

## **MAMA-86 AND THE DRINKING WATER CAMPAIGN IN THE UKRAINE**

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### Country Profile

Population: 49-50 million

Size: 603,700 sq. km.

GDP Per Capita: \$2,200 (1999 est.)

Industries: Coal, electrical power, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, machinery, transport.

Agriculture: Grain, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, vegetables, beef, milk.

Resources: Iron ore, coal, manganese, natural gas, oil, etc.

### Introduction

The case study will highlight the work of MAMA-86<sup>1</sup>, a national environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the Ukraine. It will specifically focus on the Drinking Water Campaign and the many successful outcomes of the campaign for a participatory, democratic, accountable, and sustainable water sector and country.

### The Ukraine

Today, the Ukraine is considered a “country in transition”. However, for many people who have never been there or who are not familiar with the Ukraine, it is difficult to understand what this means. Following the Soviet era and independence in 1991, the country has suffered a devastating economic blow and a large proportion of its population is very poor. While previously people had felt socially and financially secure, this disappeared with the Soviet Union and the population was left to care for itself in an unstable transition to a market-driven economy. This has been shocking for the majority of the people, as during the time of the Soviet Union; after Russia, the Ukraine was the most important economic component of the Union producing about 4 times the output of the next ranking republic.

### Poverty in the Ukraine

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>2</sup> in the year 2000, 49% of the Ukrainian population lived on less than \$1 a day, and 26.7% of the population was categorized as being in poverty. According to an ILO/UNDP survey, 46.8% of the Ukrainian population identified themselves as “poor,” and an additional 36.9% identified themselves as being “not well off”. While how poverty is measured is often a point of contention, as it also is in the case of the Ukraine, the one thing that everyone agrees on is that the majority of the people are living in various gradations of poverty.

Between 1990 and 1996 GDP fell by 57%, production by 50%, aggregate consumption, bolstered by domestic production, fell by a third and real wages fell by about two-thirds, most of the fall occurring between 1990 and 1993. The costs of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which had been covered from the Soviet budget, have fallen on Ukraine since 1992, paid for by a special 12% payroll tax. At the same time, inequality in the Ukraine has increased dramatically, primarily as a result of the rapid increase of the incomes of a very small proportion of people at the top and the failure to compensate the mass of the population for the colossal inflation which has seen prices rise 165,000 times and destroyed personal savings (Clarke, Simon, no date)

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Anna Tsvetkova the co-ordinator of MAMA-86 Drinking Water Campaign, and Svitlana Slesarenok, the Director of MAMA-86 in Odessa, for their invaluable time and contributions to this case study.

<sup>2</sup> <http://portal.un.kiev.ua/en/mdg1/>

Adding to this already difficult situation, many working people have been faced with the problem of the non-payment of wages. Researchers on poverty in the Ukraine argue that all poverty research indicates that expenses are far greater than money incomes for all types of households. They argue that some of this is due to under reporting of income, but also due to domestic production, (such as vegetable cultivation in urban centres) and private transfers in the household budget (ibid).

Needless to say, the people who are the poorest of the poor are the differently-abled, pensioners – the majority of whom are women, pregnant women, women on maternity leave and single mothers who do not receive any support from the government (MAMA-86, no date). Furthermore, families with children are most likely to be poor or susceptible to further impoverishment.

Svitlana Slesarenok, the Director of MAMA-86 in Odessa points out that according to official Ukrainian figures for the year 2000; average nominal wages are US\$42.30 a month, pensions are US\$15.40 a month and the minimal consumer budget is US\$49.70 a month. Apparently, this year, 2002, for the first time in the post-Soviet era, the average salary reached the level of the minimum consumer budget.<sup>3</sup>

### **MAMA-86**

MAMA-86, an environmental organization headed by women, was formed in Kiev in 1990 following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986. After the disaster, there was a rapid increase in thyroid cancer in women and thyroid complications in children. Children born between 1985 and 1987 were the most affected. In the years after the nuclear disaster, there was little public information about health impacts on the population and the environment. However, today it is clear to many that the declining birth rate in the Ukraine is directly attributable to women's reproductive ill health. Medical research shows that 70% of pregnant women today have extragenital and obstetrics disorders including anemia, late toxicosis, cardiovascular disorders and urogenital diseases (WEDO, no date). The terrible health and environmental consequences of the disaster prompted young, educated, and concerned mothers to organize in defense of their children and families. Since 1990, MAMA-86 has expanded to numerous towns and communities in the Ukraine and is the foremost environmental, women's and social justice organisation in the country.

The work of MAMA-86 has covered the most daunting environmental challenges such as air pollution, water contamination, women's ill-health, environmental education, children's ill-health, women's leadership in environmental policy making, development of the national environmental health action plans, demonstration projects of participatory governance in water provision, development of the Law on Drinking Water, and the nurturance of a participatory culture for policy creation and implementation in a new and democratic Ukraine.

MAMA-86's objectives are to contribute to the development of a participatory democracy in the Ukraine, to develop a strong network of environmental NGOs, to promote sustainable processes and products in the country, to promote a broad public platform for local sustainable development, and to expand practical health and environmental services to women and children.

While the work of MAMA-86 is vast and comprehensive this paper will only focus on their Drinking Water Campaign and some related initiatives.

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with the author.

## **The Water Reality**

The water resources of the Ukraine have suffered from considerable anthropogenic pressure and are severely degraded. Drinking water quality is a significant environmental health problem in the country. The problem exists both in urban and in rural areas. About 75% of the population is supplied by surface water and most of it is not fit for drinking. In towns, the main drinking water problems are the low quality of water, limited water supply, and the rapid increase of tariffs. In rural areas, where wells provide a substantial source of water, the problems are water shortages and contamination of drinking water sources with chemicals such as manganese, iron, hydrogen sulphide and nitrates. There is also extensive leakage of chemicals from stockpiles of pesticides into the underground pipes. There is an increase in diseases such as hepatitis, ontological diseases, allergies, skin diseases, endocrine dysfunction, cholera, and "blue baby" syndrome. MAMA-86 estimates that 45% of the population is consuming water that does not comply with government standards set in 1980.

The reason the problem is so aggravated is because 25% of water supply facilities and pipes have reached their expiry date, 22% of water supply systems are in a state of emergency, and 35% are worn out and inadequate. Half the pump units have depleted their water and almost 46% of the remaining pumps need replacing. The problem of supply is further aggravated by the high loss of water due to leakages in the pipes. Estimates from MAMA-86's research in Odessa confirm the high rate of leakage. Twenty-four hour monitoring of designated apartments revealed that the "water use" rate is 2-3 times higher than norms adopted in the Ukraine and 4-5 times higher than European Union (EU) standards. (Tsvetkova, Anna, 2002). The country is poor and it cannot resource capital financing for such massive infrastructure rehabilitation. However, as shall be illustrated later, NGOs have proposed and implemented projects to address some of these problems.

During the time of the former Soviet Union, water resources were generally considered unlimited and there was only a nominal fee for water. Now, in the transition to a market economy, water tariffs are rising rapidly and the government is seeking to reform the water sector and the *vodokanals*, the water utilities.

The other issue complicating water loss through pipes is water pricing; which, according to MAMA-86 is neither realistic nor transparent. One cubic meter of drinking water costs consumers about US\$0.15 in the Ukraine. This price is 10 times lower compared to the Netherlands where 1 cubic meter costs up to US\$1.50. On the other hand, the value of human labour in the Ukraine is US\$0.43 and in Germany US\$25 and in South Korea US\$7.5.<sup>4</sup> While MAMA-86 supports the development of a rational, participatory and transparent water pricing policy that will still provide safe and affordable water to all, they are insistent that the water sector cannot be reformed without social sector reforms as well.

However, due to hyperinflation and market reforms, and the lack of a rational pricing policy, many people spend more than 4% of their income on water. The poorer residents are paying up to 15% of their income on water; and due to leakages in the system the bills of some of the low-income residents have reached 30-50% of their income. Astronomical water bills have led to social mobilization in the Ukraine, including the so-called "water revolts" in Odessa in the fall of 2001. The organizing against being charged for water leakages as consumption has been successful and residents were paid back what they were overcharged by the water utility.

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<sup>4</sup> Communication with Svitlana Slesarenok.

## **The Drinking Water Campaign**

The Drinking Water Campaign, a highly successful mobilization, was initiated by consultations on priority problems in the Ukraine. Many poor women in communities across the Ukraine have been focusing on the problem of poor water quality and the associated health problems. Stakeholders identified drinking water quality as a key issue for action. An initial action was to bring together women activists, representatives from different parts of the country, government and other stakeholders to facilitate an integrated approach to finding a solution. Thus, from the consultations and networking, four NGOs from different regions launched the campaign. Today, the Drinking Water Campaign includes over ten organisations.

The short-term goals of the Drinking Water Campaign are to:

- monitor drinking water quality and survey public opinion;
- raise public awareness about the issues and provide information;
- stimulate the cooperation and debates between different sectors;
- exchange already existing good practices from the Ukraine and overseas;
- conduct pilot projects aimed at improving drinking water quality and rational water use; and
- use international events to promote participation, consultation and partnership.

Long-term goals of the Campaign are to:

- build public pressure for a change in water policy;
- activate the public and local governments to take action;
- promote the ideas of sustainable water use;
- involve the public in the decision-making process; and
- build a public platform to lobby the national and local governments (Glubovska-Onisimova, no date).

## **Solutions for Safe and Affordable Water**

MAMA-86 launched a multi-pronged water campaign beginning with education and research aimed at raising public awareness on water and health issues. For this, they gathered official information, made independent research on drinking water quality and took public polls in the different regions of the Ukraine where MAMA-86 branch-organizations are working or where they formed later. They organized stakeholder discussions of the drinking water problems at local and national levels, published informational materials and disseminated information through lectures, seminars, and workshops among children, parents, teachers, students, doctors and consumers. While popular and consumer education is an on-going activity of MAMA-86 and other NGOs, they have also been involved in extensive research on water quality monitoring, affordability, pricing, and delivery.

### Financial and Technical Assistance

For its work in the Ukraine, amongst others partners, MAMA-86 has received financial and technical assistance from the MATRA Program of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Novib-Oxfam Netherlands and the UNED-UK. MAMA-86 also works very closely with other NGOs in the country, Eastern Europe, and internationally, with consumers, women, specialized Ukrainian research institutes, local specialists, municipal governments, the private sector and other relevant local and national actors. Some of their “technical pilot projects” developed to create solutions, are elaborated below.

## Projects<sup>5</sup>

**1) In Tararbutary**, a small town in the southern part of the country, research was conducted to determine the viability of small-scale water purification systems. Then, a project was initiated to develop a Community Based Secondary Purification Water Project for a kindergarden.

The main sources of water for Tartarbutary are groundwater and artesian wells. The water is unsafe, has more than 10 times the State permitted levels of mineralization and a high level of nitrates. The local authority claimed that this region was not included in the Ukrainian State Plan for water quality improvement and thus they could not assist with the problem.

However, the project went ahead and in 1999 a reverse-osmosis water treatment device UVPM-01, "Eco-Soft" was installed in the kindergarden. In 2000-2001, due to public pressure, meetings with the local authority and the director of the school led to the expansion of water treatment for the rest of the students. Now, over 1300 students benefit from clean water. In January 2002, MAMA-86 invited Eco-Soft back for servicing and upgrading of the unit. While clean water is available for now, it is not clear how this project will be financially self-reliant in the long term.

In the meantime, the pulmonary diseases hospital, in Mariupol, an industrial city of 532,000 residents, with extremely contaminated and hyper-chlorinated water, approached MAMA-86 for assistance in solving the water problems in their sanatorium. The work of MAMA-86 Mariupol has generated a database on water purification devices, producers, and service providers which is available to all partner groups. They undertook independent analysis of water quality and concluded that the water has a high level of mineralization, with a concentration of sulphates and bacteriological pollution. Through a tendering process, a private sector company has been awarded the contract for the water purification unit.

### **2) Water Meter Installation and Rational Use of Water**

In the cities of Kiev, Odessa, and Kharkiv, MAMA-86 has been working simultaneously on research, public education on rational water use, educating and engaging the local authority as a partner for safe water supply, and engaging the private sector and consumers in water meter installation. The priority here is fixing the water mains and pipes and reducing demand. They began with pilot projects in the three cities aimed at changing public attitude to water use, to reduce use and educate people on economic instruments as tools for water sector reform.

In 1999 in Kiev, the city administration adopted to improve cold and hot water supply, sewage service system, and promote the installation of water meters. Today, new houses and new apartment blocks are being equipped with water meters. However, in older neighbourhoods, due to the high price of installation, there is no willingness to install meters. There is no economic motivation for the public in these same areas where there is high water leakage from the water mains and pipes. In some areas, the water utility has begun repair of water mains.

In May 2001, MAMA-86 organized a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the need for economic instruments for water sector reforms. In September 2001, 3 buildings were chosen to implement a pilot project on water meters in the older part of the city. They were to be demonstration projects for the city. Within a month of organizing meters were being installed. This success led MAMA-86 to call for a tender for a contractor for water meter installation. The winner of the contract was a company called Ukservicemontazh, and by January 2002, 67 water meters were installed in 27 apartments. Contracts of collaboration were also signed between MAMA-86 and consumers. Data is still being gathered on these buildings and the findings will be used to launch a mass media and public awareness campaign on water saving. A similar process is taking place in Odessa.

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<sup>5</sup> The projects described here are from the documents of MAMA-86 and other sources.

### 3) Artemivsk Alternative Water Supply

Artemivsk is an industrial town of 86,000. MAMA-86-Artemivsk has been active here since 1997. Over the years, MAMA-86 has surveyed the local and regional water supply, has done extensive water analysis, public surveys and consultations, and established good working relations with the local government. Additionally, MAMA-86 coordinates the public initiative group on water sector problems.

They began working in an area called Soledar, which has a population of 15,000 and its own water administration. Presently, Soledar receives its water from a canal. Water provided is calculated at 145 litres/person/day and it does not meet drinking quality standards. The objective of the intervention here is to; provide people with safe drinking water from local artesian water sources, provide industrial water of suitable quality and quantity directly from the Canal, allow the water utility to save funds for improvement of water services, increase the level of public awareness concerning drinking water quality and rational water use, and create a precedent of cooperation for local solutions between NGOs and the local government.

The focus has been on increasing the capacity and quality of existing wells as well as the possibility of drilling new wells. Water meters have been installed, the utility is running a profitable business, good relations have been established with residents, and water bills are being paid. This is only the first stage of the alternative water supply project. Research is now underway with the Soledar Water Utility to develop technical studies for a business plan for a more expensive second stage. The focus now is on getting investors to get involved and to identify funds for the creation of a viable infrastructure. The project is particularly important as MAMA-86 hopes to use this to show case how new forms of collaboration between public organizations, companies and the local government can realize the town's priorities.

4) The rural areas are poorer and have a much higher rate of contamination of wells. There is no state support or willingness for well rehabilitation. MAMA-86 also has an extensive programme dealing with rural water supply in areas such as Yaremcha, Nizhyn and Poltava. Nevertheless, not all their projects can be covered under the scope of this paper.<sup>6</sup>

### **How are Poor Women Involved in the Drinking Water Campaign?**

The example of Luzanivka will illustrate this. Luzanivka was formally a recreational area, a centre for washing railway oil tanks, and also had the dubious honor of an inadequate sewage infrastructure and constant overflows of sewage into peoples' homes and streets.

Many people are poor due to the post-Soviet economic collapse; there is high unemployment and a high concentration of hazardous substances in ambient air. Poor women in this area were well aware of these problems, and especially because over the years the cumulative impact of these problems had created an environmental disaster where they lived. They had approached the local authority several times, but were told that there were no funds to address the sewerage and air pollution problems.

Finally, in 1996, when 6 people died at the same time and place, this led to a social explosion in the community and the poor women organized themselves and the rest of the community for concerted action. MAMA-86 came to assist them and in 1997 a chapter of MAMA-86 was formed here. The women met with other residents, documented the extent and impact of the environmental problems and with the help of EcoPravo from Kiev, got 80 residents to sue the local authority for failure to act on air and sewerage problems. A political campaign was launched

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<sup>6</sup> Additional information is available from MAMA-86's web page: <http://www.mama-86.org.ua>

directed at local and national politicians and was eventually successful when the national government agreed to give 14 million H, to finish the construction of the sewage pump. The local authority also allocated funds for environmental works in the district. It is a new experience for people in the Ukraine to organize for their rights and engage politically in this manner. During the Soviet era there was no civil involvement in daily affairs. Women are leading the way in creating a participatory culture.

The sewage pumping station became operational in 2000 and the hazardous oil-tank cleaning facility was also decommissioned. This new experience of political mobilization to achieve desired results for a safe living environment came in handy as within a short time residents were faced with high water bills. This was due to leakages in the water mains that the water utility was not willing to deal with. They were passing the costs to already poor households. The women and men, now under the name of MAMA-86 organized once again to lobby for water main repairs and water meters for precise billing per use. The problem of high water bills, which were illegal, was resolved within a short time and people were reimbursed.

### **From Action to Policy Development**

What is noteworthy in the case of Ukrainian NGOs is their engagement in research and the development of policy options. Once again, MAMA-86 has been involved in some very innovative policy development, especially in the current context of the post-Soviet Ukraine. For example, from 1998 onwards, MAMA-86 and a host of NGOs, initiated the first every participatory and consultative process for the development of the National Environment and Health Action Plan (NEHAP). The National Coordinator asked MAMA-86 for their assistance to draft a paper for public participation on the NEHAP. The public consultation and feedback process was coordinated by MAMA-86, EcoPravo Network, Bahmat and supported by UNED-UK.

More than 600 organisations and individuals from across the country, representing environmental groups, women's groups, researchers, health workers, business people and government representatives were involved in providing input. As a result, 700 comments and additions were suggested and many of them were included in the final edition. After much lobbying by more than 50 organisations in the Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the NEHAP in October 2000.

MAMA-86 and other NGOs were also instrumental in the drafting the new Drinking Water Law. They analyzed the existing legislation, provided comments on the structure and content of the new Law, provided the public information on the process, engaged them in hearings on the draft, monitored the drafting process, and lobbied for amendments.

MAMA-86 has been active in various regional and European policy development initiatives as well such as the Dniester River Basin, the Azov Sea Basin, the Almaty Ministerial Consultation, the Pan-European Eco-Forum Water Issue Group, the Protocol on Civil Liability, the Bonn Water Forum, etc.

### **Recommendations and Lessons Learnt**

- A watershed/water basin approach is essential to water management solutions and not necessarily huge capital-intensive infrastructure projects. Attempts are being made to demonstrate this, but capital is still needed for repairs and maintenance of existing infrastructure.
- There should be more focus on water treatment and a holistic management of the water cycle. However, wastewater treatment is not yet a common practice in the Ukraine.
- Water is a critical resource and a common good. Water should not be a means for profit. In Odessa, the women of MAMA-86 and other NGOs were successfully able to block the privatization of their water supply by Suez Lionnaise des Eaux. They were able to

demonstrate that there was a lack of transparency of the tendering process, the local authority was conducting secret negotiations, and that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was willing to provide financing for the privatization for des Eaux without public consultation; but were not willing to finance a local company that would have been more accountable to the consumers.

- In the Ukraine, there is a larger issue of the lack of state governance as the water issue is connected to so many other problems. Women's actions for change are setting new parameters for democratic governance. However, women are not yet equal decision makers and a gender perspective and mainstreaming for governance is still lacking.
- There should be transparency in all water utilities and local authorities and an open process of consultation with the public, and with consumers such as women who are critical to water problem analysis and solutions. The key role of poor women's mobilization for cleaner water, for pricing accountability and affordability, for better management of water infrastructure has already been demonstrated through several successful initiatives.
- The arrival of multinationals and the push for privatization should be approached with caution as it could lead to an increase in poverty and inaccessibility of water to a significant part of the population. This will especially affect already poor women-headed households, families with children and pensioners.
- There is also need to be wary about the encouragement of corrupt practices by transnational water corporations. For example, both Suez and Vivendi executives have been convicted of bribery to obtain water contracts.<sup>7</sup>
- Attempts should be made to also learn from the practices of successful public water utilities as for example the case of the Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewage of the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil.
- The public should have the right to access all information as it pertains to discussions between local governments, water utilities and the multinational private sector.
- International Financial Institutions (IFIs) should abide by Agenda 21, which argues for the management of water resources at the local level as a key to sustainable development.
- IFIs should guarantee the rights of the local population and public participation in the process of water sector reforms.

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<sup>7</sup> See the research and documentation done by the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), University of Greenwich. <http://www.psiru.org>

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