces to better coordinate their water research programmes. Along with supporting the EU's Water Initiative, the project also aims to improve the interactions

between Member State water research programmes and the Community's Framework Programme for research.

At the moment, donor research programmes usually work in isolation – there is a lack of established working relationships between research managers in Member States. Different countries have different priorities for their development research, and experience in negotiating agreements for joint action are missing. As a Specific Support Action, the project will address these problems and set the groundwork for a more ambitious ERA-NET Coordination Action in the near future. This gradual approach will build up the necessary understanding between the partners before the Coordination Action begins its work.

Smart thinking

EUWI-ERA-NET is aiming to create a “convergence of thinking” on water research issues by bringing different development ministries together – and, indeed, by involving experts from other areas of government with an interest in the topic. Gathering information and data about what Member States are doing on water research will be the starting point. Hopefully this will identify areas for mutually beneficial co-operation and will encourage discussions



Specific Support Action EUWI-ERA-NET



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“ *Water has been and will continue to be a significant research area and we look forward to joining with other ministries across the EU to learn how we can work together better* ”

Full title:

Coordination of Member State research programmes in water science and technology for the developing world

Research field:

Coordination of national and regional activities

Co-ordinator:

United Kingdom: Department for International Development

Partners:

- DFID Department for International Development
- NERC-CEH Natural Environment Research Council
- ITAD ITAD-Water Ltd
- SYKE Finnish Environment Institute

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and negotiations about the coordination of research activities.

The project will provide the framework for Member States to work together on a wide range of water development topics, including water supply, sanitation, water management, climate, energy, transport and health. While research is the main focus, this ERA-NET will also address the transfer of knowledge. Through training, communications and dissemination, EUWI-ERA-NET could help build research capacities in developing countries, encouraging them to take part in European research programmes.

Changing cultures

This project may be the ideal vehicle to build up the confidence between ministries and funding agencies, giving them time to assess the impact of joint working on their own research programmes.

If it is successful, its impact will not be restricted to domestic ministries. It will provide support to the EU's Water Initiative working group which is also attempting to coordinate the work of Member States in this sector.

Networking and coordinating research efforts are central features of the European Research Area. It would be a considerable step forward if this ERA-NET project could draw in actors from different European countries to start working together. It would eliminate duplication of effort and make it possible to draw up long-term strategies for the delivery of water research programmes for the developing world.

EUWI-ERA-NET is the starting point for collaborative working which could see development ministries harness the ERA-NET model for other research issues such as agriculture, health and education.

The project will also contribute to other coordination activities that are being carried out at the international level. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and World Bank are currently trying to harmonise donor-country practices and procedures for carrying out development projects.