

**SUMMARY OF OAS NATIONAL FOCAL POINT MEETING
AUGUST 11 – 12, 2007;
GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA**

Preliminary Draft by Department of Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION:

The meeting was opened by Mr. Federico Franco, Vice-Minister of Environment of Guatemala. In his comments, Mr. Franco noted the importance of supporting cooperation in addressing environmental and water management issues, noting that enough time has been spent on diagnosis, and there was an urgent need to increase action that took account of the needs of the rural populations and address poverty. In his opening remarks, Alfonso Quiñonez reiterated his commitment to translating integrated water resource management from principles to practices. This first meeting of the OAS National Focal Points looked to identify a shared program of cooperation among governmental representatives, and identify 2-3 concrete areas of cooperation that could be delivered within the first six months.

The meeting began with a review of the responses received to date regarding possible areas of cooperation and focus of the OAS national focal point process. These included:

Module 1 – Information Sharing	
<i>Strengthening the informational link between surface and groundwater systems</i>	<i>67 percent of respondents</i>
<i>Developing economic-hydrological modeling approaches to help isolate and anticipate water supply and demand trends and challenges within water basins</i>	<i>67 percent of respondents</i>
Module 2 – Technical Capacity Building	
<i>Linking climate related vulnerability assessments of water basins with risk reduction measures intended to increase resilience and build climate adaptation</i>	<i>60 percent of respondents</i>
Module 3 – Scale of Cooperation	<i>Sub-regional (60 percent of respondents).</i>
Module 4 – Policy-related Work	
<i>Supporting water related governance indicators</i>	<i>53 percent of respondents</i>

SESSION ONE: INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Presentations were made by CONAE, the United States, and St. Lucia, identifying existing areas of work in remote sensing and others of CONAE, the results of a national water assessment for the United States, and the highlighting of some gaps in data, as well as time gaps, that made aggregate level data difficult to translate into on-the-ground applications for small-island developing states. (See the power point presentations at: <http://www.oas.org/dsd/Water/Meeting.htm>)

It was noted that the use of modern, rapid remote sensing instruments make possible the identification of tools for spatial information management and the coordination of informational and technological efforts.

In the discussions, Argentina reiterated that its satellite information and other data are freely available, and CONAE offered to provide technical training and other capacity-building work to countries. The US

noted that while its assessments focus on national water-use, analysis of international research in USGS was conducted on a case-by-case basis.

Several participants noted that data from remote sensing continued to improve decision-making. However, despite the comprehensive scope of data-bases provided by UNESCO, the World Meteorological Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNEP and others, gaps in data still existed. In addition, participants noted that advances in remote sensing and satellite imagery were not intended to replace but complement on-the-ground monitoring and assessment of water quantity and quality, in order to address acute problems and build water management capacity. Several participants noted the importance of ensuring that data was received and could be used by local communities and municipalities in addressing water management challenges.

Several participants underscored the importance of ensuring that information systems examined broader links between freshwater services and uses, including the link between water and the environment, surface water and groundwater, and different water-related ecosystem services, including the important relationship between freshwater and biodiversity. It was noted that UNESCO supported several activities related to water and ecosystem uses, including a research program at the Universidad de La Plata regarding ecosystem uses.

In terms of the geographic scope of information, several participants suggested that information systems focus on transboundary water-basins and identification of “hotspots”, and that a pilot project could be initiated in that regard.

In terms of procedures for data and information sharing, participants stressed the importance of using existing information systems, making specific reference to the regional and central nodes established through the Deltamerica project (completed in 2006), seeking new initiatives such as the harmonization of possible data sets.

On this issue, one delegation proposed to harmonize standards and methodologies through the information systems. For this purpose, it was suggested that documents and agreements resulting from the World Water Forum held in Mexico, including the work prepared for the regional document on Water in the Americas, could be valuable. Several countries underscored the need to consider inputs from the different agencies, according to their specific areas of expertise, so as to avoid duplication of efforts and promote synergies.

Participants also noted the need to include local actors (communities and municipalities) in information systems related to water resources management, providing them with equipment and technical training to access information. It was mentioned that while some countries have access to satellite imagery, they require technical training for the analysis of information.

Proposals:

- An offer of technical assistance from CONAE regarding the sharing of information systems and related training and capacity-building actions;
- To prepare an inventory of available information systems, including installed capacity, the geographic coverage of satellite systems, and the terms of licensing and other uses related to accessing information;
- To include information on national water plans, including technical information related to their development and implementation;

- To make the inventory of different information systems available through the regional and central nodes, established through the completion of the DELTAmerica project.
- To harmonize the rules regarding information management;

The OAS Department of Sustainable Development established in 2005 two on-line data-bases regarding national water legislation from the countries of the region (please see <http://www.oas.org/dsd/EnvironmentLaw/WaterLaw/home.htm>) as well as a data-base regarding specific clean-water drinking standards at the national level, with a reference to international standards from the World Health Organization (see annex one). Although these inventories are incomplete, they may be a useful starting point for the inventories identified in Sessions One and Two.

SECOND SESSION: CLIMATE CHANGE AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The focal point of Argentina helped to introduce the session on climate change, by noting the relevant paragraphs within the OAS Declaration of Santa Cruz, and in particular paragraphs 21, 22 and 33. In particular, paragraph 33 emphasized the need to strengthen existing cooperation mechanisms, and to address climate change and early warning systems. It was proposed that OAS National Focal Points continues to work on these mandates, with particular emphasis on strengthening regional efforts and horizontal cooperation. It was also suggested that national focal points compare and assess national water plans at federal level, and to make these national plans available to public. Finally, it was suggested that opportunities exist towards harmonizing institutional frameworks related to water, and to identify common areas within existing institutional frameworks in which the OAS can facilitate concrete projects.

The focal point of Jamaica noted several key areas of the Millennium Development Goals related to environmental sustainability, and towards increasing the number of people with access to safe drinking water. These objectives and the MDG timetable appear to be off-target because of institutional and professional shortcomings. A major challenge for many countries related to natural disasters, and the strong links between hurricanes and tropical storms, and the impacts on communities through severe flooding and other impacts. It was proposed that the OAS National Focal Points could contribute to identifying the links between climate change and water management – including technical capacity building measures – by establishing an inventory and analysis of documented successes and failures. These lessons-learned could be updated and made accessible to the public.

The focal point of Chile noted that all countries of the Americas collectively suffer from climate change. More work should be done to emphasize the scope of climate-change problems within each country, and in particular, how climate change relates to people. This could include providing an analytical framework to identify the problem, and to identify how climate-related impacts differ between and within countries, depending on numerous variables, including the impacts of glacier melting. In the particular area of climate change and water, the OAS National Focal Points should focus on different options and capacities to adapt to climate-related changes within watersheds. This should be done in terms of (a) organizing information; (b) soliciting input from communities and individuals regarding the range of solutions; and (c) supporting action.

It was noted that Session Two was closely related to Session One, and that timely and robust information should provide the basis for identifying technical capacity building gaps and needs.

Costa Rica indicated the need to advance policies to reach a neutral carbon balance, with commitments at every level, from individuals to municipalities, to NGO's, and as a government policy. In turn, Argentina called for the building up of networks in the Americas linking water management with climate change and its impacts, advancing through these networks the monitoring of the climate change process. On this issue, the delegate from Peru noted the need to train decision makers, and the need in general of

small countries for capacity building so as to address the issue of climate change. Uruguay indicated the need for integrated hydrological models, including groundwater, allowing for the incorporation of climate change issues so as to better prepare and adapt to its impacts.

Several participants provided examples of initiatives at sub-regional level in the sharing of training and technical capacity-building, including Jamaica working with St. Lucia on monitoring programs, with Barbados on fresh water resource management initiatives; and numerous partnerships through the UNESCO IHP initiative in a range of projects and programs, including water education, and climate-related adaptation strategies. Interconnection of Theme 1 with this discussion – information has everything to do with technical capacity building. In addressing adaptation, a priority should include the capacity of water institutions to adapt to climate change pressures.

There were a number of suggestions regarding priority areas for training and capacity-building. Many participants reiterated the importance of supporting public participation in identifying priorities. In defining public participation, participants noted that in addition to overall management of the water sector by federal jurisdictions, efforts should encompass all aspects of society: provincial governments, civil society, universities etc.

The role of public education was noted, and different delivery mechanisms were identified to convey information to the public, including through internet systems, audio-visual presentations, and the sharing of educational curriculum into online courses.

There are several OAS-supported educational and training programs that could help facilitate water-related educational initiatives, including the on-line educational portal (<http://www.educoea.org/>) and various OAS-related scholarships.

One aspect of the educational component entailed strengthening the link between water and economics, including improving the understanding of the economic valuation of water and national income accounting systems supported by the UN Statistical Office, helping to ensure that such information helps policy-makers in a practical way, particularly through water-tariff levels. In addition, the water-economic link could support enhanced transparency of water-related subsidies that affect prices and conservation-related efforts. In this regard, it was suggested that success stories could include practical applications of Payment for Ecosystem Services as they relate to watershed management.

Many participants noted the important programs of UNESCO in water management, including advancing applied research involving universities, research centers and the public in general.

Some specific problems and issues were discussed, including:

- Problems of increased salinity affecting coastal aquifers;
- In assessing climate-vulnerability and adaptation measures, in addition to including input from local communities, it was important to include technical information from the engineering sector, in order to help in revising infrastructure;

Several participants underscored the need to compare measures being enacted at national levels so as to integrate most effective technical capacity building options into own national plans, and to ensure that national plans address local needs that deliver support to communities and individuals, particularly poor communities.

Proposals:

- Identify within countries which areas could be supported through the offering of training and related capacity-building at the national, regional and international levels. This could be provided by the grouping of different kinds of training, from technical areas like data and geo-informatics, to the linking of water and economics in models and analysis, water laws and institutional lessons.

SESSION THREE: POLICY-RELATED WORK

The focal point of Mexico outlined the experience of Mexico in developing its national water plan (2007-2011), including the assessments of different water quality, uses by sector and region, and strategies forward. (See power point attached, Annex).

Several countries highlighted progresses made in terms of their water legislation (national laws on IWRM), particularly Nicaragua and Paraguay which only recently approved their Water Laws, but noting the urgent need of support for implementation. Other countries indicated the existing difficulties in modernizing their laws, and the need for cooperation from those countries that have advanced on this issue.

Some delegates indicated the importance in further advancing National Water Plans (México, Brasil, Argentina) while others noted the need to prepare these plans, and the on-going efforts in building capacities for this purpose, noting the importance of knowing the lessons learned from those countries that have advanced on this issue.

The focal point of the Dominican Republic noted the importance of good governance, including the importance of developing conflict resolution mechanisms, supporting public participation mechanisms and advancing environmental accounting systems. The OAS national focal point process should identify practical applications of public participation, including assessing regional comparability of different governance indicators, and providing information on water-access related information. It was suggested that the OAS process could develop guidelines to be used at the national level.

The focal point of Brazil stressed the critical role of public and institutional participation, including ensuring participation in the development of laws and standards. It was indicated that environmental education remained an important tool to raise the consciousness within civil society about the importance of water management, and the engagement of different partnerships, such as the example of engaging the Catholic Church in raising issues related to water conservation and integrated water resource management. Governance should be measured by success in meeting this end.

In discussing the role of indicators of water governance, it was noted that the OAS could share preexisting governance indicators, including those applied in the La Plata project, or governance indicators developed elsewhere. In examining different indicators, it was proposed that the OAS national focal point process examine the possible harmonization of simple criteria used for governance indicators. Other indicators were noted, including food-agricultural governance as an indicator.

In looking at governance indicators, several participants noted the political problems associated with water governance, and there is recognition of the need to include political mandates within national water plans. A proposal was made to include parliamentarians and members of congress in future OAS national focal points meetings.

It was noted that water governance includes political, social, economic and administrative systems dealing with management and regulation at the national level. Among the key lessons related to governance are the following five lessons:

- Water governance depends on social and economic conditions
- Participation processes are long and drawn out
- Governance is not strictly internal – subject to external pressures.
- Civil society / educational spheres aware of effectiveness of governance
- Providing / increasing allocation of water can turn a government from ‘bad’ to ‘good.’

CLOSING SESSION: NEXT STEPS:

The OAS National Focal Point process should focus on a number of specific and concrete technical areas. One focal point suggested that the OAS develop with the focal points a guide involving different governmental ministries involved in water management with different steps to strengthen public participation initiatives. Among the issues that could be addressed within guidelines is access to water-related information provisions.

Several participants suggested that the regional nodes within the Deltamerica web-site be used as a primary source to advance access to information.

Several participants reiterated the importance of countries developing national water plans. The OAS national focal point process should be a source of information and exchange of technical and other experiences, for those countries that are preparing or revising their National Plans, as well as countries wishing to share information on their experiences. .

OAS/DSD distributed a matrix (attached), which incorporates the following comments from participants.

- Section B should include references to the training of local populations. Argentina reiterated its pledge to provide technical capacity building and training;
- success stories should emphasize practical lessons in public participation;
- activities related to the harmonization and modernization of data should examine data needs and gaps in information;
- The OAS should distribute a revised survey results be considered on a sub-regional basis to establish priorities at the sub-regional level. *As a follow-up, the Department is attaching with this report a revised survey, which provides responses to date at the sub-regional level, as well as provides the opportunity for focal points to provide additional information.*

DDS/OEA would like to thank the Government of Guatemala for the warm hospitality and support for the development of this meeting, and to the Government of Austria for the important financial contribution that made the meeting possible.