

## UN WATER CONFERENCE 2023 - GROUNDWATERS SIDE EVENT

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I am the executive director of the Seine Normandy water agency, which is one of the six water agencies in France. They are state bodies working at a large river basin scale, which are in charge of preserving or restoring water resources & aquatic ecosystems.

I would like to share what we consider in France as **key points for a sound groundwater management at the basin level.**

**The first key point is that a proper governance is needed.**

We believe that a **decentralized organization** enables to best meet the challenges which are specific to each territory and that we have to work at the basin level and at each sub-basin scale.

I will add that for a given basin, **all types of users and stakeholders have to be associated** in the building of water management plans and policies, if we want these policies to be effective : ie state/government services, local authorities, industrials, farmers, associations.

*For example, in France,*

- *each basin has a basin committee, which brings together all categories of users and stakeholders and decides for the guidelines of water management for its basin, of course within a framework which is given by the ministry of ecology and by European regulations.*
- *the same kind of organization is set up for smaller sub-basins.*

**The second key point is that we have to develop a very thorough knowledge of our water bodies** if we want to preserve them properly.

- I'm talking about **their hydrological functioning** which can be complex because groundwaters have to be studied as part of a **whole water system**, including surface waters and aquatic ecosystems that they help sustain, and marine waters on coastlines.
- I'm also thinking of the **pressures on these resources**. To this extent, we have to consider both **quantity and quality** issues for these water bodies at the same time.

*Just a quick illustration of these pressures on groundwaters in France : Half of the annual water abstractions (33 Mdm<sup>3</sup>) comes from groundwaters and two thirds of water withdrawals for drinking water supply come from groundwaters. They are strategic resources.*

*We can observe some overuse and quantitative tensions in some areas. And with climate change, a greater number of such areas is expected.*

*As quality is concerned, the main pressure on our groundwaters today are diffuse pollutions coming from agriculture, ie nitrates and pesticides and their residues.*

**My third key point is that to tackle these issues, we probably have to design a mix of different solutions and tools, and make sure that the solutions that are implemented are adapted to the context of each basin and accepted by all stakeholders**

- **Planning these solutions in time and aiming at precise goals for a basin** can be an interesting approach for that

*for example one of the challenges today in France is to try and define trajectories for each basin for a significant reduction of water withdrawals until 2030*

- **Financial tools, economic instruments** can be widely used and they are in France, through the water agencies (we manage both **environmental taxes** and **financial aids**)

*Each water agency collects fees from all water users or polluters of the basin and these taxes are the first economic instrument that we have for water policy. Each euro collected is reinvested in the form of subsidies to local authorities, industrials, farmers, associations to finance a very wide variety of projects. Of course, we try to select and encourage the most environmentally-efficient projects. This proves to be a powerful tool.*

- We are also contracting with some of our beneficiaries, on several years (we call these **voluntary agreements** : “water and climate territorial contracts”) ; this is a way of **planning** both the most

relevant projects and the financial aids of the water agency that will help achieve these projects.

- Of course, **regulations** are complementary tools that are often useful or necessary in a number of fields.
- Finally, **communication / raising awareness** are also a useful complement, in particular towards citizens that are not necessarily aware of water issues, because they don't have to struggle to have access to water or to sanitation as in some other countries. But they have to know what awaits us with climate change and that they'll have to make an effort as water users. This UN water conference is a wonderful opportunity to show people the wider picture and help them measure how important and precious water is worldwide.