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Invited Paper on Theme 3

**Progress Towards a
Comprehensive Freshwater Assessment**

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PROGRESS TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE FRESHWATER ASSESSMENT

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Mr chairman, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to be able to address this audience and to give a progress report on the Comprehensive Freshwater Assessment.

In the UNCED-process, as well as at the Dublin Conference, the global concern over freshwater was expressed and was manifested in the Dublin Statement. The most extensive chapter of Agenda 21, agreed at UNCED in Rio 1992, is the freshwater chapter, Chapter 18. There are links to water issues in other chapters of Agenda 21 as well, the most prominent ones are the two chapters on Managing fragile ecosystems: Chapter 12 on Combating desertification and drought, and Chapter 13 on Sustainable Mountain Development. Links also exist in Chapter 17, the chapter on Oceans, all kinds of seas, and coastal areas.

CSD among its functions as decided by the General Assembly (GA/A/RES/47/191) has to monitor progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. This is done periodically for chapters dealing with Social and Economic Dimensions and those dealing with Conservation and Management of Resources for Development. Chapter 18, the "Freshwater Chapter" was one of those on the CSD-agenda at the 1994 session for reviewing, together with the Chapters on Human Health and on Human Settlement Development.

The need for a holistic and more comprehensive approach in dealing with water resources and water problems made the CSD then, based on results at the Noordwijk Conference on Drinking Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation, a ministerial conference that also served as a preparatory process for the second session of CSD, 1994, call for *"a comprehensive assessment of freshwater resources, with the aim of identifying the availability of such resources, making projections of future needs, and identifying problems to be considered by the special session of the General Assembly in 1997"*. The CSD urged UNEP, FAO, UNIDO, WHO, WMO, UNESCO, UNDP, the World Bank and other relevant UN bodies as well as NGOs to strengthen their efforts in this endeavour. The CSD also invited Governments to cooperate actively with inputs to the process, specifically identifying the Government of Sweden. The Stockholm Environment Institute was commissioned by the Swedish government to actively work in the project. A Steering Committee for the project was formed, consisting of relevant UN-organizations, co-chaired by the Secretary of the UN ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Director of SEI. The Secretary of the Steering Committee is the Executive Secretary of the SEI Comprehensive freshwater assessment programme.

The ongoing work consists of a number of different parts. It will be presented in a main report, accompanied by supporting documents, including special studies, giving the detailed background information. The main report will consist of four different parts:

- a statement explaining the urgent need for such an assessment;
- a description of the availability, quality and variability of freshwater resources of the world as well as their use. The description will deal with surface water as well as ground water. It will elucidate the issues of the driving forces as well as existing problem cluster areas;
- an investigation of current and future water needs that must be faced at the river basin level, be it local, national or international;

- strategies and options for the concerted sustainable development of freshwater resources of the world.

As the main report, to be "readable" and "digestible", needs to be fairly short, background material will be provided in background reports. Some specific aspects that will need special emphasis will be dealt with in special studies and published as such accompanying the report and the background documents.

The work within the Assessment has proceeded according to the estimated schedule. An extensive background document, that will serve as a rationale and also give the background to the assessment has been prepared and will be edited prior to being published.

Part 1 of the main report is a shared responsibility between SEI and UN and it is now in preparation. It exists in draft form. It will give the background and the rational, "set the scene", for the rest of the assessment and also indicate where new strategies will be needed.

Part 2, where the UN-agencies have the main responsibility with WMO and UNESCO as task managers, is almost finalised. An expert group consisting of agency representatives and key international scientists and research organizations has met twice. The experts, including UN-experts, have provided existing data and background material on water availability and use, for the agricultural, industrial and domestic sectors, surface water as well as ground water, and water quality including health aspects. Time constraints make it necessary to use existing data even though data are not always of good quality or may even be lacking. This is particularly true when it comes to water quality data. The material is now compiled into an extensive background document that is currently being edited. Based on this extensive background material a draft of the chapter for the final report, prepared by Mr Denis Davis, now exists in a final draft.

Part 3 to a certain extent takes its point of departure from part 2 as this part will deal with the future, indicated by scenarios. It is, however, important to mention that neither chapter 2 nor chapter 3 will give detailed data, country by country.

Within the work on part 3, where SEI is the task manager with UNEP taking a special responsibility for the river basin application, a workshop has been held. At the workshop, experts from the UN-system, in their personal capacity, as well as independent experts discussed water futures and different scenarios from regional and sectoral perspectives. The outcome of this workshop together with scenario applications will form the basis for the chapter and the background report to go with it. The background report exists as a first draft. The chapter to be in the final report exists as an outline and is now in preparation.

Parts 2 and 3 will form the basis for part 4, which will be an important part of the report. Discussions on structure and outline of that part have started and will be intensified during early spring (northern hemisphere). A workshop at which different policy options, existing as well as future, will be discussed by UN-agency representatives and eminent experts from different parts of the world will take place 18-19 May. A draft of this chapter, that needs to build on Chapters 1-3, the outcome of the workshop, and other documentation of the project including commissioned papers, will be prepared during the summer (northern hemisphere).

All foreseen commissioned, special topic, papers are well under way, though at different stages. A paper on "International Freshwater Resources: From Conflicts to Co-operation" exists in a first draft, has been discussed during a seminar this spring (northern hemisphere) and is now under revision based on comments at the seminar and other comments. Other papers, such as one on Water and Gender, one on Water and Economics and one on Urban Water Resources Management exist in outlines and will, when existing in a more complete form, be presented at seminars later this year.

So far information sessions at governmental level have been held at the desertification convention negotiations and during luncheon meetings at the CSD. A process for an intergovernmental review of it is currently being discussed but no decision has been taken as yet. The documentation will be reviewed, as it exists, by the Committee of Natural Resources, according to the CSD recommendation. Further scientific reviews will be performed by ICSU/SCOWAR, the World Water Council and other fora. This "participatory process" is an important part of the Assessment process.