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**PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIES FOR THE
BIENNIUM 2004-2005 IN THE FIELD OF WATER RESOURCES**

A. BACKGROUND

1. In comparison with other countries of the world, ESCWA member countries suffer from an acute and enduring shortage of water supplies. This shortage can be attributed to the desert climate, which reduces the amount of surface-water and groundwater resources renewed annually, on the one hand and, on the other hand, increased demand for water as a result of continued population growth and a rise in water consumption rates. Moreover, the efforts expended by the countries of the region in order to rationalize demand for and conserve water have not achieved notable success, as many of those countries have adopted development policies in some sectors (specifically, agriculture) that have further expanded water consumption and led to an increase in pressure on water resources.
2. This scarcity of water requires the ESCWA member countries to adopt an integrated approach to the management of their water resources and accord greater importance to building capacities in order to improve resource management and sustainability. Current water utilization and management practices that do not take into account the scarcity of water resources in the region and the need for sustainability exacerbate the difficulties that the countries of the region confront in responding to the increasing demand for water, in particular in the context of increasing competition for water between the agricultural, drinking water and industrial sectors.
3. In view of the increasing importance assumed by the issue of improving water resources management in order to confront the scarcity of resources and the risks posed by a deterioration of the water situation, there is no doubt that capacity-building activities deserve to be at the forefront of the priorities of the programme of work for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of water resources. It is therefore proposed that work should be done on strengthening the capacities of the member countries in three main fields, namely, the integrated management of water resources, management of shared water resources and training and research in the water sectors.

**B. PROPOSED CORE ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIES
FOR THE BIENNIUM 2004-2005 IN THE FIELD OF WATER RESOURCES**

4. The proposed programme of work for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of water resources revolves around a set of activities, the implementation of which aims to strengthen the capacities of member countries in three fields, namely, the integrated management of water resources, management of shared water resources and capacity-building for training and research in the water sectors.

1. Integrated management of water resources

5. Work within this field will be on strengthening the capacity of the member countries and their water resources planning and management institutions, identification of non-sustainable patterns in the development and utilization of water resources, in order to implement the appropriate reforms at the level of water policies, and pursuit of integrated methods in resource planning and development. The appropriate tools for this objective will also be developed, such as guidelines and sustainable development indicators in the water sectors of the member countries.

2. Management of shared water resources

6. The shared surface-water and groundwater resources that come to ESCWA member countries annually from outside the region represent more than 80 per cent of the total volume of renewable water in the region. The relative importance of these resources varies from one country to another.

7. During the past few years, the importance of rivers and groundwater reserves shared by member countries has come to the fore. The activities that ESCWA is determined to adopt as part of this core element, therefore, aim to offer support to member countries in order to strengthen cooperation between them in the exchange of information and experiences concerning the management of shared water resources in order to improve their utilization and management, in a manner that can make them sustainable.

3. Capacity-building for training and research in ESCWA member countries

8. This core element focuses on strengthening the capacities of specialized training and research centres in the field of water in ESCWA member countries in order to respond to their research and training needs by achieving integration between them, within the framework of the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET). It is anticipated that ESCWA will complete the necessary measures for the establishment of AWARENET during the year 2003.