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**recursos naturales e infraestructura**

**W**ater governance for  
development and sustainability

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## Abstract

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This document aims to identify characteristics of water institutions which promote the sustainable integration of water, both as a resource and as service, into socioeconomic development. As this does not depend only on formal institutional factors, such as legislation and organizational structure, there are also references to dynamic conditions, such as socioeconomic circumstances and the quality of the administration, summarized in the concept of governance, understood as the capability of a social system to mobilize energies, in a coherent manner, for the sustainable development of water resources. As human society becomes ever more complex and the intensity of human impact on natural resources becomes more severe, the need to integrate the different elements of water management becomes imperative. It is for this reason that effective water governance will be more and more closely linked to integrated water resources management. The specific objectives of this paper are: (i) to contribute to focusing the regional debate on those aspects of water institutions and macroeconomic policies which are particularly critical for Latin American and Caribbean countries; (ii) to promote the formulation of a regional position that genuinely reflects its situation, visions, aspirations and problems; (iii) to promote a critical and balanced analysis of legislation, regulatory frameworks and public policies for water resources management and provision of related public services; and (iv) to make available in English a summary of the water-related research carried out by the Division of Natural Resources and Infrastructure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).



## I. Introduction

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In the document “Towards Water Security: A Framework for Action”, prepared by the Global Water Partnership (GWP) for presentation at the Second World Water Forum (The Hague, the Netherlands, 17 to 22 March 2000), it was stated that “The water crisis is mainly a crisis of governance. Working towards effective water governance requires an enabling environment and appropriate institutional structures that allow stakeholders to work together for effective water management. Financial practices must be realigned to support the sustainable use of water resources” (GWP, 2000a). The Ministerial Declaration made at the same event highlighted this point of view and demanded “Governing water wisely: to ensure good governance, so that the involvement of the public and the interests of all stakeholders are included in the management of water resources”.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit (New York, 6 to 8 September 2000), the heads of State and government resolved to adopt in all environmental actions a new ethic of conservation and stewardship, and, in particular, decided “To stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources, by developing water management strategies at the regional, national and local levels, which promote both equitable access and adequate supplies”. In the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the International Conference on Freshwater “Water: a Key to Sustainable Development” (Bonn, Germany, 3 to 7 December 2001), the ministers with responsibilities for water affairs, environment and development agreed that “Each country should have in place applicable arrangements for the governance of water affairs at all levels and, where appropriate, accelerate water sector reforms”.

In the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August to 4 September 2002), it is emphasized that “Good governance within each country and at the international level is essential for sustainable development”. The Plan also called to “Promote priority action by Governments, with the support of all stakeholders, in water management and capacity-building” and to “Develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans”.

In the Ministerial Declaration made at the Third World Water Forum (Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka, Japan, 16 to 23 March 2003), the ministers and heads of delegation declared that “Whilst efforts being undertaken so far on water resources development and management should be continued and strengthened, we recognize that good governance, capacity building and financing are of the utmost importance to succeed in our efforts. In this context, we will promote integrated water resources management”.

Finally, in the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the Fourth World Water Forum (Mexico City, Mexico, 16 to 22 March 2006), the ministers reaffirmed “the critical importance of water, in particular freshwater, for all aspects on sustainable development” as well as their “commitment to achieve the internationally agreed goals on integrated water resources management ..., access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, agreed upon in Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation”. They emphasized in particular “that Governments have the primary role in promoting improved access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation, sustainable and secure tenure, and adequate shelter, through improved governance at all levels and appropriate enabling environments and regulatory frameworks, adopting a pro-poor approach and with the active involvement of all stakeholders”.

ECLAC has long maintained that “reference to a water shortage in our region in the absolute physical sense is not very appropriate ... There is no denying, however, that water management systems are often poorly organized if not non-existent” (ECLAC, 1997), and that “From the perspective of ECLAC, at this point in time, the ‘water crisis’ is more of an institutional crisis than a water crisis as such” (ECLAC, 2001a). According to Dourojeanni and Jouravlev (2001), “Initiatives that are intended to create governance capacities for water resources management form an unavoidable part on government agendas. All of the countries of the region are facing constant challenges, and as a result need to come up with legislative and organizational answers that can prevent and resolve growing conflicts over water use, as well as mitigate extreme natural phenomena. Paradoxically, while conflicts stemming from water are on the increase, it appears that in some countries of the region, there has been a reduction in the relative ability that used to exist to resolve them. This state of affairs is described by this study as a ‘crisis of governance’ in water management”.

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