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Towards effective public participation in water resources management: Issues and approaches in Turkey

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Encouraging the sustainable use of available water and land resources together with rehabilitation and prevention of water related ecosystems have become even more important in parallel to rapid population increase, increase in water demand, water pollution, drought/flooding, desertification, deforestation, degradation of ecosystems and climate change all around the world. Till 1980's, the trend was to focus on water supply and planning within limited scale; in short, producing single solutions to specific solutions was favored. But after 1980's, finding solutions in large scale to numerous problems by considering the internationally accepted principles have accelerated. The new concepts of sustainability, participation of stakeholders, integrated understanding and management have entered our lives since then.

EU Water Framework Directive emphasizes on the integrated river basin management (IRBM) approach that expects the determination of the watersheds, forming the expert organizations that will be responsible of the management of both land and water resources of the watersheds, and finally performing the watershed plans (WP). One of the fundamental steps of WP is informing public and the determination of the communication points and related communication procedures formed to gain information and evaluations from public. The utmost important part at this stage is to form the participation plan. All the state offices and organizations, privates sector, Chambers of various disciplines including the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, active NGOs at the watershed scale need to be encouraged for participation in watershed management. Preparing the criteria for consulting and public hearing is equally important for the discussion of the land and water related aspects.

In this study, the current status of EU member countries regarding integrated water resources management will be briefly summarized; importance of water governance and benefits of public participation learnt from the practices of the EU member countries will be mentioned. The experiences gained in these countries that have already started to apply WPs will be focused on emphasizing both on the institutional framework and practical applications. The key idea here is to give clues of public interference in the application of WPs for the developing countries like Turkey who is at the accession stage to join EU.

The paper will then refer to the main water issues that Turkey faces today and will underline that these challenges are largely derived from lack of good governance. In Turkey, organizational structure for water resources management is highly centralized and stakeholder participation in decision-making process is at a low level. The lack of a comprehensive water law, fragmentation of the institutional framework and the complexity of coordination mechanisms are major challenges in the Turkish water sector. Hence, both the preparation of water law and regulations and reviewing the existing regulations in accordance with the new water law is a fundamental requirement for Turkey in order to put in place new structure that promotes water management in an integrated, decentralized and participatory way. However, promulgation of the new law and regulations will not be sufficient alone. For the effective water governance in which these law and regulations can be effectively enforced, water resources management and planning is required to be institutionalized at two levels; national and river basin.

A conceptual model for effective water resources management in Turkey is developed within the scope of this study by taking into account the lessons learnt from the EU member countries and the priority water issues heading each of the 25 watersheds.

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