

**FINAL REPORT AND 4th PROGRESS REPORT ON
COMPONENT 3.4 DANUBE REGIONAL PROJECT**

ENHANCING ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION MAKING
IN
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CROATIA,
ROMANIA, SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

DECEMBER 2006



This Final Report is prepared for component 3.4 of Objective 3 of the Danube Regional Project (phase 2).

The overall focus under Objective 3 is to enhance awareness-raising in civil society and reinforce the participation of NGOs and other interested parties in water management and pollution reduction (nutrients and toxic substances) with particular attention to transboundary cooperation and river basin management in the context of the Water Framework Directive.

Report prepared by



THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
for Central and Eastern Europe



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Executive Summary

The purpose of Component 3.4 is to support emerging processes of improved public participation in environmental decision making, with emphasis on better access to environmental information and public participation in decision making on hot spot prevention and cleanup. The project built capacity in government officials who are the “front lines” of access to information and responsible for implementing public participation, using targeted training and technical assistance activities carefully tailored to the needs and circumstances of each country. National and local NGOs and the public involved in the Danube and water-related issues were considered critically important stakeholders and partners of the officials. Engaging all of them actively in capacity building supports full and effective public involvement in planning in the context of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and cleanup and prevention of future Danube hot spots. As noted by the funder, these impacts should last long after the Danube Regional Project (DRP) has been completed.

This Final Report which is also the 4th and last Progress Report covers the period from the inception of the project in September 2004 through December 2006. An inception report followed by three progress reports chronicled the progress of the project in six month increments (the previous report was completed in June 2006). In this last six-month period, the major accomplishments of the Consortium of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Resources for the Future (RFF) and New York University School of Law (NYU) are:

- ✓ Completed country activities and demonstration projects;
- ✓ Planned and carried out a Basin-Wide dissemination meeting;
- ✓ Engaged in various dissemination and communication activities;
- ✓ Wrote a comprehensive Final Report including a summary of the efforts of the entire project, and a first cut at recommendations and lessons learned.

In all these, the Consortium has completed a number of milestones and deliverables, and reached substantial results.

This report has two major parts. The first part begins by describing the project objectives and the methodology used over the 28 months since September 2004.

Successive sections go on to:

- ✓ explain how the methodology was applied including the development of country-specific needs assessments and the subsequent identification, country-by-country, of national activities to address the identified needs;
- ✓ report on the demonstration projects, how they were selected, what they accomplished and how those activities informed and enriched activities at the national level;
- ✓ discuss the technical support which was provided throughout the project in the form of two study tours, and information sharing/capacity building that took place at the local and national level through meetings, workshops, phone conversations and electronic sharing;.

- ✓ summarize the stream of activities conducted in the project;
- ✓ discuss project results (at the local, national and regional levels) and lessons learned that will be productive for countries of the Danube Basin and other countries that seek to improve access to information about shared water bodies; and
- ✓ identify recommendations to share among the five countries participating in the project and also with other Danube-Basin countries.

The Final Report does not repeat all details found in the previous Progress Reports or the Inception Report.

The most significant parts of this report summarize the results produced by and lessons learned from all parts of this project and provide recommendations which will then be distilled down into a separate document for general circulation.

The Project achieved significant results in the Danube River basin countries in which it worked. Government officials at the national, regional, and local levels improved their capacity to provide better public access to water-related information and to facilitate greater public involvement in management planning. NGOs and citizens became more skillful in obtaining the information they need to participate and understand better how management decisions directly affect them. There is good reason to believe that these results will help ensure the long-term sustainability of gains to reduce nutrient and toxic pollution of the Danube River.

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I Overview of Project Objectives and Methodology

The central objective of Component 3.4 has been to support emerging processes of improved public participation in water-related environmental decision making, with particular emphasis on better access to environmental information and public participation in decision making with respect to hot spot prevention and cleanup. It was conducted in five Danube countries (now six): Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro.

The project built capacity in government officials who are at the “front lines” of access to information and responsible for implementing public participation, using targeted training and technical assistance activities carefully tailored to the needs and circumstances of each country. All efforts were carried out in cooperation with country partners. In this effort, national and local NGOs and the public involved in the Danube and water-related issues were critically important stakeholders and partners of the officials, and were therefore co-participants in all of the project activities. By actively engaging all of these parties in a collaborative capacity building program, the project supported more effective public involvement in the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) planning process, in water related decision-making and in cleanup and prevention of future Danube hot spots, involvement that will be sustainable over the long term.

The methodology used in the Project was highly responsive to needs and circumstances in the participating countries, and focused on achieving on-the-ground changes in actual practices at the national and local levels in each of the participating countries. Several key strategies were used for effecting change.

- ✓ Obtain an accurate assessment of the situation in each country regarding public access to information and public participation, from a legal, regulatory and above all, practical standpoint, and then have participants determine which barriers to public involvement were most important and amenable to being effectively addressed through the Project. This was done through initial, in-country consultations, preparation of National Needs Assessments and subsequent discussion and priority setting cooperatively with the country partners.

- ✓ Build capacity in key government officials responsible for water-related information and public participation to set priorities and develop measures to effectively address the priority needs identified through the Needs Assessment process. This was done through development of national activities and products, as well as capacity building activities conducted at a series of National Workshops held in each country, followed by work to develop the agreed national products by the National Teams, with Technical Assistance from the Implementing Consortium and local consultants. Products developed through this process included law, regulatory and policy reforms, manuals for public officials, citizen brochures, and meta-databases, as described below.

- ✓ Facilitate participant learning by providing opportunities to examine, at close range, good practices for public involvement that have been pioneered and used successfully elsewhere in the Danube River Basin, the E.U. or in other parts of the world, and to identify those that might appropriately be adapted to overcome barriers to improved public involvement in water management decision making in their own country. This was done through Study Tours to the U.S. and the Netherlands; presentation of good practices found elsewhere in the Region, the EU, and the U.S. at two country-level workshops, regional capacity building workshops and the final Basin Wide Dissemination Meeting; as well as through written materials summarizing lessons of the Study Tours and other advice and written materials on good practices provided to participants by the Implementing Consortium.

- ✓ Develop and test at the local level new approaches to increasing public access to information and public participation in addressing pollution hot spots along the Danube as models for other Danube hot spot communities and to inform parallel initiatives to improve public involvement at the national level. This was done through five, 10-12 month Demonstration Projects designed in accordance with criteria developed by the Implementing Consortium, but developed and conducted by NGOs, in some of the cases in partnership with local municipal officials or regional water and/or environmental authorities, one in each of the participating countries.

- ✓ Share and disseminate knowledge and experience, good practices and lessons learned (both locally and at the national level) among the participating countries, as well as with the other countries of the Danube River Basin. This was accomplished through the Regional Workshops and Final Basin Wide Dissemination Meeting, through efforts such as the requirement that Study Tour participants report to colleagues on lessons learned following the tours, as well as through the project website, which posts all of the project's written products and other materials prepared by the Implementing Consortium and ICPDR, an electronic listserv to share information, and articles about the project and reporting in various relevant fora. Additional steps being taken to disseminate the results of the Project are outlined in the Communications Plan developed jointly by the Consortium and DRP/ICPDR and in the Consortium's Dissemination Plan.

II Application of Methodology

2.1 Needs assessments and their role in shaping project activities

Consistent with the methodology outlined above, the Project undertook a series of activities to identify the public access to information and public participation needs of each participating country and to formulate national activities to address those needs. In October-November 2004, the Implementing Consortium set in motion a series of intensive, country-by-country consultations with key stakeholders in each participating country, for three purposes: to identify the officials and NGOs whose participation was essential in order to assure the Project's success; to scope preliminarily the major obstacles to and opportunities for public involvement in each country; and to identify the key issues in common to these countries and the region as a whole. These consultations enabled the Protect Management Team to map out, in the Inception Report, the project going forward.

In-depth Needs Assessments were conducted in each country during the initial stages of the Project to more closely pinpoint the key barriers to, and opportunities for, increasing public access to information to support public participation in each of the participating countries. The Needs Assessments were the foundation on which all subsequent activities were based and are themselves valuable resources on the status of access to information and, to some extent, public participation programs in each of the participating countries as of early 2005.

The process of conducting the Needs Assessments began with selection of appropriate local consultants in each country who were experts in their country's public access to information and public involvement laws, regulations, and practices, to research and write needs assessments. The consultants conducted research guided by detailed questionnaires from the Implementing Consortium. Drafts of the Needs Assessments were reviewed extensively, commented and later edited by the Consortium.

When the research and editing phase was completed, the Draft Needs Assessments were reviewed and discussed in each country by groups of 25-50 stakeholders, through a series of two-day national meetings, which were held in the following order at the indicated locations:

- Sofia, Bulgaria, February 24-25, 2005
- Sarajevo, BiH, February 29-March 1, 2005
- Stubicke Toplice, Croatia March 17-18, 2005
- Sinaia, Romania, March 31-April 1, 2005
- Palic Lake, Serbia and Montenegro, April 4-5, 2005

Participants in these national meetings included experts from key ministries and regional and local governmental agencies (including agriculture, water and environment), NGOs, including Danube Environmental Forum (DEF), and in some cases businesses involved in water management issues and WFD implementation, as well as representatives of the DRP, REC, and RFF and/or NYU.

At each country meeting, the consultants who prepared the Needs Assessment presented their findings, and participants discussed whether these findings and the proposed priority needs were accurate and complete and if they needed to be supplemented or revised. The meetings provided a forum to identify and discuss sites and subject matter for the planned demonstration projects. The meetings were also used to begin the process of establishing country-specific priorities for the work that would be undertaken during the Project to address the barriers identified through the Needs Assessments. These priorities were further discussed and refined after the national meetings by the National Teams in each participating country, and were incorporated into National Activity Plans that included specific measures to overcome the barriers to public access to information and involvement identified in the Draft Needs Assessments, as described further in Section 2.2 below.

Following the national meetings, key participants from each country convened at REC Headquarters in Szentendre, Hungary, in May 2005 for the First Regional Workshop to report on and discuss the results of the national Needs Assessments and the completed National Activity Plans and, as noted in more detail below, to discuss and finalize the basic concepts of their proposed Demonstration Projects. In addition, participants discussed and compared their national experiences and examined and identified commonalities. All of this was done in order to set a more concrete workplan for addressing priority needs for the remaining activities of Component 3.4, to identify and prepare what issues would be addressed in the forthcoming study tours and capacity building workshops, and to feed into preparations for the implementation of National Activity Plans and local Demonstration Projects.

2.2 Formulation of National Activity Plans to address priority needs

The selection of country activities and formulation of the National Activity Plans was an iterative and gradual process. First, as part of the draft Needs Assessments, the local consultants identified what they viewed as the first-priority barriers to public access to information and public involvement that should be addressed by participants in the Project. These priorities were discussed and further assessed and refined, first in National Workshops and then in the 1st Regional Workshop. Based on the consultants' and participants' proposals, the Consortium provided feedback to the National Teams on which of the country activities would fit the goals of DRP component 3.4 and would be feasible to carry out within the timeframe of the Project.

Three to four major activities were identified for each country and developed by the Operational Team into a more detailed National Activity Plan. (See Sec. 2.4 below.) These plans were finalized by July 15, 2005 in a dialogue with the REC, RFF and NYU together with an appropriate budget allocations, and began immediately or at latest from September 1, 2005.

The activity plans in final form were placed on the web site of REC COs.

2.3 Demonstration Projects

Five local Demonstration Projects conducted by NGOs at areas designated as Danube hot spots were a critical element of a methodology that sought to ground all learning in concrete, practical experience and devise and test promising methods for improving access to environmental information and public participation. The results of these local projects could serve as models for other localities and help to inform work at the national level on these

issues. In addition, the results of the Demonstration Projects will be shared with officials, NGOs and others throughout the Danube River Basin.

Demonstration Projects had to meet the following criteria for selection: 1) the site of the Demonstration Project is a hot spot on the Danube; 2) an NGO exists with adequate capacity to carry out the Demonstration Project and ensure its sustainability; 3) a cooperative, relevant local government authority exists willing to work with the NGOs on the Demonstration Project; and 4) the site presents an access to information or public participation problem that is relevant to the priority issues being tackled at the national level by the Project.

One Demonstration Project per country was selected based on these criteria; the Steering Committee endorsed the selected projects in Spring 2005. The Demonstration Projects were then contracted to the NGO proponents and began operation in late summer 2005. To support the Demonstration Projects, local capacity building workshops were held at each Demonstration Project site, and technical assistance was provided by the Implementing Consortium, as needed. The Demonstration Projects were largely completed at the end of summer or fall 2006.

The steps for development, selection, contracting and implementation of the Demonstration Projects are listed below:

1. National consultants prepared a demonstration project report for each country, using the EMIS database to identify the most serious hotspots and the other selection criteria indicated above.
2. Reports were discussed in national workshops where participants, based on their experience, provided further information on the selection criteria and identified 2-3 top priority hotspots.
3. Operational Teams of the countries together with the REC Headquarters and Country Offices worked further to identify potential issues and potential partners at the identified sites, and invited proposals from NGOs working on water issues in those hotspots.
4. The list of proposed demonstration sites was presented, discussed and approved at the April 27, 2005 Steering Committee Meeting.
5. In two countries, the identified sites had to either be further investigated (Croatia) or chosen from two options (Romania). Operational Teams were involved in advising on which proposal should be supported.
6. The Consortium developed three "model Demonstration Projects" to facilitate detailed design of the Demonstration Projects by the local NGOs who would be carrying out these projects: a model for sites with advanced industrial pollution; a model where River Basin Committees would be involved; and a model for sites at which public access to information and public participation mechanisms were still at a formative stage.
7. REC Headquarters developed a format for elaborating a project description, activity plan and budget, and in dialogue with the interested NGOs and with the help of the Country Offices, developed final plans for the full-scale Demonstration Projects.
8. Contracts with the implementing NGOs were signed after all activities and the budget were finalized and agreed.

9. Implementation of the Demonstration projects began September 1, 2005 and carried out through the balance of the Project.
10. The Consortium provided technical assistance to the Demonstration Projects, and the REC Headquarters and Country Offices monitored and supported the project implementation.
11. During implementation of Demonstration Projects, various methods were used to ensure synergy with activities designed for the national level; for example, Demonstration Project managers provided input to national level NGO brochures and participated in the national capacity building workshops.

2.4 Country-by-country summary of National Activities and Demonstration Projects

Here we summarize the country activities and Demonstration Projects in each country. More information can be found in Annexes, including the final products and outcomes of country activities and Demonstration Projects.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

National Activities:

1. *Contribute to the development of bylaw(s) and procedures to implement relevant provisions of the new national Water Law*
2. *Help to develop a Water Data Base that is needed in order to understand what water-related information exists*
3. *Produce guidelines/manual for authorities to improve the currently differing abilities and skills among authorities in terms of how they manage and handle access to information and public participation.*
4. *Write and disseminate an NGO brochure on access to information to assist the public to find water-related information sources, and to increase their capacity to interpret the data provided by authorities and enable them to participate.*

Demonstration Project:

Implement a demonstration project in Lukavac City managed by Ecological Association of Citizens "Eko-Zeleni" Lukavac, Husejin Keran (Project leader) on how improved information flow can facilitate improved water management approaches for the water bodies in the Lukavac area which receive untreated waste from city industrial sites and domestic sewage.

Bulgaria

National Activities:

1. *Assess and improve the rules and regulations for confidentiality of environmental and water related information*
2. *Provide training and capacity building for authorities on how best to implement existing procedures, and good practices for improved handling of information and information requests*
3. *Improve the active dissemination of information on environment and water through the web page of the River Basin Directorate*
4. *Provide a brochure for NGOs and the general public on on-line water related information sources including information on access to information rights.*

Demonstration Project:

Implement a demonstration project in Lovech and Troyan Counties, managed by the Association for Useful Activities "Ecomission 21 Century," Nelly Miteva (Project Leader), to build awareness and capacity through information to mobilize the local community with respect to the Osam River; the river receives pollution from a variety of sources, including the Lesoplast Plant, which operates without an IPPC permit, and Actavis which operates under a little understood IPPC permit. The project's goal was to improve access to environmental and water related information in the specified Region, with support for River Basin Directorates (with special emphasis on Directorate websites as a vehicle for conveying information).

Croatia

National Activities:

1. *Develop a water information Manual for authorities in the water sector on how to organize their internal procedures and activities to improve their ability to carry out their obligations to provide public access to water related information and to disseminate information. The Manual would also serve as a model for accessing and disseminating water related information*
2. *Produce a brochure on access to water information for the general public and NGOs with an overview of relevant laws, conventions, regulations and references to web pages, as well as explanations of the rights of the public regarding public access to information.*
3. *Create and deliver a training program and materials to build institutional capacity building for public officials and relevant stakeholders.*

Demonstration Project:

Implement a demonstration project in Osijek, managed by Green Osijek Ecological Association, Jasmin Sadikovic (Project Leader) to use public participation and information in the context of an "Osijek Water Forum" to establish a transparent and efficient dialogue among authorities and stakeholders and a planning process for decision-making about the construction and operation of a wastewater treatment plant, including effective ways to monitor and control

pollution in the Drava River, and the harmonization of Croatia's water laws with the Water Framework Directive including provisions that require informing the public.

Romania

National Activities:

- 1. Assess and improve the functioning of the River Basin Committees (RBCs) and conduct capacity building and training for communication, information dissemination and stakeholder participation.*
- 2. Develop a manual for authorities on public access to information and public participation in decision-making.*
- 3. Develop a brochure for the wider public and NGOs on how to access information and how the public can be part of the decision-making process, including useful tips and examples.*

Demonstration Project:

Implement a demonstration project in Tirgu Mures, Romania, managed by Focus Eco Center, Zoltan Hajdu (project leader), to improve the flow of information and public involvement in water management by building the capacity of diverse interest groups. The area is severely impacted by pollution from industrial plants and agricultural and rural runoff, including artificial fertilizers and residue from pig farms in Gornesti. The cost of drinking water in Tirgu Mures is one of the highest in Romania because of the cost of purifying the water. The project created an integrated, generalizable model for improved NGO participation in RBCs. Local good practice examples were disseminated by means of a leaflet illustrating how public involvement in water decision issues can be a tool for integrated water management.

Serbia and Montenegro

National Activities:

- 1. Develop a Manual for Officials including legal framework, actions to facilitate requests for environmental and water-related information.*
- 2. Develop a plain language practical Brochure for NGO and Public on access to water related information.*
- 3. Develop and implement capacity-building workshops for officials to enhance the likelihood that authorities will use the guidance materials in their daily jobs.*
- 4. Develop and implement capacity building workshop for NGOs on practical aspects of public access to information with a joint session with officials.*

Demonstration Project:

Implement a demonstration project in Bor, Serbia and Montenegro, managed by NGO Association of Young Researchers in Bor, Toplica Marjanovic (Project Leader) in an area with no wastewater treatment domestic sewage and high levels of industrial discharges, some of

which also contaminate ground water. Project increased public information about wastewater problems and brought about a greater likelihood of public participation to solve these problems, through a series of activities including stakeholder identification, capacity building, NGO networking and training, roundtables, awareness raising campaign and other kinds of outreach to the general public. It also established an emissions database, electronic networking and sharing of information. Training was used to improve the capacities of NGOs and local authorities, respectively, to request and give access to information.

2.5 Identification of common needs of all countries and designing joint capacity building activities to address those needs

In addition to providing the basis on which each of the participating countries could identify its own priority problems and develop solutions through implementation of the National Activity Plans, the Needs Assessments (and related discussions at the national workshops and Regional Workshop) also enabled the Consortium to identify problems common to all of the countries that could be effectively addressed through the joint (regional) capacity building activities of the project. It became clear through these assessments and discussions at the First Regional Workshop that-- although each was in a different state of development of both law and practices--the countries participating in the project faced a number of similar challenges regarding public involvement.

These included:

1) Limited capacity of governmental officials to implement public access to information and public participation programs/requirements at all levels of government (national, regional and local):

- Government officials were, at best, inconsistent in the ways they responded to information requests and often rejected requests or provided partial answers, even when the relevant law supported the request.
- Officials responded poorly for a variety of reasons including their own lack of knowledge about the relevant laws and limited experience and/or resources in how to implement them or because the existing laws and regulations themselves were inconsistent or unclear.

2) Inadequate institutional arrangements and systems for collecting, managing, and disseminating data and tracking information requests:

- In almost all of the participating countries, there was a dearth of specialized offices or governmental units and/or specialized officials who understand and can carry out their responsibilities to disseminate information. Without these, requests can get lost because no record is kept of information requests or their outcome.
- Often national, regional and local level governmental offices each held water-related information that should be made accessible to the public; however, in most cases, there was no central data base system or links between existing databases were missing.
- Much information of importance to the public was not available in electronic form.

- In many of the countries, government bodies in the water sector lacked necessary information collection and management procedures and tools, such as dockets, systems of records and other organizing devices to assemble relevant information and have it available to respond to information requests by the public.
- Country officials lacked skills to meet the special demands of developing and carrying out the public consultation process for drawing up River Basin Management Plans as required by the Water Framework Directive (WFD)

3) Many NGOs lacked capacity to access relevant information and lacked awareness of how to participate actively in water management issues:

- Ordinary citizens and individuals and many NGOs were often ignorant about their rights to information; even when they had some knowledge of their rights, many of these important stakeholders lacked knowledge about how to make appropriate requests for information and what to do if their requests were denied.
- The poor quality of reporting of environmental and water management issues, the poor information flow between government officials on the one hand, and NGOs and citizens and the media reporting on the environment, on the other hand, and the related lack of public awareness and understanding of complex environmental technical and scientific issues, have resulted in limited informed public participation.

4) Inadequacies in the legal framework for access to information and public involvement or its implementation in practice:

- In some countries, laws regarding public access to information and public involvement are inadequate, particularly when examined in the context of requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive, the Aarhus Convention and EU Directives that implement the requirements of the Aarhus Convention.
- In other countries, new laws on these subjects must be reconciled with a body of old laws lacking provisions for (or with very different requirements for) access to information and public participation and/or not adequately supplemented with necessary by-laws, implementing regulations and procedures.

5) Problems handling confidentiality claims with respect to requested information:

Systems are needed to identify appropriately confidential information, especially business and national security information, and for segregating and protecting it in order to facilitate the sharing of information that is not confidential or secret and that should be shared with the public.

The key national needs identified and reported on during the First Regional Workshop were captured in the following matrix:

NEEDS	su	Training/Capacity Building	Government & citizen's manuals, desk books and other types of aids	Transparency/Dissemination Aids	Media (support and consultation)	Confidentiality of certain business and other information	Procedures etc. to manage INFO
BIH*	X	X	X	X	X		
Bulgaria		X	X	X	X	X	
Croatia		X	X	X	X	X	X
Romania**	X	X	X				X
Serbia***	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* technical support for AC implementation (BIH)

** additional River Basin Committees (Romania)

*** workshops to provide information on new laws (public involvement in drafting/finalizing Water Law); also mentioned some special problems involving EIA and military installations (Serbia)

Joint activities planned by the Consortium to address the common issues outlined above are described in Sec 2.8 and 2.9 below, and included further capacity building Regional Workshops at REC Headquarters and in Novi Sad, two Study Tours, Technical Assistance throughout the Project, and the Final Danube Basin Dissemination Meeting.

2.6 Technical support

A critical part of the methodology of the Project was ongoing technical support in various forms to build capacity and increase the knowledge base of the participants in the project. Technical support was woven into the entire project. The methods included two study tours, information sharing and capacity building activities that took place at the local, national and regional levels in each country through meetings and workshops and between meetings and study tours, and substantial interaction through phone conversations and electronic sharing, both on a bilateral basis and through the project listserv.

In all of its technical assistance activities, the Consortium implemented capacity building activities and provided resources that were designed to expose participants to good practices for public access to information and public participation that have been used successfully in other parts of the world, and that could potentially be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the participating countries.

Capacity building was an element of every workshop at the plenary, national and demonstration project level, through which good practices were presented and examined. Participants shared experiences in their own countries and knowledge gained through the Project with each other. Resource persons and experts from different EU or neighboring countries, as well as from the project countries and from projects implemented on similar relevant activities were invited as speakers to supplement the experience of the Consortium and DRP. In many cases, resource persons participated in the demonstration project level events to share their expertise.

Flexible communication methods delivered on-going Technical Assistance throughout the Project, including relevant written resource materials on good information access and public participation practices.

2.7 Capacity-building activities at the national and Demonstration Project levels: national and Demonstration Project workshops

Following the first round of national workshops, described above, a second round of national workshops took place in March and April 2006, bringing together in each country relevant government officials at the national, regional and local level, NGO representatives and, in some cases, representatives of business and media. Together, participants shared information and experience, worked on project products, continued the planning and execution of country activities and Demonstration Projects, found joint solutions for problems encountered in implementation of the country activities and the demonstration projects, and took other steps to identify lessons learned and best practices. An overarching issue was how to sustain project results.

Following the second round of national workshops, project participants completed planned National Activities and activities in the Demonstration Projects. Country-level meetings brought together relevant government officials from all levels of government, NGO representatives and in some cases representatives of business and media. The workshops provided opportunities for stakeholders and local groups to participate in efforts to improve understanding of the threats their communities face from water pollution and to design local efforts to address these issues through the avenue of information and public participation. Drafts of the various manuals and brochures to aid and facilitate access to information and environmental public participation were shared and commented. The workshops also provided the Consortium an opportunity to meet with the members of the national teams in each country and discuss their progress on country activities and demonstration projects.

2.8 Joint capacity-building activities: study tours and regional workshops

Two study tours and three regional-level capacity building workshops were conducted during the project to enable project participants to share their experiences and knowledge and to learn about good practices together.

Study tours in June 2005 (United States) and October-November 2005 (Netherlands) helped build capacity and increase the knowledge of 30 project participants (six per country), each of whom was strongly encouraged to share what they had gained with their colleagues at home. The United States study tour in Spring 2005 (which was partially funded by a grant from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, a foundation based in New York) enabled representatives from

all five countries to examine mature public involvement programs, key parts of which had served as models for the information access provisions of the Aarhus Convention and recent EU Directives implementing it. The Netherlands study tour provided models from a country regarded as a leader among E.U. countries in implementing successful public involvement programs, particularly in the context of water management and implementation of the WFD in both the national and transboundary contexts.

As indicated elsewhere in this Report, knowledge acquired through the study tours: contributed to the development of manuals for officials and brochures for NGOs and was integrated into capacity building seminars for officials and NGOs at the national level; helped inform efforts to develop stronger guidance on confidential business information; provided ideas on best practices for the development of water basin committees under the Water Framework Directive; presented strategies to help participants better catalogue available information within Ministries; and contributed a myriad of other ideas and aids for improving access to information and environmental public participation, with particular emphasis on water pollution.

The First Regional Workshop, held at REC Headquarters in Szentendre, Hungary in Spring 2005, focused on the Needs Assessments and proposed Demonstration Projects. The Workshop identified national level priorities and activities to address barriers identified in the Needs Assessments, and common issues to which joint capacity building activities should be targeted. Good practices and models for procedures to facilitate public access to environmental and water-related information were presented and discussed. Participants also examined in detail options for developing and implementing the appropriate legal framework and criteria for commercial confidentiality, and examined tools that can assist officials in providing information and increase public to access information.

The Second Regional Workshop, held on 5 and 6 December 2005 in Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro, provided an opportunity for project participants from all five countries to discuss common challenges and solutions, share their learning and improve their skills, and discuss how synergies could be built between Demonstration Projects and National Activities. Most of the countries had, by then, prepared draft outlines for manuals and brochures; these were shared and commented in the meeting. Additionally, the Workshop provided an opportunity for participants to exchange knowledge and experience with representatives from Slovenia and an EU CARDS WFD-related project including stakeholder involvement in the Sava River Basin and other forums to involve the public such as RBCs, and to engage in parallel working groups on specific topics of common concern. These topics included how to draft manuals and brochures, how to deal with confidentiality issues, and how to work with communication and the media to support national and Demonstration Project activities.

2.9 Basin-wide dissemination meeting

In October 16-17, 2006, over 50 participants convened at REC Headquarters in Szentendre, Hungary for the final meeting of the Project, the Basin-Wide Dissemination Meeting. At this meeting, Project participants, discussed what they had learned in this 28-month effort and shared experience with officials and NGOs of other Danube-basin countries who are engaged in water management planning, WFD implementation and related public involvement activities. In addition to discussing what were the obstacles and difficulties identified in the context of the project, how they have been overcome, what were the practical results and best practice models achieved in each of the project countries and demonstration projects, what tools and methodologies were applied, participants from all the Danube River Basin mutually presented

their experience to promote concepts of access to information and public participation in their national circumstances during the implementation of the WFD and in river basin management planning. As a result of the broad exchange in plenary and in parallel group sessions, and based on the lessons learned and a draft proposed and presented by the Consortium, good practice recommendations were discussed to promote access to water related information and public participation among government, NGO representatives and other stakeholders in all Danube countries during the implementation of the WFD and in river basin management planning.

The topics for discussions and recommendations included the following:

- Manuals, deskbooks and other standardized written aids as practical tools for enhancing access to information and public participation.
- Clearer rules and guidance on confidentiality of information can ensure that more information is provided to the public in a timely fashion.
- Brochures for civil society and NGOs and other aids, will develop a stronger understanding within the public of their rights to government-held information and data, and will lead to improved information flow and public participation.
- Electronic information and communication tools are effective and cost efficient ways to reach public and stakeholders.
- Improved governmental coordination in data storage and sharing, and in procedures for making data and information available enhance information flow.
- Public Participation in Transboundary Water Management Planning requires finding common cross-border interests and developing common cross-border solutions
- River Basin Committees (RBCs) and other public consultation forums can greatly facilitate information sharing, communication and public/stakeholder participation, particularly when implementing the EU Water Framework Directive.
- In order to achieve the widest possible awareness on water issues as well as issues of access to information and public participation, it is important to engage the broader public.

As a result, meeting participants from the project countries and from other Danube countries presented their rich and diverse experience and could learn from the various approaches, achievements regarding participatory river basin management as well as from countries that are more advanced in implementation of the WFD. Based on the results of the meeting, the Consortium has prepared a summary of lessons learned and good practice recommendations useful to all of the Danube Basin countries which are presented below in sections V and VI of this report. These lessons learned and good practice recommendations along with those stemming from the project achievements, outputs and outcomes, will also be shared as part of a user friendly and practical publication and will be published in January 2007 in electronic and printed versions.

The project participants also used the opportunity to discuss the implementation and sustainability of the project results at the local and national level in each country and shared plans and ideas on how the government officials and the NGO representatives involved in the project will continue their cooperation after 2006. These proposals are presented in more details below in section VI.

The 1st ICDPR Public Participation Expert Group Meeting was held back to back with the Danube Basin-wide Dissemination meeting at the REC on October 17, 2006. All the EG members were invited and participated in the Basin-wide Dissemination Meeting which provided an opportunity for them to participate, share their own experiences and learn from others' experiences and build their capacities as well. During the EG meeting they also could discuss how the results of the project and the meeting could be made use of and sustained in their future activities.

The results of the Basin-wide meeting are distilled into the "Lessons Learned" and "Recommendations" sections of this Report (Sections V and VI, below).

2.10 Steering Committee meetings

Steering Committee meetings at regular intervals provided an opportunity to share plans and results with the DRP, ICPDR, the DEF representative and Heads of Delegation or their representatives from Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

- The 1st Steering Committee Meeting took place on April 27, 2005 at REC Headquarters in Szentendre, Hungary, following the Regional Workshop. This meeting offered the opportunity for those attending (including all Project countries represented either by the ICPDR Head of Delegation or his/her representatives, representatives of DEF, ICPDR, DRP and the implementing Consortium) to review and discuss the progress of the Project component; decide on the sites of the Demonstration Projects; inform about the progress on developing indicators and a log frame for evaluating project progress; and provide support and strategic direction for the implementation of the Project component.
- The 2nd Steering Committee Meeting for the Project was held on March 13, 2006 at the REC Country Office for Serbia and Montenegro in Belgrade, to review and discuss the progress of the Project component; inform about the upcoming tasks in the next 7 months; discuss the concept of the Danube River Basin Wide Dissemination Meeting; and provide support and strategic direction for implementation of the Project component.
- The third and last Steering Committee meeting took place in Szentendre, following the Basin-Wide Dissemination meeting. The meeting considered the results of the Project and provided guidance for the Final Report and other dissemination materials. It was resolved that the Consortium would prepare a publication sharing lessons learned, good practices, models and recommendations, based on the outcomes of the Project.

III ICPDR Assessment Reports Written and Finalized

In February 2005, the Consortium finalized two reports evaluating ICPDR rules and practices. One of these focused on access to information at ICPDR and the other on public participation in ICPDR decision making and activities. Draft reports had been submitted to the DRP and ICPDR in December 2004, and the final reports incorporated comments received from DRP and ICPDR.

The report on access to information reviewed existing practices at ICPDR with regard to how ICPDR actively provides access to information and how it manages requests for information. Gaps and best practices were identified. The report contained suggestions on how to improve access to information in the possession of ICPDR. In the Steering Committee meeting in April, ICPDR expressed satisfaction with the report and indicated it would consider the various suggestions for implementation.

The report on public participation at ICPDR identified a series of options for improving public participation in ICPDR decision making and activities, including options for enhancing the ICPDR observer process and for further developing the stakeholder forum concept. These options were based on review of ICPDR's current rules and procedures for public participation, as well as on research on the public participation rules and policies of other comparable institutions. ICPDR indicated in the Steering Committee Meeting in April that the options presented in the report were useful and that the report was being used to inform the current process of changing ICPDR's observer process and in further developing the ICPDR stakeholder forums. A first ICPDR stakeholder conference was held in June 2005 in Budapest. One of the partners in the Consortium, REC, was present at the conference and contributed to the discussion.

IV Project Results

4.1 Project products and results at the national and local levels

This section describes the principal results achieved by the Project, and provides illustrative examples of specific products and results that were produced at the national and local levels in the participating countries. The full list of project products are listed in the Annex to this Report and are accessible on the project web site at

<http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/DanubeRiverBasin/default.html>.

Principal results of the Project include:

4.1.1 Produced in-depth Needs Assessments and other written analyses identifying major barriers and opportunities with respect to efforts to increase public access to information and public involvement in all five participating countries and at selected Danube hot spots. The Needs Assessments and other analyses are easily accessible online.

Example: Bulgaria. Country team identified the key legal, regulatory and practical problems with implementing the current system for providing public access to water-related information, with special emphasis on how confidential information is handled. These needs were incorporated into the design of the Demonstration Project. Using the Lovech/Troyan area as an example, the Demonstration Project partners and the researchers made a written analysis of gaps in relevant legislation and practice and conducted several rounds of test requests for information. The analysis of the results was used in preparing recommendations on a procedure for handling business confidentiality, implementing the “public interest test” and supplementing the currently used Rulebook of the Ministry of Environment and Water.

Example: Romania. Country team conducted a survey and prepared an assessment identifying key legal and practical barriers to public involvement in River Basin Committee decision making (i.e. the bodies in Romania that are responsible for implementing river basin management and planning under the WFD), and incorporated these needs into the design of the Demonstration Project. The Project also examined how communication and decision-making takes place within RBCs and how RBC members communicate and involve their stakeholders. Using the Mures River Basin Committee as an example, the Demonstration Project researched and identified barriers to public involvement in RBC decision making, and produced recommendations for improvements.

4.1.2 Enhanced the capacity of government officials to provide public access to water-related environmental information and involve the public in water-related environmental decision making. This involved development of a variety of effective tools specifically adapted to national/local needs and circumstances, including:

4.1.2.1 Produced manuals, deskbooks and other guides to improve the knowledge and practical implementation skills of officials and personnel in governments tasked with providing information to the public; these aids have been published and disseminated and are also available online in native language.

Example: Romania. Country experts produced a guidance manual addressing public access to environmental and water-related information and public participation in water related decision-making with a focus on implementation of the EU WFD. A Project report summarizing the findings of an assessment targeting internal and external communication of RBCs and their members assists national authorities in identifying the changes needed to increase public involvement in RBC decision making and to improve the functioning of these bodies.

4.1.2.2 Developed and implemented improved systems for data collection, management and dissemination

Example: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Cooperation between NGOs and government personnel during the Project activities led to the development of a first-time meta- system for identifying where water-related information could be found in the complex, multi-level governmental structure. The key issues addressed include which governmental agencies hold what information and how to contact them (including a direct link to the respective institution's web site). This provides the foundation for an effective process for providing information on request and helps to orient requesters. The meta-information system is accessible online through the REC CO web page at <http://www.rec.org.ba/drp3.4.htm>

Example: Serbia and Montenegro. As part of the Demonstration Project in Bor, Serbia, an NGO, in cooperation with local authorities, established a standardized database for water resources that can be accessed by a wide variety of stakeholders and will be transferred to the municipality's Environment Protection Department to operate in the future, after completion of the Demonstration Project. The NGO trained municipality personnel to maintain and further operate the data base. The database is accessible to various governmental authorities, water users and the public.

Example: Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Project team worked with river basin authorities to improve their websites as a vehicle for conveying information to the public. Based on a needs assessment conducted with representatives of the Danube River Basin Directorate (RBD) and other RBDs, a common approach was developed for the websites identifying what should be added to the content to be more informative, functional, simple and accessible. In addition, a new web page was developed for the Danube RBD that includes information about the structure and activities of the RBD, relevant legislation, and explanations of how information can be accessed, including procedures and terms. The web page also now includes an application form as well as a section on frequently asked questions (FAQ). A manual was also prepared for officials managing the web page.

The Lovech/Troyan Demonstration Project helped create more effective websites for the Lovech Region and the Municipality of Lovech and provided information for the current web page on the website of the municipality of Lukovit. A hyperlink was created on the new website of the municipality of Troyan.

4.1.2.3 Developed methods for appropriately characterizing and handling confidential information

Example: Bulgaria. The country activities team examined models for distinguishing between confidential business information and information that should be made available to the public, and developed guidance and recommendations on this for government personnel that will be included in the Rulebook of the MoEW.

4.1.2.4 Trained key national, regional and local officials to implement information access requirements and to involve the public in water-related environmental decision making.

Example: Through two sets of National Capacity Building Workshops in each country, conducted in national languages, officials at national, regional and local levels in all five participating countries received training in practical methods for increasing public access to information and/or public involvement in water related decision-making. The effort was iterative and participatory and:

- identified and finalized the list of national and local priority needs and decided on relevant country activities to examine solutions.
- discussed, developed and commented on draft versions of practical work products such as manuals for officials, brochures for civil society and NGOs, recommendations for officials on handling confidentiality issues, as well as content of draft by-laws, databases, web sites, and a wide range of project products.

Example: Local officials involved in the Demonstration Projects received training through capacity building workshops designed for their specific needs. Within the Lukavac Demonstration Project, for example, an interactive workshop format allowed a wide variety of local representatives (including the local council, cantonal level, health authority, water operator and local industry) to constructively discuss practical examples of water information access and dissemination related problems and to engage in joint problem solving.

4.1.3 Increased the capacity of NGOs and citizens to access water-related environmental information and participate in water-related environmental decision making through a variety of effective tools specifically adapted to national/local needs and circumstances, including:

4.1.3.1 Prepared, published and disseminated citizen brochures and toolkits to help individuals and NGOs understand how best to submit information requests, who to submit those requests to, what are their rights to information, and what to do in case an information request is rejected.

Example: Romania. Selected members of the NGO community produced, published and disseminated a "toolkit" that includes practical fact sheets aimed at the general public that offer assistance for accessing information and getting involved in decision making processes. A concise brochure included in the toolkit provides a more descriptive background of the information and participation context in Romania. The kit also includes other and in-depth materials targeted to the needs of NGOs.

Example: Bulgaria. The NGO members of the project team designed a brochure containing useful and practical information for NGOs and citizens, including sources of available on-line water related information in Bulgaria and abroad. The brochure also explains the procedures for accessing information and citizens' rights to access information in Bulgaria. An existing brochure was improved to include updated and more relevant information to help NGOs, citizens and the media understand how to access relevant information held by the government and to be aware of on-line sources.

Example: Bosnia and Herzegovina. A brochure designed for NGOs presents the most important pollution and health problems related to water resources, and shows why the public needs to be involved in solving these problems. It identifies public involvement opportunities under the current national and international legislation, explains citizens' rights and procedures for accessing information and participating in decision-making, and provides examples of good practices for public involvement from EU and other countries.

4.1.3.2 Trained NGOs and citizens to exercise their rights to obtain environmental information relating to water and participate in related decision making.

Example: Bulgaria: Participants in the Demonstration Project built local community capacity, including for NGOs, concerning the rights and duties of key stakeholders in the process of searching for and obtaining ecological information and gaining practical experience with such requests. One of the capacity building activities undertaken in the Demonstration Project was to engage local citizens and NGOs in submitting information requests to local, regional and national authorities and to thereby help test what kinds of water management information are being withheld as confidential.

4.1.3.3 Helped government officials and NGOs and other stakeholders to improve their communication and potential for joint action concerning common issues and challenges, and strengthened their cooperation and collaboration on critical issues of information access and public involvement in water-related environmental decision making.

Example: Croatia. The Demonstration Project in Croatia established a "Water Forum" to promote discussion and communication on essential water issues among governmental authorities and NGOs, citizens and other stakeholders. The Water Forum is expected to become a permanent platform for Osijek regional communication about water issues.

Example: Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Demonstration Project convened local meetings in constructive ways that encouraged citizens, NGOs and local industry to consider together the impacts of pollution on their joint interests and look for joint solutions. Previous efforts had been unproductively confrontational. Because of the collaborative approach taken by the organizers of the Demonstration Project, a local industry decided to participate in the discussions and offered its factory as a meeting site, setting a new, civil tone for discussions.

Example: Bulgaria. A radio program on the topic of access to ecological information, to which the Demonstration Project contributed, included an NGO representative, a governmental institution's legal adviser and an official dealing with access to information, reflecting the constructive collaboration promoted by the project.

4.1.3.4 Substantially improved public awareness of water pollution problems and how they impact local health and safety and of potential solutions at local hot spots, and promoted involvement of the local public to help solve these hot spot problems.

Example: Bulgaria. Raised public awareness locally and nationally of the problems and solutions regarding public access to local water pollution information through media campaigns in local newspapers and local TV as well as broadcasting on the Bulgarian National Radio.

Example: Serbia and Montenegro. Increased public and media awareness of a community water pollution problem, its sources and potential solutions through activities of the Demonstration Project team in Bor who prepared and printed a leaflet and devoted a special edition of the bulletin "Ekobor" to project activities. This was disseminated to participants of the round table, local media and citizens. Several informative programs were aired on local radio, television and on the NGO web site about local water pollution problems and the project activities.

4.2 Project Products and results at the regional and Basin-wide levels

4.2.1 Through in-depth Study Tours of the U.S. and Netherlands, two Regional Workshops presenting good practices and case studies from the E.U., U.S. and elsewhere, written resource materials prepared by the Consortium, and a Basin Wide Dissemination Meeting—as well as summaries of these activities published online—exposed government officials and NGOs in the five participating countries and throughout the Danube River Basin to good practices and new options for increasing public access to water-related environmental information and engaging NGOs and citizens in the process of protecting water bodies. This exposure helped inform and guide the work by participants in each country to increase public involvement in water-related decision making.

Example: U.S. and Netherlands Study Tours. Exposure to practices for managing water-related environmental information in mature regulatory systems helped NGO participants in the Demonstration Project for Serbia and Montenegro to assess the status of data management practices in their local hot spot community and, together with local governmental authorities, to develop a publicly accessible, basic water database that can be used as a starting point for collecting and disseminating water related information, and then expanded and improved upon in the future. The database will enable citizens to get some of the information they will need for informed participation in local water pollution issues.

Example: U.S. and Netherlands Study Tours and targeted workshops at the Regional Meetings. Exposure to good practices, procedures and criteria for handling confidential information requested by the public assisted a Working Group of officials and NGO experts in Bulgaria to prepare practical guidance materials and legislative and other recommendations for improving methods of handling confidential information for the Ministry of Environment and Water, as well as to prepare a proposed supplement to the Rulebook of the Ministry.

Example: Technical assistance. With assistance of a report prepared by the Consortium on good practices for public involvement in water management bodies in the U.S., E.U. and elsewhere, Demonstration Project participants in Romania were able to identify and recommend constructive options for improvements in the procedures for selecting non-delegated (citizen/NGO) representatives for membership on the RBCs, as well as options for increasing public input to RBC decision making.

Example: U.S. and Netherlands Study Tours. Manuals and guidance documents for public officials and citizen brochures used in the U.S. and Netherlands, which were provided to Project participants as potential models, assisted participants at the national and/or local levels in all five countries to prepare similar tools for officials, NGOs and citizens in their home countries.

4.2.2 Using technical assistance tools outlined above, enabled governmental and NGO stakeholders from the five participating countries, as well as the other countries in the Danube River Basin, to share their experiences and learn from each other. The materials and information shared included a broad range of specific, practical tools that can be used to increase public access to information and public involvement in WFD planning and other water-related decision making.

4.2.3 Through establishment of a Project website containing all of the national and Demonstration Project products of the Project and a project "listserv," created an important, new region-wide and Basin-Wide resource on ways to increase public access to water-related environmental information and public involvement in Danube environmental decision making. This resource is also accessible to non-Danube River Basin countries facing similar challenges.

4.2.4 Through the Basin-Wide Dissemination Meeting, dissemination of final Project Products following the conclusion of the Project, and Recommendations contained in this Final Report and in the publication to be prepared in January, will have enabled all countries of the Danube River Basin to benefit from lessons learned through the Project and to consider and act upon the Basin-Wide recommendations coming out of it.

4.3 Project products and results at the ICPDR Level

4.3.1 Produced an assessment of current practices regarding public access to information held by ICPDR, as well as concrete recommendations for increasing public access to such information, through an in-depth report prepared by the Consortium.

4.3.2 Produced an assessment of current practices regarding public participation in ICPDR activities and, as an annex, researched and prepared a companion report examining rules and practices in other relevant institutions around the world, as well as options for increasing public participation at ICPDR, through an in-depth report prepared by the Consortium.

V Lessons learned

The lessons learned in this effort have been enormous and wide-ranging. Many have been detailed in previous Progress Reports. This section organizes lessons learned in the following fashion: First, we discuss lessons learned as a result of the technical assistance efforts (e.g. study tours, various capacity building workshops, and constant project interaction). Second, we distill lessons learned from the operation of the Country Activities. Next, we distill lessons learned from the operation of the Demonstration Projects. Last, we present lessons the Consortium has learned in carrying out this effort that might be of use to others undertaking similar efforts in the future. Clearly, there is overlap between the various categories. Where useful, we note experience from particular countries.

5.1 Lessons learned: technical assistance

5.1.1 Lessons learned in providing technical assistance to governments

- Government agencies in most of the participating countries lack concrete, clear procedures for receiving, processing and responding appropriately to information requests.
- Few of the government agencies in these countries have inventoried what kind of water-related information they hold and where this information can be found within the agency:
 - They have had little experience with databases and other ways of gathering and organizing information.
- Government personnel in most of the participating countries frequently deny requests for relevant water-related information or provide only partial responses because they have difficulty determining whether providing the requested information might reasonably be considered a violation of their obligation to protect documents containing legitimately confidential information.
- Government agencies engaged in regulation and implementation of water and environmental laws in some of the participating countries typically see the public-- and particularly NGOs-- as an adversary rather than as a potential ally. They are not accustomed to considering that:
 - Involvement of the public can provide essential practical, local and even, in some cases, technical, knowledge to improve government decision-making;
 - Access to information and increased public participation can act to increase respect for rights and laws.
 - Engaging more fully with the public can improve the levels of public trust and confidence in and support for government decisions.

5.1.2 Lessons learned from providing technical assistance to NGOs

- NGOs might act and approach the government as “the enemy” rather than as a potential partner (at least for some purposes); this may be because of the history of the environmental movement in the region before the economic and social transition, which frequently was one of opposition
- NGOs had in some countries difficulty in forming alliances with other groups in society whom they saw as the opposition (particularly business and industry), and did not consider whether even with such groups, there might be small areas of possible agreement.

- NGOs often failed to communicate well with the broader public; to some extent, this may have evolved from the origin of many Central/Eastern European environmental NGOs as who are groups of experts rather than broader grass roots citizen groups and may lack communication skills and resources to reach out to general public.

5.2 Lessons learned: country activities

5.2.1 Lessons learned from developing manuals and other aids to improve the capacity of officials to respond appropriately to public requests for water-related environmental information

- Written aids (manuals and other tools) can provide needed day-to-day support for officials at all levels of government (national, regional, local) and in diverse authorities (e.g., water, environment) to meet their responsibilities to provide information and involve the public in water management decision making.
- Many government officials in the region were, at the outset, unaware of how useful these tools can be and how extensively (and why) they are used in other countries.
- Government officials who were not accustomed to using manuals and other written aids often needed some level of evidence or convincing that the aids would be worth developing and using, for example, by showing where the gaps in understanding the issues are and what can be gained in terms of government efficiency by having such written aids.
- Learning about good practice examples from other countries that use these tools effectively, through study tours, capacity building workshops and the like, helps officials to recognize the value of developing these written aids for decision makers in their own country.
- Engaging in the process of developing these written aids helped officials participating in the Project to consider and address a number of key related issues, including that:
 - Writing manuals is not alone sufficient in an environment in which such aids have not previously been used. Even if manuals are written and distributed, a strong commitment to *use* them is also essential. To be most effective in promoting the use of written aids, this commitment needs to come in the form of high level governmental support for or endorsement of the written aid, its wide dissemination among relevant government officials, and training of these officials in its use.
 - It is important to consider the needs of potential audience(s) for the written aid when selecting the kind of language and approach to use in drafting, as well as what issues to address and what kind of information to include in the manual or other aid.

5.2.2 Lessons learned from developing brochures to help citizens and NGOs understand their rights and implement their responsibilities

- Although citizens, NGOs and citizen groups express interest in exercising their rights under the Aarhus Convention and the various laws and regulations that implement EU Directives that guarantee access to water-related environmental information, they often don't understand how to formulate these requests, to whom to direct them, and what information they are entitled to.
 - Frequently, NGOs and citizens don't know how to formulate information requests in a specific, clear and persuasive way that will get results.

- They often lack information about which government offices and officials to direct their requests to.
 - They are frustrated when requests are either denied or even ignored, but don't know how to register a protest or whether they have rights to appeal such decisions.
- Citizen aids, ranging from concise citizen brochures to more extensive materials such as citizen toolkits and NGO websites, can provide much needed road-maps to gaining access to water related environmental information held by the government, including where key information is held, which agencies and contact persons within agencies to contact for information, how to write an information request, and what to do if it is denied. These aids facilitate citizens' use of the information access system, and test how it is functioning in practice, thus paving the way for increased and improved public access to water related information in the future. They also can make the authorities' jobs easier.
 - There are often differences between the knowledge and understanding of the NGO community and of ordinary citizens; these differences must be accounted for in the preparation of brochures and other aids to make sure they are appropriate for relevant potential users.
 - When drafting brochures and other written aids to encourage and facilitate citizen requests, it is important to use tactful and constructive language in identifying deficiencies in government processes; failure to do so can be counterproductive.
 - There are many useful models from other countries for citizen brochures and other written aids that can be used to inform preparation of these tools; a number of the models to which participants were exposed during the Project were relevant and relatively easy to adapt to needs and circumstances in their countries.
 - Real-world constraints present challenges in terms of brochure dissemination. Even a generous budget cannot assure printing of sufficient citizen's brochures to meet the on-going demand; moreover, many under-funded NGOs and ordinary citizens lack regular or affordable access to internet;
 - Even when official processes exist for obtaining information, sometimes old habits (of informally contacting people "you know") seem easier, even though relying on these methods can actually be counter to the overall goal of establishing a reliable system that *everyone* (not just people who know people) can use.
 - Even when NGOs and governments are able to develop stronger levels of communication, as they did in this project, there were still sensitivities to consider, especially when drafting brochures and other written aids to encourage and facilitate citizen requests. One example was illustrated by the need to use tactful and constructive language in identifying deficiencies in government processes.

5.3 Lessons learned from operation of Demonstration Projects

- Demonstration Projects conducted at local hot spots can be a valuable tool for developing effective approaches to increasing public access to water-related information and public participation in local water-related decision making; it can also help test and inform reform measures that could be useful at the national level.
- For example, the Demonstration Projects conducted through the Project in Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that direct collaboration between information providers (i.e., government officials) and information users (e.g., NGOs) can produce water databases or meta-information systems that can be used by NGOs and

citizens to inform their participation in hot spot related decision making and can be further elaborated by governmental authorities in the future.

- Similarly, the Romanian Demonstration Project identified key improvements that could be made to increase the representativeness of a local River Basin Committee and to increase public participation in the RBC's decision making; the reform measures identified through the Demonstration Project can be used to inform efforts at the national level to increase public involvement in water management and planning decision making in RBCs throughout Romania. { TC "1.6 Lessons learned" \f C \l "2" }
- To maximize the effectiveness of Demonstration Projects as a centerpiece of the learning process in a project like ours, considerable effort must be invested to assure that the Demonstration Projects are tied thematically and practically to other parts of the project (in this case, country level priority issues) so that each activity reinforces the other.
- Demonstration projects, which are principally a learning-by-doing exercise, are best implemented through an iterative process of identifying priority needs, developing ideas on how to remove obstacles through country activities, and planning and implementing those in practice, as this process is more likely to incorporate genuine national and local needs.
- NGOs sometimes need assistance to understand how their involvement in the Demonstration Project could be used to develop the tools and networks they need for future efforts.
- The activities of Demonstration Projects can enable key stakeholder individuals and groups who do not have experience working together to build bridges and jointly develop effective strategies; to make this work, however, Project Managers need to assist participants in addressing obstacles to collaboration and help them find ways to work together productively.
- Modest funding, such as the grants made to NGOs to conduct the demonstration projects in each participating country, can achieve very significant results at the local level, such as those achieved by the Project's five demonstration projects.
- Such results can be achieved in a relatively short timeframe, such as the 10-12 month timeframe of the Project's demonstration projects.

5.4 Lessons learned by the implementing Consortium

- Experience confirmed the Consortium's instincts that each of the countries involved in the project presented different stages of development and capacity for successfully achieving and implementing reforms in the field of access to information and public participation and this insight shaped the way effective assistance was formulated and adjusted.
- Finding new ways of doing business is a learning experience for everyone (NGOs, government personnel and stakeholders included), all of whom need to be encouraged to look beyond their own more narrow experience to think of how interactions and participatory processes can find common ground and then move everyone forward toward achieving the articulated goals. An iterative approach helps break down complex objectives into manageable tasks whereby small successes can breed more success and finding ways to reduce mutual suspicion and help build government-NGO-bridges.
- Likewise, sharing experience across five countries that often bring dissimilar experience and traditions to the discussion offers both challenges and opportunities. The challenges

include the complexity of arranging joint discussions that encompass everyone's needs. The opportunities include the value of sharing experience, and learning and helping those countries that want to do so, to move in a similar direction and possibly save time and resources. Our task was to identify analogies and promising approaches that can be adapted and tailored to the needs back home.

- Many government officials and NGO representatives have heard a lot about the theory of information access. What they really want and need is practical concrete examples from actual practice; ideas to assure a smoothly working, reliable system for daily functioning; intelligence about problems people commonly run into when working on issues of access to information and public participation and ideas for managing those problems.
- Experts often think that only experts can solve environmental challenges; environmental public participation efforts help reinforce the idea that success in this area requires the collaborative efforts of a wide range of people (NGOs, national level water officials, national, local and regional environmental officials) and talents (database specialists, people who understand how to communicate effectively within communities, etc) each of whom brings his or her own perspectives and skills to the mosaic that is environmental protection.
- When projects necessarily rely on the engagement of otherwise busy officials and NGO representatives, it is sometimes useful to get them away from their regular duties and into a setting in which they can communicate on a more casual and relaxed basis with each other in order to spend time getting to know one another and building better understandings of their mutual interests and goals.
- It is not sufficient to simply expose people to ideas from more mature systems of information access; cultural and legal "translation" is critically important.
- Sometimes participants' enthusiasm for the project and optimism about its results can lead them to set unrealistically ambitious goals; a critical role of the consortium was to help set realistic goals without quashing participants' enthusiasm, the necessary spirit and imagination.
- The challenges presented by getting different sectors and various government levels and ministries within one country to work productively together are multiplied into special challenges presented by transboundary public participation in water management planning. In the latter, commonalities and differences between countries and stakeholders on both sides of the border can be both predictable and surprising, but despite differences in language, timing and the dynamics of the process, progress can be achieved by finding common interests and concerns as well as developing common solutions.

VI Recommendations for Use at Regional Level

6.1 Learn from the experience of others

- Looking at the experience of other countries that have developed effective tools for increasing public access to water-related environmental information and public participation—such as the U.S. and the Netherlands-- can be a helpful strategy for developing similar tools in the home country. Ways to identify these “good practices” can include researching similar programs in other countries. However, direct experience with foreign systems, through study tours and workshop presentations by foreign officials and NGOs (such those at the Project’s Regional Meetings and the Dissemination Meeting), is a more powerful and effective way for officials and NGOs to examine the potential applicability of the tools used in other countries to circumstances in participants’ home countries.
- Exchanges of knowledge and experience among participants from all of the countries in the Danube River Basin, through workshops, study tours, further meetings of the ICPDR Stakeholder Forum and other direct exchanges, should be promoted and expanded as these exchanges are a valuable tool for jump starting improvements in AI and PP programs, particularly in countries that are furthest behind in developing and implementing these programs. All countries benefit from these exchanges, which can result in increased public involvement and thus a larger constituency for Danube River Basin protection in the region generally
- Good practices used in other countries need to be carefully tailored and adapted to the particular circumstances of the country that is seeking to improve public involvement. Important considerations that should be evaluated in assessing the viability of options used elsewhere include: the cost of establishing and maintaining the practice; the training and human resources needed to implement it successfully; the legal, cultural, practical and institutional context in which it operates; and to what extent and under what conditions the practice (or some version of it) could improve public involvement in the home country.

6.2 Develop practical tools to guide and assist governmental authorities

6.2.1 Written aids such as manuals, guides, deskbooks or guidelines, (hereafter referred to as “manuals”) can assist officials at all levels of government (national, regional, local) and in all relevant authorities (e.g., water, environment and related ministries) to meet their responsibilities to provide information and involve the public in water management decision making

6.2.2 To ensure that manuals are actually used by the relevant officials:

- authors should get to know the target audience and relevant stakeholders before they start writing;
- have a clear dissemination plan early in the drafting process that will assure distribution to all relevant officials;
- engage relevant authorities in the early phase of development;
- make sure manuals are easy to follow, concise, practical and in local language;
- manuals must correctly state relevant AI/PP legal requirements and should give guidance on how to interpret them:

- manuals should illustrate implementation with concrete and relevant practical examples;
- manuals should have the dual function of informing officials of their own responsibilities and of the rights of the public;
- it would be best if the issuance of manuals is coordinated with relevant timetables and if the contents and tasks are similarly coordinated (e.g. in terms of legal WFD requirements and schedules);
- authors should not assume officials or personnel will be aware of written aids – instead, undertake efforts to acquaint and train them;
- obtain high-level commitment to the manual development effort at the outset and official letters of endorsement that agree to use them when the manual is completed.
- be aware of personnel turn-over in ministries and make sure the manual is transferred to the new person, put in the library and provided as part of new employee orientation and that experience in working with the manuals is shared within departments.

6.2.3 Written aids will be effective if certain simple rules are followed

- Authors should have a plan to keep the manual up to date and responsive to changes in law, policy, and good practice.
 - feedback from users is an important tool in this regard (for example, using flexible format feedback through questionnaires after the manual has been in use for a sufficient but not long time -- 6-12 months);
 - flexible formats (e.g. ways to substitute or add pages to a manual) make it easier to update and revise the manual when there are changes in law, policy, good practice, and feedback from users
 - electronic formats can enhance broader dissemination and easier update but not be consistent with the actual level of access to the internet in some countries.
- Authors should provide good practice examples and examples of practices to avoid.
- A lot can be gained from the experience of other countries, but make a clear effort to understand the context in which their decisions were made, to understand how transferable their experiences are.
- It is best to use country experience where it exists, but also useful to show internationally recognized best practices. Especially when country experience or internationally recognized best practice examples are meager, examples of good practices from other countries or realistic hypothetical examples could also enhance comprehension
- Authors should include flowcharts , lists, boxes and schemes and other graphic design elements for better understanding;
- Authors should engage key government officials in the drafting process and ask them to contribute to and comment on the drafts. Such consultations should also include formal consultation processes within the agencies and among agencies to get official support

- A collaborative open drafting process will engage a variety of stakeholders and build trust and mutual respect. It should include:
 - discussion starting with an outline and then early and more advanced shared drafts;
 - meetings;
 - frequent communications including feedback among stakeholders between meetings;
 - professional facilitation of such meetings, when feasible, to help build a positive atmosphere and assure a productive outcome.

6.3 Develop practical tools to assist citizens

6.3.1 A variety of written aids (brochures, tool kits, etc.) can help NGOs and the public become informed consumers and users of information *and* also make it easier for government to serve the information needs of the public. These aids can also help citizens to understand better how they can participate in upcoming decision making processes.

6.3.2 These aids can be most helpful if they:

- are tailored to the needs of the targeted users (general public, NGOs, or both);
- provide clear roadmaps to locate information disbursed among various authorities at various levels of government;
- orient NGOs and citizens as to what information can be found at which agency
- help NGOs and citizens to formulate requests for information, for example
 - whom to contact,
 - where to address the request,
 - using what language;
- use a flexible or web-based format to keep aids up to date including responding to changes in law, policy, good practice, frequently asked questions and feedback from users;
- let citizens and NGOs know (in specific detail) their rights to information, how to appeal denials, when and how they can participate

6.3.3 Remember that NGOs tend to be more organized and educated on these issues than the general public, so consider these different audiences with different needs while drafting. The formulation of these tools works best when the people developing them:

- Initiate collaborative ways to talk to stakeholders (e.g. hold a series of meetings not just one, assure frequent communications and feedback among stakeholders between meetings, and develop an open process that builds trust and mutual respect);
- use, where possible, professional facilitation of meetings to help build a positive atmosphere and assure a productive outcome
- Identify barriers to information access and public participation by:

- testing the current system with specific requests to key governmental authorities and using the resulting examples as raw material for stakeholders and others to develop solutions;
- posing questionnaires to public authorities to find out where key information is kept and by whom;
- employing independent expert analysis of the relevant legal/regulatory requirements and how they are being implemented in practice.

6.3.4 Access to information should be backed-up or supplemented (where resources are available) with systems such as information centers and “green phones” to answer questions and resolve problems; this can also save authorities time as the requests that come in are more clear and specific.

6.3.6 Traditions of informal access to information (for example, asking people one knows in the government) actually undermine official access to information regimes. Brochures should encourage use of the system.

- This result can be aided by giving the draft brochure to officials to comment on content and tone.

6.3.7 Brochures should be written with mutually respectful language and in a neutral tone, even when the text is identifying problems in the information access system and making recommendations for changes. This can build the public’s trust in government authorities and the government’s comfort in working with NGOs and citizens. However, the language should not dissuade the public from going to governmental authorities for information.

6.3.8 It’s impossible for any brochure to answer every question; expert knowledge and specific answers from experts (including appeals procedures) will continue to be necessary.

6.4 Jointly build capacity in, and bridges between, NGOs and citizens, and government officials

6.4.1 Building bridges between the information providers/decision makers (i.e., officials) and the information seekers/users, as well as the interested public, can help to increase public involvement in water related decision making. Both sides need to be educated about the value of this collaboration to serve their own interests and goals.

6.4.2 One way to build bridges and strengthen communication between officials, NGOs and the public is to engage all stakeholders together in collaborative capacity building activities; these can include a broad range of joint activities, including workshops and training sessions; discussion forums; joint efforts to develop databases; and study tours.

6.4.3 Short term joint activities can build a foundation for future efforts. But to sustain long-term cooperation, on-going processes to facilitate communication and collaboration among interested stakeholders and relevant government officials is essential. Some ideas tested by

the project include creating a permanent forum that meets regularly to dialogue on water management and planning, pollution control, and other joint local interests. The joint effort to collaboratively develop a basic water database also proved to be a unifying experience.

6.4.4 Both short and longer term collaborative activities, including dialogue and capacity building training/workshops, are needed in order to increase public involvement in water related decision making throughout the Danube River Basin and should be developed and implemented at the regional, national and local levels in Danube River Basin countries.

6.4.5 Few on-going efforts can continue without adequate sources of funding. However, impressive results can be achieved with very modest funding, particularly at the local level, as the results of the demonstration projects show.

6.5 Take initiative to address the opportunities and challenges to public participation in transboundary water management

6.5.1 Because rivers and river-basins frequently intersect more than one country, productive joint efforts require careful attention to commonalities and differences and actively engagement of relevant stakeholders on both sides of the border in developing common solutions.

- In efforts to harmonize and run parallel PP processes in several different countries, careful attention must be given to issues of communication, timing, dynamics of the process, and other differences that emerge out of different traditions, languages, legal arrangements and national styles.
- Often it is more effective to use existing “platforms” (for example, associations of the representatives of authorities and stakeholders including NGOs) rather than trying to create an overall integrated PP process from “scratch”;
- Harmonized approaches and parallel standards work best when expectations are clear between the various parties; these expectations can be clarified using tools such as memoranda of understanding;
- For maximum impact, NGO-stakeholders should take the initiative, organize themselves, elect delegate representatives to platforms or advisory/consultative bodies, and prepare proposals, recognizing that it is impossible to involve everybody.
 - NGOs need to take responsibility for their own actions and organization

6.5.2 Public participation in river basin management and planning requires financing. Ideas for sources include provincial or state funding (e.g. German lande provides resources from state budget) or contributions from local authorities.

6.5.3 When river basin planning committees serve an advisory function, the roles and responsibilities of the committees and those serving on them must be worked out. Their functions can include commenting, provision of and access to information, feedback, dissemination links to and from the public, and constructive opportunities for discussion and informal input into decision making.

- The more expertise and knowledge the group acquires, the more influence it can have on the decision making.
- Expertise and knowledge can be increased through workshops that prepare participants to understand issues and how constructively to engage; the Green League in Berlin is an example.
- Involving people early in the process is more efficient and a good upfront investment of time and resources for governmental authorities.
- Cultural differences between countries can impact the implementation in each of committees in case of transboundary RBs.

6.6 Take stock of where water data is stored and adopt measures to centralize data storage and collection

6.6.1 Environmental information relating to water is generally disbursed among many ministries and government offices at the federal, state, entity, regional and local level. A critical first step to facilitate information access is to develop an information foundation that identifies what is available and where it can be found.

- A significant effort is required to identify offices and people holding water-related information.
- Once the information foundation is in place, a next step is to construct an electronic system that coordinates, links or integrates multiple sources of data and information.
- A legal requirements for the creation of a central water database system will help assure that data is shared among the different governmental agencies that hold it and that agencies do not hoard information or keep it secret from each other.;
- Even officials who might have reservations about sharing their data can see that access to the additional information and data can be useful to them if they understand how it can make their own data more useful.

6.7 Develop clear rules and procedures for protecting confidential information

6.7.1 Governments should establish clear rules, to the greatest extent possible, to clarify what is and is not confidential information.

6.7.2 Governments that want to manage confidentiality claims must:

6.7.2.1 Think about content *and* process.

- Require authorities to notify business when information that is potentially confidential is requested.
- Establish procedures that require business to validate/substantiate claims they make for the confidentiality of particular documents when requests are made for those documents.
- Require authorities to provide an adequate explanation when refusing information requests on the grounds of confidentiality
- Require/enable authorities to review confidentiality claims and give out information for which confidentiality is claimed without the necessary legal justification

6.7.2.2 Clearly articulate criteria for confidentiality to the extent possible and make them public.

- Consult the public and business while such criteria are being established but always be clear that the government is the final decision maker.
- Provide mechanisms for confidentiality criteria to be challenged and/or reviewed.
- Acknowledge that some confidential business information (CBI) decisions will fall in the “gray” area and provide mechanisms for resolving those issues.
- Use of a “public interest test” balances the need for confidentiality against the value of providing public access; this approach has been used successfully in a number of jurisdictions.
- When claims are made that are in the “gray” area between identified criteria for CBI and unresolved legal or policy issues, governments should establish a review process to consider and resolve these issues.
- The process should provide legal assistance and advice to the official when needed.
- The process can engage increasing higher levels of administration within the government depending on the degree of complexity of the issue to be resolved.

6.7.3 Ombudsman Offices can help straighten out legal issues and clarify gray areas; while their decisions are usually not legally binding, they are respected on the basis of their neutrality, expertise and reasoned opinions that are always made publicly available (experience in Hungary suggests that the Ombudsman’s opinion is followed in 90% of cases).

- An open legal question is whether the Ombudsman’s report can be used in a subsequent legal challenge
- In some countries, courts can review especially difficult issues.
- Industry must feel confident that governments will not endanger their competitive position by disclosing legitimate secrets.

6.8 Electronic tools can facilitate information access and are effective and cost efficient ways to reach the public and particular stakeholders but developing them requires resources and constant attention

6.8.1 Electronic access can simplify information access for the public and make easier the job of government officials responsible for provision of information

- In some cases, regulations and procedures are the best way of establishing rules for providing information (including electronic) to the public.
- Electronic sites require constant maintenance, which in turns demands skills and expertise for the establishment and maintenance of e-tools. People who manage the website would benefit from continuous capacity building and training.
 - Realistically, municipal offices are often operated by people reluctant to use computers or without electronic skills, or with no access to electronic tools.

- Electronic or web-based information should also include contact information such as addresses for government staff dealing with specific identifiable issues.
- Websites should be promoted to potential users!
- Websites should be linked with other sites to maximize the information flow. In some cases, companies have paid some of the costs of establishing and maintaining web sites in return for having on-line links, but it is important to assure that government web sites under these arrangements maintain their independence and bi-partisan nature.
- Feedback loops, such as ways to submit information requests on line would be very useful, but they are sometimes hard to arrange and require that the site be regularly maintained and managed.

6.8.2 Environmental information is normally found in a number of ministries and government offices, at the federal, state and local level. No electronic approach can be established unless government makes a determined effort to identify what information is available and where it can be found.

- In the countries that are just starting this process, identifying the offices and people with information is an important start.
- In other countries, it has been possible to construct an electronic system that coordinates multiple sources of data and information.

6.8.3 As individual agencies that hold information sometimes are reluctant to share it with others, it is often useful to have a law that requires the creation of a central system.

6.8.4 Sometimes it is possible to persuade officials who might have reservations about sharing their data that access to the additional information and data can be useful to them – it makes their own data more useful.

6.9 Involve the broader public at all stages

6.9.1 Effective public participation involves engaging the extended public, not only NGOs and groups already organized around environmental and water issues.

- Doing so takes additional work –
 - local people have important questions or needs but may need help in formulating their questions and concerns; they also may have important local knowledge but may need advice as to when and how best to communicate it so as to be timely and relevant to the decision making process.
 - Authorities do not always take seriously comments coming from stakeholders who lack “technical” knowledge or are not “experts.”
- Examples of activities to reach the broader public:
 - Water Festivals (Austria),
 - Water Prize “Neptun”
 - Posters
 - Media campaigns

- Children and youth are groups of special importance. Not only will they be the caretakers of the future, they are a means of multiplying environmental messages into their families and communities.
 - Surveys and studies show that children in high-schools had much higher environmental awareness if they had been involved in environmental education activities in pre-school and primary school age.
 - Many good examples of activities targeting children abound; they include Danube Day activities, a Children's Corner on websites; World Water Monitoring Day (18 October) (www.worldwatermonitoringday.org); green schools, kindergartens and workshops; school networks (international or national), and educational materials produced by various ministries.
 - Generation Blue Project (Austria) is a model that is seeking to develop cooperation with other countries.
 - Children can be trained and involved in technical activities such as biological monitoring but to make this effective, financing and training is necessary.
 - Children should be involved also in the planning of activities.
- Targeting children and youth is important but immediate challenges require engagement with current decision makers and stakeholders
- Dialogue is critical but initiating the dialogue takes hard work because of resistance from all sides -- including authorities and unwilling/unconvinced stakeholders:
 - Take advantage of independent motivating events to engage new participants:
 - Making environmental accidents or exposures into opportunities for learning and dialogue
 - Positive communication/problem solving, e.g. showing the relationship between, employment and quality of life
 - Framing issues in ways that are salient in the relevant communities (e.g. in the U.S. global climate change deniers were motivated by uncertainty through the thought that when the weatherman forecasts rain, people take an umbrella)
 - Find common ground/common interest and show the benefits of cooperation.
- "The public" has much more power than parts of it generally tend to believe and can be a galvanizing force. Subtle, tactful and careful work is necessary to help shape ideas from NGOs and citizens into viable projects that will also provide helpful examples to inform work on identified national priorities.
- Participatory processes are essential for formulating and carrying out national activities and demonstration projects and critical to developing the sense of ownership, accomplishment and satisfaction necessary to build a foundation for future successful efforts to clean up and protect water bodies.
- No one sector can solve these problems alone. Although it is sometimes difficult to get people and groups with diverse specialties and points of view to communicate, cooperate and work together, doing so helps flesh out the dimensions of the obstacles to access to information and public participation and will help in formulating more effective approaches.
- Good relations with the media (radio, TV and print) can build a partnership for publicizing the right to information and its uses in controlling local water pollution.

6.10 The requirement for River Basin Commissions opens many interesting doors to improved public participation, if managed carefully

6.10.1 RBC-based cooperation between NGOs and government on local and national levels can be replicated if there is a willing and capable NGO, a cooperating governmental authority, and some, but not necessarily a lot of funding.

- Governments should be supportive because it can enhance the deliberations and outcomes of the RBC;
- Transparent decision making processes reinforce good decision making and democratic values.
- The results from effective participation are maximized by using good practices early in the decision process (providing relevant documents including agendas and meeting minutes, water management-related data and maps, plans and proposals pending before the RBC, etc.);
- broad representation in the RBC, for example through an election or selection process that is sensitive to these values, benefits everyone in terms of a sense of fairness and transparency;
- Doing the hard work to develop a model process in one river basin has spill-over benefits in the form of developing models for others with similar challenges and the potential for similar benefits.

6.11 The gains obtained through activities like the project described in this report are not likely to be self-sustaining without continuous efforts into the future at the national and local level

6.11.1 Experience elsewhere in the world proves that advances in information access and environmental public participation can always be eroded. Keeping these rights intact over time requires diligence. Diligence in the context of this project can include:

- Sustained dialogue on the part of NGOs, using tools such as websites and subgroups by topic for email joint list
- Building independent constituencies for sustained efforts based on their own self-interest.
 - For this project, it can mean maintaining contacts with people who participated in national workshops and operational teams
 - Motivated constituencies (e.g., farmers, “water communities” – as engine for keeping the process going).
- Electronic forums.
- Bilateral exchanges of experience, e.g., between the demonstration projects in Romania and Croatia.
- Exchanges among participants in the project using the project listserv.

- Efforts to leverage good project products into additional funding. In, for example, “neighbor, what about the water?” a water supply company funded continuation of a project because the project demonstrated the costs of providing water.
- Twinning opportunities.
- Continuation ideas.
 - Publication that memorializes what happened and the ideas that emerged.
 - forum where questions/ideas and experience gleaned from other countries;
 - exchange experience/study tour kind of format to update on experience in other project countries. How did things actually work? Use the information to improve own efforts.
- Harmonize efforts with the activities of the Public Participation Expert Group of ICPDR and participate in/contribute to the various basin wide or sub-basin and national initiatives.

VII Conclusion

The Project achieved significant results in the Danube River basin countries in which it worked. Government officials at the national, regional, and local levels improved their capacity to provide better public access to water-related information and to facilitate greater public involvement in management planning. NGOs and citizens became more skillful in obtaining the information they need to participate and understand better how management decisions directly affect them. The demonstration projects gave participants opportunities to test methods to improve information access and public participation.

Equally important, the Project built new bridges between government officials, NGOs, and other stakeholders and demonstrated—in some cases for the first time—the effectiveness and importance of working together to solve water pollution problems. Finally, through the demonstration projects, the Project showed how even with modest resources and limited time, innovative collaborations among stakeholders can help overcome substantial barriers to information access and more fully engage the public in efforts to address pollution hot spots in the community.

There is good reason to believe that these results will help ensure the long-term sustainability of gains to reduce nutrient and toxic pollution of the Danube River. The health of the river and those who rely on it will depend on the efforts that all stakeholders undertake to maintain and increase public involvement into the future.

Annex Bibliography of Project Products

Country Products Resulting from National Activities

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- 1) BiH Needs Assessment Report and Summary, in English
- 2) Draft by-laws on Access to Information and Public Participation to the Water Law, in local language (separate for the two entities, for the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- 3) Manual for Authorities on Public Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-making in the Field of Water Management and Environmental Protection, in local language
- 4) NGO Brochure on Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-making in the Management of Water Resources, in local language
- 5) Meta-database of information sources - on line version, in local language, accessible at:
<http://www.rec.org.ba/drp3.4.htm>

Bulgaria

- 1) Bulgaria Needs Assessment Report and Summary, in English
- 2) Web Site of the Danube Region Basin Directorate – at <http://www.dunavbd.org/index.php?x=46>
- 3) Manual for Information Management of Danube Region Basin Directorate Web site, in Bulgarian
- 4) Comparative Analysis of Legislation and Practice with Regard to Confidential Information, in Bulgarian
- 5) Recommendations and Good Practices Regarding Confidentiality Issues, in English
- 6) Procedure for Access to Environmental Information (Algorithm), in Bulgarian
- 7) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) to be placed on the web site of DRB, in Bulgarian
- 8) Brochure for NGOs: Access to Water-Related Information: Legislation and Internet Sources, www.rec.bg/brochure, in Bulgarian

Croatia

- 1) Croatia Needs Assessment Report and Summary, in English
- 2) Manual and Guidance for Handling Information Requests (with an overview on national reporting obligations according to the water related EU directives), in Croatian
- 3) Training Material for Authorities on Access to Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making, in Croatian *
- 4) Brochure on Access to Information on Water Issues for NGOs and the Public, in Croatian

Romania

- 1) Romania Needs Assessment Report and Summary, in English
- 2) Overview of Practices in Public Participation within River Basin Committees (RBCs) or Similar Bodies (NL, FR, US, Braz), in English
- 3) Assessment on Information, Communication and Involvement Process of River Basin Committee (RBC) Members and Their Stakeholders, in Romanian
- 4) Manual for Authorities on Environmental and Water-related Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-making, with Focus on EU WFD, in Romanian
- 5) Toolkit for Public: Brochure and Fact Sheets on Environmental and Water-related Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-making, in Romanian

Serbia

- 1) Serbia Needs Assessment Report and Summary, in English
- 2) Manual for Authorities on Access to Information on Environmental and Water Issues, in Serbian
- 3) Brochure for NGOs on Access to Information, in Serbian

Products Resulting from Demonstration Project Activities

BIH — Pilot Project in Lukavac

- Informative leaflet on water related information sources*

Bulgaria — Pilot Project in Troyan/Lovech

- Information requests and answers*
- Analysis of answers to information requests to the organs of executive power related to water resources (including recommendations for improvements), in English
- Analysis of progress made by local and regional authorities/institutions as result of the Demonstration Project, in English*
- Project information and documents disseminated on CD and on the web site of Bluelink at <http://www.bluelink.net/water/public/>

Croatia — Pilot Project in Osijek

- Public outreach poster to raise awareness about the pollution problems in the Osijek area and promote the Osijek Water Forum*
- Stakeholders agreement on the Osijek Water Forum*
- Website www.zeleni-osijek.hr, contains the list of stakeholders which enables the people to ask questions about water management issues

Romania — Pilot Project in Mures Basin

- Methodology for selecting, representing NGOs within River Basin Committees (RBCs), applicable to other stakeholders
- Brochure for NGOs and public, on WFD implementation *

Serbia — Pilot Project in Bor

- Water database, accessible to stakeholders and wider public at www.etos.co.yu
- Training material and guidelines on how to use the database*

Products for ICPDR

- 1) ICPDR Information Access: Report and Suggestions
- 2) Options for Further Developing Public Participation, Including Observership and Stakeholder Participation, at ICPDR
- 3) Annexes to the Report "Options for Further Developing Public Participation, Including Observership and Stakeholder Participation, at ICPDR"

Other Major Products by the Consortium

- 1) Synthesis Report on Identified Country Needs
- 2) Study Tour Summaries (U.S. and Netherlands)
- 3) Communications Strategy*
- 4) Green Horizon articles:
 - Knowledge-based Basins
 - Tuzla Armed with Information
 - Tours of Transparency
 - Information Flow Helps the River
- 5) Danube Watch article, www.icprdr.org

All project products can be found online or will be accessible from January 3, 2007 at :
http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/DanubeRiverBasin/project_products/default.html

unless another direct web link is indicated above. The items marked with asterix are currently not accessible yet through the web.