NETWORKING TO PUT KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS: THE SWEDISH WATER HOUSE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: The Swedish Water House, through its networks, supports international policy development and co-operation through knowledge generation, dissemination and partnership building, primarily within the areas of sustainable river basin management and integrated water resources management. Communications will be an important part of the task of the Swedish Water House.

INTRODUCTION

Information dissemination plays a crucial role in supporting international policy development and co-operation, particularly with regard to sustainable river basin management and integrated water resources management (IWRM). Yet in many countries, the knowledge and experience owned by many stakeholders -- organisations, scientific institutions, NGOs and international organisations, the government, etc. -- is often disseminated in an uncoordinated way. This leads to a "cross-talk" which, to say the least, is confusing for the intended target audiences, namely, politicians and key decision-makers and opinion-leaders.

In Sweden, an effort is underway to network the combined water knowledge in the country in order to sharpen the messages related to sustainable river basin management and IWRM, and also to speak, credibly and authoritatively, with one voice to decision-makers in different sectors on an international level. The effort involves not the creation of a new organisation but rather the creation of a virtual network of existing entities whose success will depend in large measure on understandable communications channelled from the partners, through the network, to the intended audiences.

The benefits of such a network from a communications perspective are that they pool the combined knowledge of the partners, leverage the resources and capabilities of organisations to the benefit of the network, and thus lead to more influential and effective messages.

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Communications tools which will be used by the network include the traditional -- conferences, workshops and seminars -- but a main emphasis will be on media advocacy and electronic, web-based approaches.

The Swedish Water House approach will serve as a case study which, if successful, will provide other countries in the developed and developing world with a model for how to use communications based on the networking of diverse, in-country knowledge pools, in order to galvanise that knowledge, ultimately, into influential information dissemination.

MOBILIZING COMPETENCE TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

The Swedish Water House (SWH) increases Swedish support and engagement in international water and development processes. SWH was announced at the 2nd World Water Forum in the Hague and was established in 2003. It stems from the Swedish Government’s commitment to contribute to the implementation of agreed actions from the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development and other international conferences in order to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals and other relevant international targets.

The SWH will operate by building networks between, for instance, governments, stakeholder organizations, scientific institutions, NGOs and international organizations, and mobilizes competence to support international water processes and problem solving. By promoting actions through networks and project clusters, it serves as a link between practice, science, policy making and decision making in the search for sustainable water resources management strategies.

The SWH utilizes a network of partners who provide expertise on a wide range of water issues and share knowledge with national and international organizations. The Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) has established the Swedish Water House, and it is funded initially by the Swedish Ministries of Environment and Foreign Affairs. These partners, each with their own communications expertise, can contribute to the network.

SOLVING WATER ISSUES REQUIRES BROAD CO-OPERATION

Pressure on the world’s water resources is increasing. Population growth and distribution, changing consumption and production patterns, trade policies, and socio-economic development in general all have an influence on water resources. Pollution, which degrades the chemical and biological properties of water, land use and human manipulation of the landscape modify its natural flows and add to existing stresses.

Measures that reduce or prevent further stress on water resources and reverse the ongoing, negative trend should be seen as critical investment opportunities rather than costs to society. Knowledge of possible remedies, however, must be linked to a will to act. The vastly diverse water community, among many others, plays a very important role. This role is not confined to
scientific monitoring, analysis and interpretation, or to finding technical solutions. It also includes proposing comprehensive recommendations for future actions and needs in much broader societal terms, as freshwater resources are the key in almost all aspects of social and economic development and quality of life.

The complexity of water issues is obvious, and proficient management strategies need to take this complexity into account by establishing dialogues and participation among all concerned parties. Effective water management cannot be achieved solely through political, scientific or managerial means, but rather through a complex interaction of all three. Networks are essential to tackle the problems.

Because physical and socio-economic settings are so diverse, most decisions and actions related to water management need to take place at the local, national and regional level. Nevertheless, international co-operation and partnerships in support of national actions are essential for achieving the overall goals of sustainable development, particularly in the water sector.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SWEDISH WATER HOUSE

The purpose of the Swedish Water House is to act as an advocate in the policy debate through knowledge generation and dissemination and partnership building. Support to international policy development and action within sustainable river basin management and integrated water resources management (IWRM) are key focuses. Although the specific role and mode of work for the Swedish Water House will be elaborated during 2003, it will initially focus on three broad areas:

1. Increase understanding as a way to stimulate action

   The access to knowledge and experience can help stimulate implementation of necessary actions. It is through knowledge and understanding that we can generate a will to act! The links between the UN Millennium Development Goals and effective water management strategies must be made clear, and the people affected, as well as decision makers, must be encouraged to act and see the benefits of their actions.

   The Swedish Water House will build on the network partners to generate and disseminate information and knowledge about water policy issues and innovative concepts within water management. The underlying goal will be to stimulate further action – at local, national and international levels – and support international policy processes. It will serve as a knowledge resource center, to which national and international organizations and government agencies can turn to for assistance and information.

2. Build national and international partnerships and clusters of co-operation and support projects in line with the mission of the SWH concept
The Swedish Water House project is not a new water organization. Rather, the goal is to stimulate networking among existing national and international organizations and promote co-operation to identify and solve specific water related problems, in particular those linked to basin management and integrated water resources management. Focuses include, among others, support to the development of national strategies for IWRM and river basin management strategies, including issues of effective governance but also links between water, ecosystem management and ecosystem services.

3. **Generate and disseminate water knowledge through conferences, seminars, workshops, the media and web-based material**

Through its network, the Swedish Water House will generate and disseminate innovative knowledge and experience, in particular linked to river basin management and integrated water resources management. The means will be conferences, workshops, seminars, media advocacy and web-based material. Activities will stimulate debate and promote co-operation. SWH will enable new concepts to be elevated, discussed and disseminated.

### ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN TO DATE

In May 2003, around 50 actors within the water network of Sweden assembled for a first gathering and planning of action. This included a discussion of the important role of communications. The Stockholm Environment Institute, for example, indicated that its extensive experience with ecological sanitation -- and in communicating about eco-san -- would be a good topic with which to communicate about through the network.

During the World Water Week, the Swedish Water House co-convenes a seminar in its function to assemble different actors on the same questions at one and only discussion table. The seminar is about Shared Water Problems in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority Areas. The Seminar will be opened by the Swedish Minister for the Environment, Ms. Lena Sommestad. Those speaking at the seminar will include representatives of the Office of the Israeli Water Commissioner, the Palestinian Water Authority, the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation together with leading experts in the field such as Dr. Eran Feitelson of the Hebrew University, Munther J. Haddad, former Minister of Water and Irrigation in Jordan, Professor Marwan Haddad of the University in Nablus, Richard Laster, a prominent environmental lawyer from Jerusalem and Dr. Abed Tamimi, director the Palestinian Hydrology Group. All of those taking part have been actively involved in dealing with problems relating to water in the region for many years.

### NEXT STEPS
The Swedish Water House is in an implementation phase, as are its communications activities. Future development of a web site, database, and coordinating planning with the partner organisations, will take place throughout the fall of 2003.

**SWEDISH WATER HOUSE GOALS**

- Increase understanding as a way to stimulate action
- Build national and international partnerships and clusters of co-operation and support projects in line with the mission of the SWH concept
- Generate and disseminate water knowledge through conferences, seminars, workshops, the media and web-based material

**SWEDISH WATER HOUSE BACKGROUND**

- Initiated by the Swedish Government
- Established to stimulate and support expert network co-operation in the water sector
- Administered and developed by the Stockholm International Water Institute