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**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 WITH RESPECT TO
INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Santiago, Chile, 12-14 December 1995)

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I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date

1. The Group of Experts on the implementation of Agenda 21 with respect to integrated water resources management in Latin America and the Caribbean met in Santiago, Chile, from 12 to 14 December 1995. This meeting was held in the context of follow-up activities pertaining to the recommendations contained in the Dublin Statement and Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by specialists from different countries of the region, as well as by representatives of international organizations (see list of participants in annex 1).

Election of officers

3. The following officers were elected:

Chairperson:	Humberto Peña (Chile)
First Vice-Chairperson:	Enrique Mejía (México)
Second Vice-Chairperson:	Michael N. White (Jamaica)
Rapporteur:	Tomás A. Bandes R. (Venezuela)

Agenda

4. The following agenda was adopted:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Progress achieved by the countries of the region in the pursuance of the recommendations made in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on integrated water resources management
4. Integrated management alternatives for the development and sustainable use of water resources at the national level
5. Regional support programmes for government measures to implement the recommendations contained in chapter 18 of Agenda 21
6. Other matters
7. Adoption of the report

Opening meeting

5. At the opening meeting, Mr. Gert Rosenthal, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, speaking on behalf of the Commission, stressed the importance of integrated water resource management to Latin America and the Caribbean, and the role it should play in the economic and social development of the region. He pointed out that the work programme of ECLAC included a number of activities in the area of integrated water resource management; that issue was closely linked to the research being carried out by the Commission in the areas of environmental management, industrial development, health and social policy. He trusted that the meeting would help identify priorities for government measures to implement the agreements contained in chapter 18 of Agenda 21, entitled "Protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources: Application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources". He also hoped that the meeting would develop guidelines for the work of international organizations, and make recommendations for action to be taken by governments of the countries of the region. Finally, he stressed that ECLAC wished to contribute to the implementation of Agenda 21.

6. The discussions began with a statement by Ms. Isabelle Vanderbeck, representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who said that her agency had been entrusted by the Committee on Natural Resources with making an assessment of the main water resources management issues facing the region. To that end, meetings were being organized in different regions of the world in order to determine the extent to which the governments were following the agreements set forth in chapter 18. She pointed out that in chapter 18, seven programme areas were proposed, namely: integrated water resources development and management; water resources assessment; protection of water resources, water quality and aquatic ecosystems; drinking-water supply and sanitation; water and sustainable urban development; water for sustainable food production and rural development, and impacts of climate change on water resources. She stressed the fact that the main objective of the present meeting was to discuss and analyze progress made by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in implementing the recommendations contained in chapter 18. The discussions should focus on determining whether the countries of the region were implementing the measures agreed on in chapter 18, and in what ways they were doing so.

II. ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

Progress achieved by the countries of the region in the pursuance of the recommendations made in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on integrated water resources management (item 3 of the agenda)

7. The discussion opened with the presentation of the background paper entitled Progress achieved by Latin America and Caribbean countries in the implementation of the recommendations made in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on integrated water resources management, which was prepared on the basis of reports of consultants to the Natural Resources Unit of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of ECLAC. The document includes information on follow up to the recommendations of chapter 18 by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela.
8. At the plenary meetings, the experts presented reports on the experiences of their own countries and on actions carried out by governments on matters related to the agreements set forth in chapter 18. Statements were made on the current situation and on innovations in the area of water management that were being implemented in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Saint Lucia and Venezuela. In their presentations, the experts analyzed the changes their countries had made in their water resources management systems, in pursuance of the agreements contained in chapter 18. The participants agreed on the need for water management at all levels, bearing in mind that water was no longer an unlimited resource —either in time or in space—, but one that had an economic value.
9. It was stressed that all countries of the region should include environmental considerations in their national policies. It was pointed out that some countries had enacted constitutional amendments in order to ensure the right of their citizens to enjoy a clean and healthy environment.
10. Emphasis was also placed on the progress made by the countries of the region towards implementing the recommendations contained in chapter 18 concerning the expansion of coverage of potable water and environmental health services; improvement of the efficiency of irrigation systems; inclusion of the community in action and decision making on water resources management; progress in developing water resources management systems at the level of the catchment basin; progress in quality control of both surface and underground waters, and monitoring of the water cycle and applied research on water resources.
11. During the discussion on progress achieved by the countries of the region in the pursuance of the recommendations made in chapter 18, it was pointed out that many of the problems faced by different countries were due to shortcomings in the mechanisms for financing water resources management systems. Reference was made to the need to ensure that commercial water services were self-supporting. In that regard, the importance of applying charges for water use as an environmental management tool was stressed.

12. These statements will be included in the forthcoming ECLAC report on Progress achieved by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the implementation of the recommendations made in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on integrated water resources management.

13. After the national experts had made their statements, the representatives of international organizations reported to participants on the activities that had been carried out in the countries of the region by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund. Special mention was made of specific programmes being carried out by the governments of the countries of the region in compliance with the agreements contained in chapter 18.

III. RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Integrated management alternatives for the development and sustainable use of water resources at the national level (item 4 of the agenda)

14. The experiences of the countries of the region with respect to the implementation of Agenda 21 show that the progress achieved in complying with the agreements contained in chapter 18 has been different in different countries; there are also differences in regard to the programme areas addressed. It appears that some countries have not expressly incorporated the objectives of chapter 18 into their national policies, while others have substantially revised their policies in the light of the agreements. In general terms, however, the following conclusions may be reached:

1. There is some confusion about the conceptual distinctions between the environmental dimensions of water management *per se* and overall environmental management issues. Unfortunately, there appears to be a tendency to minimize the relative importance of water resources in the context of overall environmental concerns.
2. In most countries of the region, the greatest progress has been made in the area of regulation. Thanks to Agenda 21 and the principles of the Dublin Statement, several countries have amended their constitutions, laws and decrees with a view to moving towards integrated management of water resources and of environmental systems.
3. Little progress was noted, however, as regards the application of the aforementioned principles. More has been done to carry out institutional and organizational changes in response to the need to reform the state apparatus for macroeconomic reasons, than has been done to incorporate the principles of Agenda 21. The experts were of the view that the principles and goals of chapter 18 should be adopted in the context of the process of change that is currently underway, in order to ensure that they are incorporated into the institutions and organizations of the state.

15. In general terms, the experts proposed that any reforms that might be made in water resources management systems, along with the relevant changes in legislation, should be based conceptually on the main principles of chapter 18, which are geared towards:

1. meeting the most felt social needs;
2. respecting the culture, uses and customs of the areas covered;
3. guaranteeing, with clear and stable rules of the game, that water use rights will be granted with a view to ensuring proper and effective use;

4. promoting decentralization and administrative efficiency and ensuring that sectoral activities will be self-supporting;
5. promoting integrated water resources management at the level of catchment areas, or of water systems, with emphasis on preventing pollution; and
6. ensuring that water resources management policies view water as a vital and irreplaceable resource, and an "economic good".

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING

16. The experts made the following recommendations with regard to programme areas included in chapter 18:

1. Recommendations on integrated water resources development and management

- a) An integrated water resources management system should be created, in accordance with national legislation. It should be coordinated at the national level, and should include the participation of both the public and the private sectors.
- b) Each water-use sector should be required to meet all its obligations, in particular the following:
 - to coordinate its activities with those of the national water authorities and with other sectors;
 - to meet demands, in terms of time, form and quality;
 - to plan the improvement and expansion of services, in order to meet reasonable goals;
 - to become self-supporting by adopting adequate rate systems, when this is feasible from the socio-economic standpoint; and
 - to generate resources in order to remedy or mitigate the different types of environmental impact produced by the sector.
- c) Effective mechanisms should be established to require institutional coordination between the main actors involved—either public or private—and the civil society, in the watershed or water system concerned.

2. Recommendations on water resources assessment

- a) The importance of specific data on quantities and availability of water should be recognized as a basis for all management systems. It was noted that in many countries, the institutions concerned did not have the capability for implementing and managing a system for continuous monitoring and assessment of water resources.
- b) Consideration should be given to the possibility of requiring all users, both private and public, to supply relevant information to the public institution responsible for water resource assessment and, in general, to contribute towards improving available information on water resources.

- c) Governments should consider the possibility of financing, at least partially, the cost of construction and maintenance of water systems, through the granting of water use licenses.

3. Recommendations on protection of water resources, water quality and aquatic ecosystems

- a) Governments should reinforce activities aimed at monitoring water quality in accordance with desired quality objectives and with a view to protecting aquatic ecosystems. This includes the need to regulate and monitor all discharges into bodies of water, to promote the use of clean production technologies and to introduce adequate disposal systems through the use of appropriate technologies, both in industry and agriculture and in domestic discharges.

4. Recommendations on drinking water supply and sanitation

- a) In order to achieve the levels of coverage envisaged in chapter 18, potable water systems and sanitation services must be economically and financially viable. Emphasis was placed on the advisability of charging for such services at rates that reflect the real cost of providing them. It was also stressed that the rate-setting process must ensure that utility companies will be able to operate efficiently.
- b) Consideration should be given to allowing private sector participation in the provision of services. At the same time, the experts recognized that private sector participation would not relieve the State of its responsibility to supply such services, but would change the nature of that responsibility.
- c) As new actors appear on the scene as a result of decentralization and privatization processes, it will be important to strengthen the regulatory role of the State by creating well-defined and efficient regulatory agencies that can guarantee the existence of the conditions necessary to ensure competitiveness, effectiveness and equity in the operations of the entities subject to regulation.

5. Recommendations on water and sustainable urban development

- a) It should be borne in mind that many of the problems currently facing the Latin American and Caribbean countries in regard to water resources management in urban areas are due, to a large extent, to the fact that the process is still geared towards a certain purpose, and that there are no instances of institutions being designed specifically for water management. This is due to the absence of an integrated management approach that would allow for the creation of a mechanism for promoting public participation and coordination between the public institutions responsible for creating policies and programmes relating to water resources in urban areas, and the public and private institutions responsible for the use of these resources. This further shows the importance of considering water resources management at the level of the catchment area.

6. Recommendations on water for sustainable food production and rural development

- a) It should be borne in mind that in order for food production to be sustainable over time, irrigation and drainage systems must be economically and financially viable. The social role of many of these projects was also recognized.
- b) Although irrigation farming is still subsidized in many countries, it is important to consider the opportunity cost of the resources that are spent on such subsidies. The actual demand for subsidized products must also be taken into account. As a general rule, no new subsidies should be granted unless an economic and environmental impact study has been made that takes into account all relevant variables. The existing subsidies can be justified, however, provided they are viewed as a temporary social policy measure. In this regard, reference was made to the successful experiences of Chile, Mexico and Peru, which have granted subsidies in order to improve irrigation systems.

17. In addition to the above, the experts made recommendations on intraregional cooperation in connection with the implementation of the agreements contained in Agenda 21. In particular, they stressed the following:

- 1. Use should be made of existing regional cooperation networks, and all national and international agencies should be encouraged to participate actively in them.
- 2. Data extracted from documents on the evaluation and management of catchment areas should be included in regional information networks, such as the Pan American Network for Information and Documentation in Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences (REPIDISCA).
- 3. Technical support should be provided for the development and application of environmental information systems, using geographic data systems.
- 4. Advantage should be taken of the successful experiences of committees that have done research on international rivers and lakes, such as the Amazon, the River Plate, Lake Titicaca, and others; this information should be used to improve the management of other international watersheds.
- 5. An effort should be made to encourage cooperation through exchanges of experiences in the area of water resources management.

18. It was recalled that Agenda 21 includes estimates of the cost of implementing the programme recommendations contained in chapter 18, and that these estimates, which were made in 1990-1991, were intended as mere indicators. Up to now they have not been analyzed in detail by the governments. The group of experts therefore considered that the estimates of both external support and national funds envisaged at that time would not be sufficient to guarantee implementation of the recommendations. It therefore made the following recommendations:

1. Recognizing the effort that governments have made to comply with the agreements contained in chapter 18, the international community should reaffirm its commitment to provide external financial support—even though such support may not allow for a complete solution—in order to make it possible to solve social problems—thus improving the quality of life—, as well as problems linked to climate change.
2. It is important to realize the need to recover costs by charging for water supply services—for a variety of uses—and for sewage treatment, in order to ensure adequate financing. This would not necessarily preclude the granting of subsidies to users, who should be screened by means of a transparent "focalization" procedure.
3. ECLAC should consider including in its programme of work: i) the preparation of an inventory of costs for each country of the region, and facilitation of support from bilateral and multilateral financial agencies in order to partially meet the countries' needs, and ii) a specific project on the most economical methods for sewage treatment, as well as research on ways to obtain financing and amortize investments.
4. Bilateral and multilateral financial agencies should offer incentives for governments to provide adequate national financing to support the water resources sector.
5. Account should be taken of the work already done in this regard by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

19. In order to allow for an analysis and cost estimates to be made that reflect actual current financial conditions, the governments should be asked to provide information on their water resources management budgets for the last two fiscal periods. This information should include income and expenditures related to privatization, if that is pertinent, and to other sources of financing, such as bilateral cooperation. Such information would allow for a comprehensive estimate to be made of costs and of the potential for private financing.

Regional support programmes for government measures to implement the recommendations contained in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 (item 5 of the agenda)

General recommendations:

20. Governments of the Latin American and Caribbean countries should consider the following order of priorities in the context of multiple and integrated water use:

1. evaluation, monitoring, management and research, including watershed management and water resources ecology;
2. potable water and sanitation, and

3. water for irrigation and food production.

21. The responsibility for applying the recommendations of Agenda 21 should be assigned to a national intersectoral focal point (which may be either an advisory board or an executive board) that includes representatives of the public and private sectors, as well as actors representing the civil society at large.

22. Considering that the privatization of public water services is already underway in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is essential that a regulatory framework be adopted before it proceeds further, in order to avoid traumatic situations that could arise —over the short or the medium term— in the absence of such regulations. In addition, it is recommended that the governments:

1. Concentrate their efforts on the development of regulatory frameworks that provide the public and private sectors with the assurance that there will be a fair and stable set of rules that will prevent abuses of power when there is a monopoly —either public or private— in the provision of services.
2. Consolidate the national regulatory bodies, where they exist; such bodies should be created in countries where they do not yet exist.
3. Foster horizontal cooperation between regulatory bodies of the different countries of the region and promote joint programmes of activities geared towards drawing up and expeditiously developing the relevant regulatory frameworks.

Specific recommendations to international organizations:

23. With respect to coordination of the activities of such organizations:

1. UNEP should be responsible for coordinating programmes concerned with water resources —a task which so far has been carried out by the different United Nations agencies in the region—, taking into account aspects pertaining to policies, legislation, techniques and financial support to the governments of the countries of the region.
2. The international cooperation agencies should strengthen and promote measures to streamline procedures for the evaluation and approval of project proposals.
3. At the national level, the governments should strengthen mechanisms for international technical cooperation.

24. With respect to the "El Niño" phenomenon:

- Specifically, WMO should support the governments of the region that are interested in conducting further research on this current and its effect on the availability of water resources in the hemisphere. In particular, it will be important to draw up mathematical models that will allow for the inclusion of climate as a variable associated with the phenomenon, in models for predicting river runoff currents. In this regard, horizontal cooperation between countries interested in conducting such studies should be encouraged.

25. With respect to the dissemination of information:

1. International agencies should identify communication and access networks, such as Internet, that facilitate the flow of information through networks such as the Inter-American Water Resources Network (IWRN) and REPIDISCA.
2. ECLAC should consider including in its programme of work the identification of ways and means for compiling and disseminating information on economic tools for the management of natural resources and water resources, as well as other actions linked to water resources management.
3. The international agencies should make an effort to publicize meetings relating to water resources and seek a way to make it possible for such meetings to be held jointly.
4. International agencies should promote adequate means for the collection, processing and dissemination of data relating to water resources.

Recommendations to governments and international agencies:

26. With respect to regional programmes to support training, monitoring and research, the following should be promoted and strengthened:

1. technical training, at all levels, in the area of water resources;
2. cooperation between institutions that offer courses on water resources and hydrology;
3. research on technologies related to water resources and the environment;
4. supervision of water resources through fora and monitoring networks, such as GEMS/Agua;
5. research on climate change and water resources, and
6. institutional strengthening of national and regional training centers that specialize in environment and water resources, with emphasis on integrated water resources management.

Annex 1

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Annex 2

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

1. *Provisional programme*
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