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**WORK AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL
CONFERENCES AND TRAINING WORKSHOPS ON THE WATER RESOURCES
IN WHICH THE ESCWA NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION PARTICIPATED
DURING THE BIENNIUM 1999-2000**

In view of the scarcity of water in the ESCWA region, compounded by the increasing demand in all sectors and the lack of an integrated approach, it became apparent to the Natural Resources Section of the ESCWA Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division that additional effort would be needed to ameliorate the situation. It was necessary to increase awareness through dissemination of knowledge on modern water management measures and strengthen capacity-building at all levels with regard to developing an integrated approach to the management of water resources in the ESCWA region. In this regard, the Natural Resources Section oriented some of its activities during the year 1999-2000 toward preparing and presenting technical papers that focused on issues of regional and national priority related to water management practices and water legislation at the national and international level, as well as organizing training workshops on specific water subjects. Following is a brief account of the Section's activities in this respect:

(a) ESCWA participated in the International Conference on Water Resources Management, Use and Policy in Dry Areas (Amman, 1-3 December 1999). A paper was presented to the conference on "Aspect of desalination in the ESCWA region". The conference, which was organized by the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), addressed a number of key issues related to the way in which water should be managed in the future, taking into consideration the impact of high population growth, the low public perception of the potential crisis in water availability, the lack of proper management mechanisms and the existing levels of cooperation at regional and international levels.

(b) ESCWA participated in and co-sponsored the 4th Gulf Water Conference, "Water in the Gulf; Challenges of the 21st Century", organized by the Water Science and Technology Association (Bahrain, 13-17 February 1999). ESCWA presented two papers: "The role of water legislation and the management of water resources in Western Asia" and "Hydrogeological condition of paleogene aquifers in the ESCWA region". The discussions and recommendations of the conference indicated a need to refine the assessment of water resources and formulation of water policy and strategy.

(c) ESCWA co-sponsored and participated in the Training Workshop on Irrigation Management in Semi-Arid Areas, which was organized by Saint Joseph University and the French Embassy in Beirut and convened in Zahle, Lebanon, from 19 to 21 October 1999. The objective of the workshop was to strengthen the technical capabilities of water specialists in selected member States in the area of irrigation water management. ESCWA was provided financial support by French Trust Fund to sponsor four experts from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Cases studies presented by the experts provided a platform for discussion on the issues of water utilization and practices in irrigation. The workshop experience stressed that irrigation, as the major water consumer, should receive the highest conservation effort.

(d) ESCWA participated in the third Governing Body meeting of the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (Amman, 19-20 September 1999). The ESCWA representative at the meeting briefed the participants on the efforts of ESCWA and other United Nations organizations in the formulation of a regional water vision to be used as a guideline for future water programme activities.

(e) ESCWA participated in the Second Regional Seminar on Policy Reform in Water Resources Management (MENA/MED Water Initiative), organized by the World Bank and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation of Jordan (Amman, 8-11 May 1999). A presentation was made on ESCWA activities in the field of water resources. In reviewing the efforts of some Arab countries with regard to the formulation of water policy, the need to undertake water policy reform was emphasized, taking into consideration the impact of other sectoral demands on water supply.

(f) ESCWA participated in the WHO/CEHA regional workshop on Water Conservation and Reuses: Important Elements of Water Resources Management Strategies (Amman, 5-8 April 1999) and presented a paper on the water resources situation in the ESCWA region. The meeting reviewed the status of the implementation of water conservation measures, as related to demand management and pollution control and water conservation strategy at the national level. The conclusion drawn from the meeting was that

conservation measures should remain a programme activity to be implemented on a continuous basis by the countries of the region.

(g) Representatives of ESCWA attended the Second World Water Forum and Ministerial Conference, which was held in the Hague, the Netherlands, from 17 to 22 March 2000. Some 4,500 international water specialists, decision makers, politicians, officials, media representatives, women's group, NGOs and youth from all over the world participated and discussed the looming water crisis in the next century. The Forum provided a rare opportunity for participants from all corners of the globe to share their own, unique experiences with others. It served as a platform where the processes that can be translated into decisions, and policies and action were addressed. The meeting was comprised of 87 technical sessions grouped under four main sections: regional presentations, water-use presentations, major groups and special subjects.

A Ministerial Conference, the initiative of the Dutch Government, was held parallel to the Forum. Its aim was to mobilize political support for countering global water predicaments with concrete action. Also closely linked to the Forum was the World Water Fair and Film Festival. A large number of international exhibitors participated, ranging from multinationals to local players, from the commercial-minded to the idealistic. Thus, visitors to the Fair were given the opportunity to see an international community presenting and demonstrating solutions, displays and products related to future water use.

The Forum sessions concluded that there is a need for profound change in the way water is managed if we are to achieve any measure of sustainable water use in the near future. The empowerment of people at the local level to wisely manage their water resources is essential. Groundwater resources must be inventoried, while food self-sufficiency, particularly in the arid and semi-arid developing countries, was viewed as a major factor in contributing to water stress. The extent of the water crisis in the Arab and ESCWA region was highlighted and it was stressed that, owing to the region's limited natural water resources and growing populations, the challenge was greater.

(h) ESCWA co-sponsored the Regional Training Course on Policy Issues Implementation for Water Demand Management (Beirut, 8-19 May 2000). The training course was organized by the FAO regional office in Cairo and the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon. The objectives of the training course were to enhance and develop capacity in formulating the water demand management policies needed to improve the sustainability of water use in competing sectors; and to promote the adoption of institutional reforms that will emphasize the new role of Government in water resources management. ESCWA provided logistic arrangements for the meeting and financed the participation of four experts from the member States of Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The Commission also made two presentations, one on the status of water resources management and the other on the trend in water legislation development.

(i) The Training Workshop on Water Resources Assessment for the Arab Countries (Cairo, 1-5 December 1999) was organized by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources of Egypt and co-sponsored by ESCWA and UNEP. The objective of the workshop was to demonstrate and encourage the application of appropriate methodology to assess the capabilities of concerned countries to undertake water resources assessment according to the guidelines detailed in the handbook published by WMO. The workshop lectures introduced the participants to methodologies of data collection, coverage and quality control; outlined the personnel qualifications required; and defined the type and level of studies on water resources needed, according to country policy. ESCWA presented a paper on "The aspect of water management in the region".