

A1.1 Preparation of a national water resources policy

Characteristics

A National Water Resources Policy sets goals and objectives for the management of water resources at the national scale and includes policies for regions, catchments, shared or transboundary water resources, and inter-basin transfers, all within an IWRM framework. It addresses both the quantity and quality aspects of both surface and groundwater resources and also deals with delivery of water services.

A national policy may include matters of jurisdiction and delegation and items like: the extent to which water management is decentralised or consolidated, the use of economic incentives, capacity building to meet institutional challenges, and the monitoring and control to reduce ecosystem degradation. Policies entail measures which require investments and their costs and benefits should be considered before their adoption.

The IWRM approach moves away from single sector water planning to multi-objective planning and integrated planning of land and water resources, recognising the wider social economic and development goals and entailing cross-sectoral coordination. It is a dynamic approach. The IWRM approach is often set within a catchment (watershed) framework ([B1.04](#)). Therefore, the process of policy making for IWRM requires extensive consultation as well as raising the awareness of the importance of integration among policy makers, stakeholders, and the general public. The sustainability of resources and policies should be a central goal.

Policy reform may be incremental in recognition of changing political and resource priorities, or may be able to respond to major shifts in external circumstances, which enable comprehensive redevelopment of water resources policies.

Lessons learned

Policies are more useful if they are designed proactively, not just as a short-term response to a crisis (although a crisis may provide an opportunity for policy change). By failing to anticipate change, and taking a narrow sectoral view, water resources policy development has frequently ignored both macroeconomic and development needs.

Some key points for effective integrated policy making are:

- Ensure policies clarify the roles of government and other stakeholders in achieving overall goals and especially define the role of government as regulator, as organiser of the participatory process and as a last resort adjudicator in cases of conflict.
- Identify and set priorities for key water resources issues to ensure a focused policy.
- Recognise that considering water as a social and economic good means designing policies to allocate resources to where they offer the greatest value to society, starting with the fulfilment of basic needs.
- Make explicit in the policy the links between land use and other economic activities.
- Engage stakeholders in policy dialogue, recognising potential conflicts and the need for tools for conflict resolution
- Recognise the importance of subsidiarity, so that water resource allocation decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level
- Take into account trade-offs between short term costs and long term gains
Make functional arrangements and cost allocation explicit.