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**PRIORITY ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF  
WATER RESOURCES IN THE ESCWA REGION: THE ROLE OF THE  
WORKING GROUP IN FOLLOWING UP THOSE ISSUES**

**I. BACKGROUND TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIALIZED  
WORKING GROUPS**

1. In order to strengthen regional cooperation in implementing integrated water management programmes in the countries members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and with a view to encouraging those countries to make an effective contribution to each stage of the preparation, organization and implementation of its activities, ESCWA proposes to continue using specialized working groups for the joint preparation of certain activities that will be undertaken in the course of the fifth session of the Committee on Water Resources. This approach proved successful during the fourth session of the Committee, and was used to produce a report on the optimum use of water in ESCWA member countries. The report reviewed the measures taken by those countries during the 1990s in order to optimize the management of water and build the capacities of the sector with respect to the integrated management of water resources. Member countries were involved in the preparation of the report and as a result, several important aspects of water management were identified as being in need of material, technical and institutional support in order to improve the performance of the relevant parties in the public and private sectors.
2. The involvement of the working groups in the preparation of the above-mentioned report was significant because of the wealth of basic data they supplied on current policies, legislation and field practices in the area of water management at national level, as well as the implementation mechanisms used and their effectiveness. Nevertheless, it became clear that there were some gaps in the supply of well-documented quantitative or qualitative data. It was also clear that it was important to reinforce the role of the specialized working group in its capacity as a mechanism for joint action and the strengthening of regional cooperation. A specific programme of work for such groups should be ratified and the necessary resources provided to carry out the programme of work to be adopted during the fifth session of the Committee. This will improve the quality of ESCWA studies and its documentation of indicators and accurate data and increase its usefulness to beneficiaries in member countries.
3. This document deals with three priority issues concerning the integrated management of water resources in ESCWA member countries, in order that they may be discussed and an agreed position taken in their regard and acted upon by the working group, pursuant to resolution 233 (XXI) concerning the strengthening of cooperation between member countries in the field of shared water resources.
4. Set forth below is a brief outline of each of those three issues.

A. BASIC INDICATORS ON THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF WATER  
RESOURCES IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

5. In this area, the aim is to contribute to the establishment and updating of a database on national water resources. Such a database will facilitate the formulation of appropriate water-related policies and the monitoring of their execution. It will also identify gaps and the nature of future requirements for the development of the sector. At regional level, the significance of this initiative will be in the supply of standardized indicators from member countries and the strengthening of regional coordination in this field.

6. The working group responsible for this issue will undertake the periodic review of the water situation at national level in order to identify the available resources, the manner in which they are used, average rates of consumption and levels of contamination. It will also translate the various technical water-related data into socio-economic indicators, thereby making it easier for decision makers to incorporate water policies into national economic policies and sustainable development plans. It may, for example, be possible to calculate the impact of water loss and contamination on gross domestic product and public health. In this context, the review at national level must include an evaluation of material, technical and human capacities, and data must be systematically collected through institutions, in order to ensure that the work is comprehensive and sustainable.

7. The working group responsible for this issue is also required to look into the possibility of developing and updating qualitative and quantitative cognitive norms; investigate sources of information; adopt systems for the collection, storage and management of information; and develop indicators. This will all contribute to the integrated management of water resources in ESCWA member countries and facilitate the systematic exchange of indicators at the regional level, with a view to drawing up a common attitude towards the water-related challenges that face the region. Out of this working group may come a regional network concerned with the management of information on water, which can contribute to the building of capacities at both national and local level.

B. MANAGING THE DEMAND FOR WATER IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

8. In this area, the aim is to reinforce action on the principles of water demand management in ESCWA member countries and encourage their application, in order to ensure the sustainable development of water resources by improving the efficiency of water use, and conserving, rehabilitating and recycling supplies. Work is required on a number of levels, including the technical, social, economic and political, if change is to be brought about in water consumption patterns in many sectors. The most important of those sectors are the domestic and productive sectors and, above all, the agricultural and industrial sectors.

9. It is proposed that the working group responsible for this area should seek to identify unsustainable consumption practices and, in the light of such practices, study the feasibility of putting in place an appropriate mechanism for bringing about change in public attitudes towards the use of water. Possibilities could include economic incentives such as the imposition of tariffs and fees; the formulation of specifications and standards to regulate consumption; constraints on construction plans and the use of land; an evaluation of the policies and practices adopted in dealing with and recycling waste water; and investigating the feasibility of providing support for countries in undertaking projects in this field.

10. In this context, the importance should be highlighted of raising awareness and encouraging social change. The education sector and civil society can play an important role in raising awareness of water-related issues in general and the management of demand in particular. They may also urge decision makers to extend the range of the involvement of civil society in managing water resources and monitoring their quality and cost, or in reclaiming those costs, and may consider mechanisms and dimensions for strengthening partnership with the private sector and civil society in order to bring about a qualitative change that will help to control demand for water, optimize use and ensure the integrated management of public water resources.

C. LAWS AND LEGISLATION ON THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF WATER  
IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

11. The aim in this area is to evaluate water-related and other relevant, including environmental, legislation in ESCWA member countries, in order to ascertain the extent to which it meets the requirements of integrated water management and is linked to land use and environmental legislation; how appropriate it is for modern trends in water resource management; the role of civil society and the private sector; and other relevant principles.

12. The work of the specialized working group in this field includes looking into impediments to the implementation of laws and the extent to which laws are consistent with water policies. The member countries of ESCWA have made progress in translating water resource policies into legislation and in putting in place environmental measures with respect to the management of water. However, most such laws continue to lack implementation mechanisms or effective control over waste and unsustainable consumption. Legislation should therefore be reviewed in order to ensure harmony between its socio-economic and environmental aspects. In addition to legislation governing water rights, water use and quality, action must be taken on issues relating to the pricing of water, the imposition of contamination taxes, Government support, incentives to control waste, optimum use and the provision of good quality water to remote areas and to persons with limited income in both urban and rural areas.

13. The working group must also consider such laws and legislation from the point of view of their role in regulating the institutional situation, improving coordination between the various Government authorities and departments involved in the management of water, and strengthening decentralization and the role of municipalities in planning water resource management and protection measures and implementing such measures.

**II. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE  
THREE WORKING GROUPS**

14. The three issues set forth above will be discussed during the fifth session of the Committee on Water Resources, and it is supposed that the discussion will lead to the choice of one or more of the three; the identification of a framework for the work of the group that will undertake the study; the formulation of a preliminary plan for implementation; and the identification of the members who will participate and of a communications officer for the group at national level in each member country.

15. Each group member must take the following action:

(a) Provide the data and information necessary at national level in order to prepare the report on the relevant issue, and take part in preparing that report;

(b) Ensure, in coordination with the responsible party in the country concerned, that sufficient time is allocated to the communications officer in the relevant working group to take part in preparing and discussing the report;

(c) Take part in a coordination meeting for the members of the selected group, the aim of which will be to discuss the report to be prepared by the working group. A time and place for that meeting will be decided upon in due course, but it must be held prior to the sixth session of the Committee on Water Resources, either in United Nations House in Beirut or in a member country.

**III. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ESCWA**

16. The Commission shall have responsibility for the following:

(a) Facilitating the exchange of information; coordinating between the members of the working group with respect to certain administrative matters; and preparing for the coordination meetings of the working group at headquarters or in an ESCWA member country;

(b) Taking part in the review of the report prepared by the working group; translating, revising and distributing that report; and including it on the agenda of the sixth session of the Committee on Water Resources;

(c) Taking part, in cooperation with member countries and with funding from those countries or other donors, in arranging a training course on indicators and how to administer them, and the use of geographic information systems in collecting, storing and managing information.

17. It is expected that the working group that is being formed will undertake the preparations for and management of a meeting during the sixth session of the Committee on Water Resources for the purpose of presenting its report and the activities that it has carried out.