C8. INFORMATION EXCHANGE – Sharing knowledge for better water management

The Rio statement on sustainability emphasised the need for accurate information to facilitate decision-making in water resources management. This information may come in many forms and styles, for example: written reports; biophysical, economic and social data; and first-hand experiences in implementing land and water management practices.

An IWRM information exchange process allows professionals, practitioners and the general public to exchange and share experiences in implementing IWRM. This exchange and information development becomes a capacity building tool. It involves getting wide-ranging and appropriate information into the hands of water professionals, especially those in government decision making agencies, and helping them to share information, ideas, and experiences.

The process places importance on all relevant information sources, not just those from 'technical experts'. It engages local communities by providing opportunities for discussion and enables them to provide and access information readily. In the ToolBox there are many tools associated with communication, sharing of information, building of knowledge and capacity, see B2, C1, and C4 for example, and this set of tools looks at the techniques for managing information, and supporting the IWRM process.

There are four broad types of information; all are involved in supporting IWRM:

- *Data* (quantifiable and qualitative facts about the characteristics of water resources (such as quality, volumes, frequency of occurrence, spatial variability)
- *Information* (how these data can be assembled into meaningful patterns for specific purposes)
- *Knowledge* (understanding of the implications of trends and values in data over time, personal and corporate understanding of resource use practices and their impacts)
- *Wisdom* (agreement about commonly accepted methods of using water resources to ensure sustainability)

To bring these together requires the systematic management of a wide range of materials; the tools described in this section are Information Management Systems, and are also discussed in C1.3 (Modelling in integrated water resources management) and C4.2 (Communication with stakeholders).

Alongside this concrete information are people's perceptions. Individual motives, cultural expectations, social conditioning and different priorities can all affect decision making.