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GWP-Med: Launching of the Assessment and Dialogue on Private Sector Participation in Water Infrastructure in Tunisia

24/05/2011



The National Workshop on "Private Sector Participation in Water Infrastructure" was organised on 23 May 2011 in Tunis by the Bureau de Planification des Equilibres Hydrauliques, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of Tunisia, the Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It was held within the framework of and was supported by the GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystems (MedPartnership) and the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI).

The Workshop was attended by more than 30 targeted participants representing different stakeholders including technical departments in the competent ministries, public utilities, private sector, technical and financial partners, universities and civil society. The participants were introduced to the background and methodology of the activity and were presented with examples where similar activities have been carried out. The Checklist for Public Action developed by OECD was introduced as a means to provide practical guidance and help governments and other stakeholders to assess and manage the implications from involving private actors in the financing, development and management of water and sanitation infrastructure. Moreover, experience and lessons learned from the Checklist's application in other countries within and outside the Mediterranean region were also presented and discussed. Special attention was given to the consultation process developed jointly by GWP-Med and OECD in the framework of the MED EUWI Policy Dialogues on Water in Lebanon and Egypt with the support of GEF MedPartnership regarding the elaboration of assessments on the enabling environment for private sector participation in the two countries.

In particular, the meeting focused on the Tunisian context and experiences were provided by the two public utilities in charge of drinking water and sanitation services. Participants were engaged in an active discussion on opportunities, challenges and constraints for private sector participation in Tunisia. The Workshop launched a national assessment and dialogue activity on the framework for private sector participation in the water sector addressing also the financial sustainability of projects. The Dialogue aims to achieve a better understanding and to forge an internal consensus across all levels of government and with key stakeholders on needed reforms to strengthen the enabling environment for private sector participation.

The activity will be completed by the end of the year replicating and taking stock of similar work by GWP-Med and OECD undertaken in Egypt and Lebanon.