

Water and Environmental Resources Management

How to cope with our ever increasing demands?

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Since the Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development in 1993 and The Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment in 1992, the international community has stressed the need to develop approaches that safeguard the access of future generations to our scarce natural resources. Hence, concepts such as sustainable development and wise use of natural resources have become distinct parts of planning and management activities, worldwide. In addition, new concepts such as capacity building and integrated approaches to planning and management have become regular components of natural resources development programmes. This integrated approach relates to: the occurrence, quantity and quality of natural resources; their spatial distribution; the interests of users and economic sectors; the institutional arrangements; and strategy formulation under the complete set of national objectives and constraints.

How can we solve our imminent water problems and at the same time preserve our natural resources for coming generations? This is the essential question to address when we implement the concept of "Sustainable Development" to water and environmental resources management. Which technologies, methodologies, management approaches and strategies should we develop to cope with these issues and how can we create the institutional and human resources capacity to implement these strategies and policies?

A supply oriented strategy solely aimed at developing more water resources is bound to meet serious environmental, financial and social constraints. Instead new approaches should be developed to manage our demands through a combination of technical measures (such as water saving technology), administrative measures (such as licensing), economic incentives (tradeable rights, water pricing, taxing, subsidies, etc.), legal incentives (laws, regulations, sanctions), and awareness raising and promotion. When a wise strategy is chosen that strikes a balance between supply and demand management it is possible to set out a scenario for a sustainable future that combines economic development with a healthy environment, both for the present and for future generations.

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