



REVISIONING WANI

Summary of Results from the Revisioning WANI Workshop in Mesoamerica August 2008

BACKGROUND

WANI, the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative, was launched worldwide in 2003 covering a broad range of field and policy activities. This Initiative is closing its successful first phase in 2008, and its next phase is now under design.

This new design process is based on a combination of lessons learned from the initial period and the demands emerging from an incredibly dynamic process of change affecting water resources all over the world coupled with other key related processes such as the food and energy prices crisis. Needless to say, the poorer segments of societies around the world are the ones most dramatically affected by this dreadful combination.

In this context WANI is conducting regional consultations with its existing and potential partners to analyze the direction and priorities to be addressed in the new period. In the initial stages of this participatory consultation process, four key areas were defined as the strategic umbrella for the Initiative. They are:

- Improvement of poor people livelihoods through the demonstration of best practices for water and ecosystems management
- Improvement of governance and decision making processes to balance water uses, maintain ecosystem services and address the needs of the poor
- Promotion of rational and equitable investment mechanisms in water management and ecosystems services in a way that benefits economically vulnerable groups
- Improvement of integrated water management processes through leadership and learning initiatives

These four areas are cross-cut by a key common process of upscaling through replication, practical applications and policy development support.

While these broad areas delineate the action sphere for the new phase of WANI, there is still a need to focus them regionally through a participatory process to adjust the general vision and to better define the key regional priorities.

THE PROCESS

A regional workshop was held in San Jose, Costa Rica, from August 12 to 14th, 2008 to work on regional priorities. The event was attended by global, regional and national IUCN and WANI staff, IUCN member organizations and representatives of actual and potential partner organizations from Mesoamerica plus Cuba and Dominican Republic.

The work was organized under an innovative systems-thinking based approach that helped participants to walk through a process addressing both elements of systems thinking and the traditional situation analysis, objectives, priorities and recommended actions usual in this type of exercises.

In a few words, the participants defined a goal for each one of the key areas and the expected trend of each goal, with and without WANI, over the next five years. Then, they identified the key variables of

the system(s) related to that goal and the way in which those variables related to each other. These systems were then used to identify intervention points and key interventions expected to generate dramatic change towards the expected goals. Finally the participants developed recommendations about what priority actions should be undertaken by WANI to achieve the expected changes. All steps were done by work groups that exchanged their views and proposals periodically in order to ensure both information sharing and enrichment of ideas.

A full report of the workshop and its results will be available soon in Spanish and English at the Confluencias website (www.confluenciasagua.net) or from the IUCN WANI staff at IUCN HQ or IUCN ORMA.

RESULTS

Strategic Area 1: Water and ecosystems management to improve livelihoods and water security

The prioritized goal was focused on the development and adoption of productive and economically profitable systems by the local communities in a way that ensures the conservation of water recharge areas and the water supply to local communities. These experiences should be adequately registered and disseminated to influence local and national policies.

The work in this subject was dominated by the concept that Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) will only be achieved in a sustainable way when rural production activities are profitable and the local families have access to reasonable cash income in addition to other products for self-consumption. Obviously, these activities should neither degrade lands nor affect the water recharge areas, as these areas are essential to ensure the water supply to other areas downstream. Interestingly, this approach is focused on rural production (the key land use in Mesoamerica) and it emphasizes not just the water management component but also its economic aspects that are essential for spontaneous adoption and sustainability of these activities without external support.

During the first phase of WANI the projects undertook a few activities reasonably consistent with the advised priority but definitively this was not their key direction as they emphasize water management issues and governance over profitable, water-friendly productive activities. Therefore this is a concept to be considered for stronger incorporation into WANI 2

Strategic Area 2: Governance and decision making to balance water uses, maintain ecosystem services and address the needs of the poor

The key priority for the participants in this area was the development of effective and participatory governance platforms at different levels (local, regional, national, transboundary) able to foster negotiation and agreements among different sectors to impulse IWRM.

Governance platforms need to be open and highly participatory in order to be able to influence policy and legislation at different levels and, even more important, to contribute significantly to the effective implementation of policy and legislation.

During WANI 1 several efforts successfully addressed the development of these platforms, but mostly at the local level (micro-watershed management committees and similar). Therefore, the challenge for WANI 2 is the upscale these efforts to larger levels without compromising its grassroots base.

Strategic Area 3: Rational and equitable investment mechanisms in water management and ecosystems services in a way that benefits economically vulnerable groups

The priority in this strategic area was given to the strengthening of the native funding base of the IWRM initiatives. An observed weakness of the current IWRM processes in many sites is its dependence on foreign funding, mostly through Projects. In this case there was a strong argument about strengthening

or developing local and national mechanisms to replace a significant proportion of the foreign funding. There is a variety of mechanisms from the payment for environmental services (e.g. carbon sequestration) to service canons (e.g. water canons) to national and local governmental budget allocations and incentives; moreover, other new mechanisms can be also developed and tested.

Under WANI 1 some initial efforts were made in this area and currently there are specific associated projects aimed to payment for environmental services (PES) and governmental incentives for good management. The challenge for WANI 2 would be to keep expanding in this area with a clear focus to make IWRM less dependent on external funding sources.

Strategic Area 4: Leadership and learning initiatives to strengthen IWRM

The work in this area was dominated by the approach on strengthening watershed governance bodies. In a way, the priorities in this area were quite close to those of the Strategic Area 2 on governance and decision making. This is an interesting convergence as the participants in this theme decided that the priority level for learning, capacity building and leadership development and strengthening is the local level.

The WANI Projects during Phase 1 allocated significant efforts in this direction, but definitively the time required to develop these capacities is much longer than the time available for the first phase. Even more interesting is the discussion about what is the adequate starting level for these efforts. Many initiatives, mostly governmental, started its development at the national level or similar addressing large watersheds and from there they attempt to reach the base levels. WANI in Mesoamerica is following a different direction starting from the local level. Therefore, the challenge for WANI 2 seems to be to maintain the strengthening efforts at the local level while opening venues to reach larger levels.

A RENEWED VISION

A post-workshop attempt to define a new vision for WANI based on the results of the workshop yielded the following vision formulation.

WANI is a key instrument in building a multi-scale (local to global) empowerment platform. This platform articulates IWRM processes on the ground focused on sustainable and profitable production schemes integrated in active self-financed watershed grassroots organizations, with other ensembles active at higher complexity levels (subnational, national, global) able to influence water related policies creating conditions to mainstream the IWRM efforts on the ground.

There are several key concepts in this vision that merit a short comment as follows:

- Contributing, WANI contributes to efforts made jointly with other organizations
- WANI will operate at different scales from local to global aiming to articulate them in an effective way
- A key component in the WANI efforts is empowerment as the basis to achieve better results and long term sustainability
- Platform is mentioned in the sense that WANI contributes to efforts made jointly with other organizations aiming to create a structure able to develop stronger leverage and also to gain sustainable outcomes. There are platforms at the different levels at which WANI operates.
- Sustainable and profitable production is a basic component of almost any process aiming to achieve sustainable development, hence a key component to be articulated in the WANI efforts
- Active and self-financed watershed grassroots organizations is another essential element for both empowerment and results sustainability
- Mainstreaming IWRM is the final step closing the field-to-policy loop and feedbacking policy products to enhance ground activities.