

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/22/4(Part III)/Add.3
7 March 2003
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Twenty-second session
Beirut, 14-17 April 2003

Item 6 (c-iii) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS
ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION AT
ITS TWENTY-FIRST SESSION**

The strengthening of cooperation between member countries in the field of shared water resources: resolution 233 (XXI)

Summary

1. Resolution 233 (XXI) urges member countries to increase the level of their cooperation in the field of water resources and, in particular, with regard to shared groundwater, water-related legislation and the management of demand, by creating within the Committee on Water Resources working parties specialized in the various technical aspects of the field, with a view to harmonizing methodology with respect to the management of such resources.

2. In view of the number of the fields in which it is possible to strengthen cooperation between member countries, the secretariat aimed to implement the aforementioned resolution by means of a wide variety of activities, including the following:

(a) The establishment of a working group for the rational management of water resources in the countries of Western Asia, in which most member countries were involved. Two specialized subgroups dealt with the basic indicators for integrated water management and the management of demand for water;

(b) The establishment of working groups and projects for bilateral cooperation between member countries in respect of specific shared water resources;

(c) The organization of studies and training activities aimed at building national capacities, strengthening cooperation between member countries and standardizing working methods in the management of water resources.

A. ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

*Working group for the rational management of water resources
and working groups for other fields*

3. The working group for the rational management of water resources was established in 2001. The group has the responsibility of studying the institutional, legislative and economic reforms in water sectors which have been implemented by various member countries in the past few years. The aim is to summarize

03-0187

the outcomes and make them available to all member countries, who could benefit therefrom when formulating relevant reform policies. It was expected that the activities of the group would lead to the production of a reference study summarizing the experiences of member countries in that field. As part of the process of preparing that study, the secretariat organized the Consultative Meeting on the Establishment of a Working Group Responsible for the Optimum Use of Water Resources, that was held in Beirut on 12 and 13 November 2001. In the course of that Meeting, the framework for the study was agreed and responsibilities were assigned to the working group.

4. The draft study on the optimum use of water resources in Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) member countries was submitted in document E/ESCWA/ENR/2002/IG.1/4 to the fifth session of the Committee on Water Resources, which was held in Beirut from 30 October to 1 November 2002. Committee members were requested to review the contents of the document and to provide ESCWA with their comments and any information or developments that they wished to include. The aforementioned study is currently being completed in the light of the comments of Committee members and of the available additional information.

5. It should be noted that the fifth session of the Committee on Water Resources recommended that two other working groups should be established, the first to deal with the basic indicators for integrated water management in the ESCWA member countries, and the second to deal with management of the demand for water in those countries. Those two working groups will be established within the forthcoming few months.

B. BILATERAL COOPERATION PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY MEMBER COUNTRIES
WITH RESPECT TO SPECIFIC SHARED WATER RESOURCES

1. *Project to manage the basalt groundwater aquifer shared by
the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan*

6. In February 2002, ESCWA organized an expert group meeting which was attended by specialists from the Ministry of Irrigation of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation of Jordan. The aim of the meeting was to agree upon the elements of a project designed to develop a joint planning concept for the basalt groundwater aquifer shared by the two countries, with a view to improving its management and increasing its utility. The project will be funded as part of the technical cooperation project being jointly implemented by ESCWA and the German Government. At the aforementioned meeting, agreement was reached on the elements of the project and on a working mechanism for implementation of the activities agreed upon by the parties. The memorandum of understanding formulated by ESCWA covered the establishment of a working group that would comprise experts from both countries and have responsibility for carrying out those activities. The observations of both parties were taken into account when the final form of the memorandum was produced, and the secretariat has been officially notified of the approval thereof of the authorities in the Syrian Arab Republic. Notification of the approval of the Jordanian authorities has yet to be received.

2. *An evaluation of the water resources of the Jordan River basin*

7. A team of water experts from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic carried out a study financed by the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA), as part of a project to evaluate water resources throughout the world. The team issued its report on the study in November 2002.

3. *Working group on joint planning for the waters of the
southern basin of the Al-Kabir River*

8. The secretariat initiated contacts with the relevant parties in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic with a view to implementing a project to develop a model for the joint planning of exploitation of the waters of this river.

4. *Project for the management of shared groundwater
in the Mediterranean region*

9. It is expected that the secretariat will obtain funding from the United Nations Development Account for a project aimed at building the capacities of institutions involved in the management of water resources in member countries with a Mediterranean coastline and enabling them to use, manage and protect their shared groundwater resources. This project also aims to develop and test various mechanisms for cooperation in the management of such resources on the basis of a comprehensive review of the relevant expertise within and beyond the region. Preparations for this project began in 2000; it will be carried out by a number of research centres in member countries in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The secretariat carried out the following activities in preparation for the project:

(a) Funding was provided for a brief preliminary study on shared groundwater resources in the Mediterranean region;

(b) In February 2002 a consultative meeting was held in cooperation with UNESCO, in order to discuss the preliminary results of the study and agree the broad outlines of a project proposal for submission to donors;

(c) The aforementioned project proposal was prepared and submitted to the United Nations Development Account in July 2002, and provisionally approved for funding. Additional consultations will be held with the executive parties in order to identify the responsibilities to be undertaken by each. Implementation will begin in 2004 and continue for two years.

5. *A project for the management of the aquifer shared by Oman
and the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi)*

10. The secretariat initiated contacts in respect of this project with the relevant parties in each country. Funding will also be provided by the German Government technical cooperation programme. The project remains in the course of preparation.

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDIES AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR THE BUILDING OF
NATIONAL CAPACITIES, STRENGTHENING COOPERATION BETWEEN
MEMBER COUNTRIES AND STANDARDIZING WORKING METHODS
IN THE MANAGEMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

1. *The evaluation of the legal aspects of the management of
shared water resources in the ESCWA region*

11. The secretariat prepared a study in which the legal aspects of the management of shared water resources in the ESCWA region were evaluated. The study presented a comprehensive exposition of the international agreements relating to three river basins, namely, the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, and made clear the need for cooperation mechanisms in respect of rivers and shared groundwater basins in the ESCWA region if possible tensions are to be reduced and the optimal exploitation and management of those resources are to be achieved. The study also made it clear that shared water resources may constitute an appropriate basis for cooperation that extends beyond the simple division of waters to the building of wide social and economic interests between the countries of ESCWA.

2. *Training courses in water dispute management*

12. With funding from and in coordination with the German Technical Cooperation Agency, the secretariat organized workshops on the management of disputes and accommodation of diverse interests in

the use of shared water resources, with a view to strengthening the capacities in that field of decision makers and water experts.

3. *Consultative guide to groundwater management*

13. This guide is being prepared by ESCWA as a practical tool for the standardization of practices relating to the management of water resources in member countries. It aims to establish certain concepts and modern water resource management practices, suitably adapted to regional conditions. A draft of the guide will be presented at a workshop on the legal aspects of the development and management of groundwater resources in the ESCWA region which is scheduled for the second half of June 2003, in Beirut. It will then be submitted for approval to the sixth session of the Committee on Water Resources.
