

The role of NGOs in improving access to safe water in EECCA.

**Address by Anna Tsvietkova
Ukrainian national environmental NGO “MAMA-86”,
Coordinator of Water Issue Group of European ECO-Forum
Co-leader of Water Working Group of WECF**

Today in EECCA countries the water supply and sanitation sector is in critical conditions. To improve the situation in the sector reforms and huge resources and time are needed. Water is a basic need for every day life and people cannot wait till the reforms will be implemented. Under the existing critical economical, environmental and social situation in the EECCA countries the participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of the right to water is needed.

The local and national NGOs concerned with issues such as water, sanitation and the environment are the important stakeholders group mainly working in the region to improve the citizens' access to safe water and proper sanitation.

Today these NGOs, working in the EECCA countries have accumulated important and valuable capacity of practical knowledge about the local situations, developed the experience on independent research of local water and health problems (such as nitrates pollution of wells and “blue baby” syndromes in rural areas of Ukraine and Romania; high salination of drinking water in Aral Sea region of Karakalpakstan and the fluorine contamination of tap water in Ukraine and etc.).

In EECCA countries there is not tradition of the open and transparent informing the public about the environment contamination problems and their links to the health problems. The right to water is based on right to know. The consumer has to have the needed actual information about water quality and other aspects of drinking water to make a correct decision on which water to drink. Environmental NGOs play an important role improving the public access to the proper information about the local problems, including drinking water quality and the water related risks for the human health. NGOs organize the seminars and workshops on water problems for the communities and local authorities, multistakeholders debates on water supply and sanitation sector development and technical solutions needed for improvement of the situations, public hearings of the water and sanitation action plans at local and national levels. Many education and information materials on different water and health problems are published and disseminated among broad public by NGOs.

To inform about water problems and the water – related health risks is not enough now. Usually the local communities and authorities have not ideas and information about the possible technical solutions and alternatives to improve the situation at local level. NGOs and their networks have valuable experience in the implementation of good practices for water resource management, including water sources protection. They have developed expertise on implementation of low cost, environmentally sustainable, and efficient technologies. Today NGOs working on drinking water and sanitation issues in the Europe demonstrate examples of fruitful partnership and international cooperation for the improvement the access to safe water in the EECCA countries. For ensample

Women international NGOs' network "Women in Europe for a Common Future" (WECF) is working actively on water issue in EECCA region since 2000. During the last 3 years WECF members in Armenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Uzbekistan have implemented several pilot projects on technical solutions to improve the rural residents' access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Ukrainian environmental NGO "MAMA-86" during last 10 years implemented 17 pilot projects on solving the local drinking water problems in urban and rural areas of Ukraine. The scale of this pilots is broad: from rehabilitation of shallow wells and installation water purification devices for groups of consumers till rehabilitation of rural or town water supply infrastructures. During the last tree years MAMA-86 together with WECF introduced the ecosanitation technologies in Ukraine and built 12 pilots ecosan toilets for 3 rural schools and 8 individual households.

It can be highlighted that women NGOs are acting successfully as they focused on empowering women to act for improvement the access to safe water and adequate sanitation.

Women NGOs, networks and partnerships are one of the key actors who contribute practically to the realization of the right to water for all at all levels. First of all they work for themselves and for their own children and families and they are able to assist others in fulfilling the right to water.

NGOs of the EECCA region are seeing the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health as an important step taken by the States to fulfill the right to water. Protocol implementation can contribute a lot into improving the access to safe water by developing the National Reports on real current situation on water and health problems in the countries and in the region, by improving the access to the information needed for the decision making at national and local level and by improving the public information and education on water and health issues. By implementation the protocol Governments will develop the conditions for involvement other stakeholders in fulfillment of the right to water.