Media Contacts

The UN System in Brief: Working for Freshwater

Lead Agencies for the International Year of Freshwater

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA)

Through its Water Management Branch, DESA provides project execution and policy advisory services at national and regional levels in integrated water resource management. While providing policy advice to Member States, DESA stresses the importance of water as a key resource to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

UN/DESA: serves as secretariat for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, where freshwater issues are sometimes dealt with in conjunction with other issues, such as international conflicts or economic deliberations; serves as secretariat for the System-wide Subcommittee on Water Resources; houses the UN Secretariat's main freshwater expertise; manages a large programme of technical cooperation in integrated water resources management and ground-water development, including management of international waters; helps governments and local entities design development strategies and build national capacities in freshwater resources planning and management; conducts needs assessments and develops water resources management programmes; plays a key role in promoting inter-agency cooperation around water issues; and launches advocacy campaigns for partnership-building.

Areas of expertise: Sustainable development, economic and social development
Key publications and resources: Agenda 21 (Ch. 18), Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management
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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Water is a major priority for UNESCO, which has taken a multidisciplinary approach to help provide the scientific knowledge, technological training, sociological studies, policy advice and ethical guidelines required to manage the resource efficiently, fairly and environmentally.

Key water programmes include:
• The International Hydrological Programme (IHP) (http://www.unesco.org/water/ihp.html), which has diverse projects concerning the hydrological sciences and water management, including: transboundary aquifers, international river basin monitoring and management, groundwater studies particularly in arid zones, urban water management, water governance especially concerning the role of women, studies concerning water history and civilization, the ethics of nonrenewable water mining, in addition to the prevention and resolution of water conflicts between and within countries. IHP has also developed training and research institutes around the world, including the UNESCO-IHP Institute for Water Education in Delft (The Netherlands), Centre for Water in the Humid Tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama), the Regional Centre for Urban Water Management, based in Tehran (Iran), and the International Research and Training Centre on Erosion and Sedimentation in China;

• The International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, which operates under the auspices of UNESCO jointly with WMO;

• The World Water Assessment Programme (http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap), which brings together the work of 23 UN agencies to better assess the world's water resources. These findings will be released periodically in the World Water Development Report, the first edition of which will be launched at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003.

Areas of expertise: UNESCO's activities in the natural sciences cover diverse fields, such as oceanography, freshwater, environmental education, biodiversity, coastal zones and geology.
Key publications and resources: World Water Development Report (to be released in March 2003), a series of technical reports on water management, reports on the state of the world's freshwater resources, a major analytical report on the prevention and resolution of water conflicts between and within states (to be released in March 2003).
Website: www.unesco.org/water

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Lead Agency for World Water Day 2003

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Freshwater is one of UNEP's priority areas of concern. Through its work on water policy and strategy, UNEP addresses the issues of inadequate quantity, declining quality and insufficient access, while also promoting a better understanding of the linkages between freshwater, coastal areas and the marine environment. Working with other UN partners, and through the newly established UNEP Collaborating Centre on Water for the Environment, UNEP assists countries to integrate environmental considerations into efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and in attaining the environmentally related water and sanitation targets agreed to at WSSD and other recent international forums.

Key water-related activities include: the Global International Waters Assessment; the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities; the Global Environmental Monitoring System's freshwater quality programme, GEMS/WATER; and the Dams and Development Project.

Areas of expertise: Environmental monitoring, assessment, early-warning systems, policy development, law, water, marine pollution, biodiversity, chemicals, hazardous waste, energy, atmosphere, economic instruments, trade, sustainable consumption, cleaner production, urbanization.
Key publications and resources: Global Environment Outlook, Regional Environment Outlooks, UNEPAnnual Reports, Our Planet magazine, Earth Report (TV series on BBC), Vital Water Graphics (in 2003), Atlas of International Freshwater Agreements (in 2003), Global Groundwater Assessment (in 2003), Children in the New Millennium: Environmental Impact on Health.
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Other UN System

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

FAO has been active in water development ever since its inception in 1945. The three basic concerns shaping FAO's water programme are: to produce more food with less water; to protect water quality and the environment, including human health; and to close the food consumption and production gap, particularly in Africa. The Organization has a focus on "more crop for the drop" – irrigation methods for higher water productivity – and related technology transfer.

FAO's specific water activities include: water resources inventories and evaluation; development of a global GIS-based water information system; a programme for water policy formulation and river basin planning; improved water use technologies and management tools; a programme on water development and irrigation expansion; and water quality control, conservation and environmental effects projects.

Areas of expertise: Nutrition, agricultural productivity, water development, animal and plant production for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, nutrition, food standards and commodities, economic and social policy, investment and trade
Key publications and resources: The State of Food and Agriculture, World Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030 - Summary Report, Land-water Linkages in Rural Watersheds
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International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

IAEA is mandated to assist its Member States in using nuclear science and technology for various peaceful purposes, including food and agriculture, human health, marine and terrestrial environments, and water resources. The water resource programme of IAEA (http://www.iaea.org/programmes/ripc/IH) aims to increase the global hydrological knowledge base, including a better understanding of the water cycle, and scientific capacity of developing countries to assess water resources. A cooperative project with UNESCO and others has been launched recently to prepare a global assessment of fossil groundwater resources based upon isotope data on the origin and age of groundwater.

IAEAhas invested about US$ 30 million in 150 projects in 60 countries to improve water management using isotope hydrology. These projects have helped provide hydrological information on surface and groundwater resources and strengthened human capacity as well as infrastructure for water quality and water resource assessment and management.

Areas of expertise: Nuclear science and technology as it relates to food and agriculture, human health, marine and terrestrial environments, and water resources
Key publications and resources: IAEABulletin, factsheets

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United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The overall objective of UNICEF's Water, Environment and Sanitation (WES) Programme is to contribute to child survival, protection and development by supporting efforts to achieve universal access to safe water supply and environmental sanitation services as a basic right and by promoting the behavioural changes essential to realizing the full benefits from such services – in short, to improve the hygiene conditions in children's and families' environments.

UNICEF presently supports WES projects in nearly 80 countries with 200 professional staff, both international and national. UNICEF's support for water supply and sanitation started in the late 1960s as a response to drought emergencies. Since then, UNICEF has supported government programmes for the provision of a minimum level of water supply and sanitation for those most in need.

Areas of expertise: Children's protection, water, environment and sanitation, education, health, nutrition, humanitarian emergency response
Key publications and resources: State of the World's Children, UNICEF Annual Report, "We the Children": the Secretary-General's report
Website: www.unicef.org/programme/wes/
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United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UNIFEM promotes gender equality and women's social, economic and political empowerment. It works to ensure the participation of women in all levels of development planning and practice and acts as a catalyst within the UN system, supporting efforts that link the needs and concerns of women to critical issues on the national, regional and global agendas, such as water. UNIFEM's work focuses on strengthening women's economic capacity as entrepreneurs and producers, increasing women's participation in the decision-making processes that shape their lives and promoting women's human rights.

Areas of expertise: Financial and technical assistance, women's human rights, economic security, gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment
Key publications and resources: Annual Report, Picturing a Life Free of Violence, Progress of the World's Women
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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Water plays a pivotal role for sustainable development, including poverty reduction. UNDP focuses on supporting activities at the country level that aim to increase access to safe water and sanitation by 2015 and to halt the unsustainable exploitation of water resources.

In the past decade, UNDP has maintained a marked presence in water issues in 90 countries through its water programmes. As one of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) implementing agencies, it works to sustainably manage international water resources, including lakes and river basins. UNDP's GEF-funded Small Grants Programme has already provided grants for over 3,900 community-level projects.

UNDP and partners have established the Water and Sanitation Programme (www.wsp.org); Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (www.wsscc.org) and Global Water Partnership (www.gwpforum.org), as well as capacity building for integrated management of water resources and service delivery (www.cap-net.org).

Areas of expertise: UNDP works in 166 countries, helping to find solutions to unsustainable water management practices including water supply and sanitation.
Key publications and resources: UNDP-GEF Biological Diversity Projects; Ecological Sanitation for Food Security; Water Governance Strategy; Water and Sustainable Development
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United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)

UNFIP, which was established by the UN Secretary-General in March 1998, serves as the operational arm of the Secretary-General in the partnership between the UN system and the UN Foundation (UNF) – the public charity responsible for administering Ted Turner's $1 billion contribution in support of UN causes. The UNF/UNFIP partnership focuses on four priority areas: women and population; children's health; peace, security and human rights; and the environment.

UNFIP also promotes new UN partnerships and alliances with a variety of sources, including companies and foundations, in furtherance of the Millennium Development Goals. This includes facilitating dialogues between key civil society actors and the UN system with a view to developing innovative collaborations.

In the area of water, in June 2002, UNFIP facilitated a roundtable discussion on partnerships for global water alliances conducted by UNDP and PriceWaterhouseCoopers. The aim of this meeting was to explore

creative solutions to the global water crisis and the achievement of the millennium goals related to water and sanitation through partnerships that engage a broad range of participants, including the UN, other multilateral organizations, governments, the private sector, foundations, NGOs and water associations. This meeting was unique in that it was the first such discussion to bring interested stakeholders together to address water and sanitation challenges in the context of the millennium goals.

Areas of expertise: Partnerships between UN and civil society, including private sector and foundations.
Key publications and resources: Final Report of Roundtable on Partnerships for Global Water Alliances; Towards Global Partnerships (General Assembly report – A/56/323, Oct. 2001).
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United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

A central focus of UN-HABITAT's work is sanitation and access to adequate water, especially for suburban agriculture and for municipal drinking water.

Among the organization's key water initiatives are the following:
• The Urban Management Programme, which is active in 120 cities in 57 developing countries. This is a long-term technical cooperation programme to strengthen the contribution that cities and towns make towards human development, including economic growth, social development, reduction of poverty and improvement of environmental quality. Partners include the World Bank, UNDP and others;
• Managing Water for Africa, which addresses different aspects of water for Africa's largest cities in collaboration with UNEP. It is directed towards promoting a demand-side perspective of water management and water pollution control methods, gender mainstreaming, and improvement of water access for urban poor and peri-urban areas;
•A new regional programme, Water for Asian Cities, will promote pro-poor investments in water and sanitation to support the Millennium Development Goals. It was launched in May 2002 (www.un-urbanwater.net).

Areas of expertise: Human settlements, urbanization, social services, urban poverty management, environment, infrastructure
Key publications and resources: The State of the World's Cities, Global Report on Human Settlements, UN HABITAT in Action, HABITAT Debate newsletter
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United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

UNIDO helps developing countries and economies in transition in their fight against marginalization in today's globalized world. It mobilizes knowledge, skills, information and technology to promote productive employment, a competitive economy and a sound environment.

UNIDO's water strategy focuses on promoting sound management of water resources and environmental conservation, maintaining environmental quality and preserving the productivity of river basins, coastal areas and large marine ecosystems, as well as the health and well-being of those populations dependent on and living in them.

UNIDO water-related projects currently include a cleaner production programme for the fishing industry in Chile, the transfer of environmentally sound technology in the Danube River Basin – involving five Central and Eastern European countries – and a mercury pollution reduction programme in Tanzania.

Areas of expertise: Industrial water pollution control, integrated coastal zone planning and management; control of water pollution by toxic accumulative metals (e.g mercury, arsenic), cleaner production technologies and biodiversity conservation
Key publications: Industrial Development Report 2002/2003; The Gulf of Guinea Large Marine Ecosystems – Environmental Forcing and Sustainable Development of Marine Resources; World Water Development Report – Chapters on Water and Industry, Water and Energy (due in March 2003)
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United Nations University (UNU)

UNU's International Network on Water, Environment and Health (INWEH) is a research and capacity-development centre contributing to the resolution of global water problems, particularly in the developing world. INWEH was established in late 1996, with financial support from the Government of Canada, and is headquartered at McMaster University, in Hamilton, Canada. INWEH advocates the need for integrated capacity development as an essential prerequisite for integrated water resource management. It establishes training centres and undertakes collaborative, demand-driven projects on river basins, urban water systems and marine coastal waters in support of initiatives in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

Projects to date have included the development of a Lake Malawi watershed decision-support model; establishment of a water quality monitoring programme for Lake Victoria; groundwater pollution assessments in Jordan and the Gaza Strip; a nitrate pollution (blue-baby syndrome) study in Syria; design and implementation of a sustainable wastewater

biosolids programme in northern Mexico; and development of a global curriculum for the UN Water Virtual Learning Centre.

Areas of expertise: Water management capacity
Key publications and resources: Capacity Building at UNU/INWEH: The Four Pillars Approach, Metadata Report
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Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)

The WSSCC was set up in 1990 by virtue of a United Nations General Assembly resolution to maintain the momentum of the International Decade for Water Supply and Sanitation in the 1980s and to enhance collaboration among developing and developed countries. In 2001, the WSSCC launched the 'WASH' campaign (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) – a global advocacy effort involving all partners and supporters of the Council.

Areas of expertise: Water supply, sanitation, hygiene awareness, poverty alleviation, gender issues
Key publications and resources: WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All, Global Water and Sanitation Assessment Report (with WHO/UNICEF), Vision 21– Water for People
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World Bank

The World Bank water programmes and its water unit reflect the Bank's long-term water resources management policy, focusing on freshwater, coastal and marine resource management, integrating an ecological dimension into water resources management from the upper watershed to the coastal zone. Water resources management projects include investments for: urban, rural, industrial and agricultural water supplies; sewerage treatment; flood control; irrigation and drainage; hydropower; and navigation projects. Activities in catchment areas can include forestry, mining and construction, and industrial discharge and agricultural runoff.

The projects fall into 10 main areas: coastal and marine management; dams and reservoirs; groundwater; irrigation and drainage; river basin management; transboundary water management; water and environment; water economics and institutions; water supply and sanitation; and watershed management.

Areas of expertise: Development assistance, economic growth, poverty eradication
Key publications and resources: World Development Report, World Development Indicators, Global Development Finance, Global Economic Prospects
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World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is mandated to maintain health as a central focus of water and sanitation development, which is reflected in its water programme (http://www.who.int/peh). In water, WHO's objectives include to emphasize the provision of health-related guidance in support of sustainable development in Member States and to target its water and sanitation activities on specific health goals.

WHO collaborates with other UN organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and UNEP, as well as with the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (http://www.wsscc.org). The Joint Water Supply and Sanitation Monitoring Programme – a WHO/UNICEF programme – supports individual countries in strengthening their water supply and sanitation monitoring capability.

Areas of expertise: Developing health systems, health care management, mortality, morbidity, disability, poverty eradication, disease control, risk education
Key publications and resources: World Health Risk Report 2002 – Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life, Water Resource Management Series, Environmental Effects of Chemicals
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World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

WMO's Hydrology and Water Resources Programme concentrates on promoting worldwide cooperation in the assessment of water resources and the development of hydrological networks and services, including data collection and processing, hydrological forecasting and warnings, and the supply of meteorological and hydrological data for design purposes.

WMO's education and training programmes as well as its technical cooperation activities include hydrological components which aim to bridge the gap between the national services of developing and developed countries.

WMO supports capacity building at the regional level through activities such as the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS) – a system for acquiring hydrological and related data on a regional basis and making them available to decision-makers, engineers and resource managers.

Areas of expertise: Atmosphere, weather, climate, assessment of water resources, operational hydrology, early warning against natural disasters, and related geophysical sciences
Key publications and resources: WMO Bulletin, Annual Statement on the Status of the Global Climate, World Climate News
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Regional Economic Commissions

The Regional Commissions support a wide range of water activities: technical cooperation, policy advice, research, analysis, data/statistics, exchange of best practices, meetings, regional integration and coordination, publications, networking and training. See links below for specific areas of involvement.

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Areas of expertise: Fostering sustainable development
Key publications and resources: Economic Report on Africa; Transboundary River/Lake Basin Water Development in Africa: Prospects, Problems and Achievements; Population, Agriculture and Environment in Africa, Some Key Indicators; Harnessing Technologies for Sustainable Development
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Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

Areas of expertise: Environment, human settlements, transport, environment and health
Key publications and resources: Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; The Protocol on Water and Health: What It Is, Why It Matters; Protection of Transboundary Waters: Guidance for Policy- and Decision-making; Protection and Sustainable Use of Waters
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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Areas of expertise: Environment, human settlements and natural resources
Key publications and resources: Globalization and Development; CEPAL Review; Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean
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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Areas of expertise: Environment, natural resources, population, rural and urban development
Key publications and resources: Guidebook to Water Resources Use and Management in Asia and the Pacific; Integrated Water Resource Management in Asia and the Pacific; Guidelines in Water and Sustainable Development, Principles and Policy Options; ESCAP News Bulletins, UN Focus Newsletter, UN Asia-Pacific News
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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Areas of expertise: Agriculture, environment coordination and natural resources
Key publications and resources: Water Management: From Conflict to Cooperation; ESCWA Update (newsletter)
Website: www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sectoral/agriculture.htm, www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/environment/ecu.html or www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/environment/nrs.html
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