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**Implementation of the water policy and strategy of the
United Nations Environment Programme for the
period 2009–2011**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present document provides a report on progress in the implementation of the water policy and strategy of the United Nations Environment Programme for the period 2007–2012 adopted by the Governing Council by its decision 24/16 A of 9 February 2007. It provides information on activities undertaken pursuant to the policy and strategy since the twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council, and lessons learned from its implementation. Given that the water policy and strategy conclude in 2012, it also suggests actions for a way forward.

* UNEP/GCSS.XII/1.

Introduction

1. The water policy and strategy of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the period 2007–2012, adopted by the UNEP Governing Council in its decision 24/16 A of 9 February 2007, provides a framework for implementing water-related activities within the six cross-cutting thematic priorities of the UNEP medium-term strategy for 2010–2013.

2. Using the water policy and strategy, UNEP has undertaken numerous activities to promote the adoption of the ecosystem approach in water management in order to improve water security and human livelihood. The present report highlights some of the main results achieved for the period 2009–2011. They are presented below in accordance with strategy's components: assessment, management and cooperation.

I. Assessment

3. The objectives of the assessment component of the water policy and strategy are to provide a knowledge base from which to develop, manage, monitor and evaluate water resources programmes and to encourage the integration of sustainable water resource management into development policies and processes; to raise awareness and inform stakeholders (including the public) of water resource issues and concerns, including demand; and to assess threats, trends and emerging issues with regard to which future action may be needed.

4. UNEP undertook several assessments to explain to managers, practitioners and planners why they should adopt the ecosystem approach with a view to strengthening the environmental component of integrated water resources management, thereby contributing to sound economic and social development and reducing poverty while addressing risks. The related results are highlighted below.

A. Awareness raised of the critical role of ecosystems in water management

5. UNEP, in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) led the 2010 and 2011 World Water Day celebrations across the United Nations system. The theme of the 2010 celebrations, held in Nairobi, was “Clean water for a healthy world” and that of the 2011 celebrations, held in Cape Town, South Africa, “Water for cities: responding to the urban challenge”. As a result of increased awareness of the contribution of ecosystems to maintaining good water quality, UNEP was requested by the United Nations mechanism for inter-agency coordination on water resources (UN-Water) to lead the development of water quality guidelines for ecosystems.

6. Through the UNEP-led status report on the application of integrated approaches to water resources management, to be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and under the auspices of UN-Water, UNEP is contributing to global awareness of the need to maintain the momentum in terms of improving water resources management in the face of increasing challenges such as population growth, urbanization and uncertainties stemming from climate change and disasters. This work is drawing attention to ecosystem degradation, environmental hot spots, vulnerable areas and the role of the ecosystem approach in water management.

7. Since the twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council, several UNEP publications promoting the ecosystem approach to water resources management, climate change adaptation and water and food security were launched, receiving wide media coverage. On the basis of its publication on an ecosystem services approach to water and food security, UNEP was invited to contribute to the development of the outcome statements of World Water Week 2011 and the international conference in Bonn, Germany, in November 2011 to examine the nexus of water, energy and food security. Other publications are being translated and used extensively by Governments and other stakeholders as reference materials to inform policy development and planning.

8. Through the work of UNEP and its partners, the important role of ecosystems in water management is increasingly recognized, as demonstrated by the high profile of ecosystems on the agenda of global water events. For example, UNEP provided four keynote addresses during the past two world water weeks, enabling it to influence global policy. UNEP was requested to address regional meetings on water, such as the Africa Water Week, the Asia-Pacific Water Summit and those of the Arab Water Council, thereby influencing policy at the regional and subregional levels.

B. Knowledge base for water resources management improved

9. The “Africa Environment Outlook” series and *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment* raised awareness of the looming water crisis. Consequently, the African Ministers’ Council on Water requested UNEP to prepare an assessment for the water sector to enable it to take informed decisions.

The *Africa Water Atlas* was prepared and received wide coverage in the international media, triggering the Council to request its technical committees to identify priority areas needing focused attention. UNEP also received requests from regional economic commissions and river basin organizations, such as the Zambezi Watercourse Commission, to highlight the situation in their spheres of competence.

10. The UNEP Global Environment Monitoring System/Water Programme is an international water quality monitoring programme aimed at understanding inland water quality issues around the world, where countries voluntarily provide data from their national monitoring programmes that are used in many United Nations publications. To enable the programme to continue providing this information, the Government of Canada pledged Can\$2.5 million over the coming five years to strengthen national-level activities such as assuring data quality and conducting performance evaluations of samples.

11. The Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme, implemented jointly by UNEP, the International Hydrological Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other partners, developed indicators for the five main transboundary water bodies (river basins, lake basins, aquifers, large marine ecosystems and open oceans) and a tracking tool to assess impact of human interventions. These activities are assisting planning to use resources more effectively and tackle international conflicts over shared resources. The tool will be used to perform an initial global baseline assessment, which will then be followed by a second assessment in which hot spots will be identified, causal chain analysis performed and forecasting undertaken, so as to produce information for the allocation of funding and distribution of information to the Global Environment Facility transboundary diagnostic analysis and strategic action programmes for transboundary water systems.

C. Information provided on threats, trends and emerging issues

12. UNEP continues to conduct water assessments that are being used to make decisions by Governments, organizations and civil society. The vulnerability of the Mau Forest, a water tower in Kenya, was identified using information provided in the publication *Africa: Atlas of our Changing Environment*. Consequently, a comprehensive and high-profile programme for the restoration of the forest was developed by the Government of Kenya, UNEP and other partners. The programme, which is housed in the Prime Minister's office, is leading Governments to pay greater attention to environmental issues.

II. Management

13. The management component of the water policy and strategy focuses on the three integrated water resources management pillars (environment, economic and social) and aims at strengthening the enabling environment; strengthening institutional functions that allow effective interaction between various administrative levels and stakeholders; and improving access to management instruments. Because the activities contributing to these pillars are cross-cutting, the results from UNEP activities in this component are presented according to the selected thematic areas in the water policy and strategy below.

A. Mainstreaming of ecosystems in the development process

14. Countries are developing integrated water resources management plans in response to the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A 2006 analysis of the development of these plans revealed that the ecosystems component was weak. Since then, UNEP has supported the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo to develop such plans and strengthen the ecosystems component. The plans were used to establish structures for promoting participatory water resources management, including national stakeholder partnerships that are operational in all the countries, and to mobilize resources from development partners to improve water resources management. UNEP also facilitated the formulation of Liberia's first national water policy, which now forms the cornerstone of its sustainable water resources management approach.

B. Restoration of ecosystems

15. Countries are increasingly recognizing the relevance of ecosystems for water security in water resources management. The ecosystem approach in water resources management is, however, relatively new and most managers and practitioners have inadequate knowledge of how ecosystems function, what they contribute to water resources management and how they should be managed to enable them to continue providing ecosystem services. This problem is compounded by the lack and

inaccessibility of relevant tools, meaning that practices continue that cause significant ecosystem degradation.

16. To develop the required tools, UNEP worked with UN-Water and formed partnerships with many institutions. The training manuals and guidelines developed are being used to strengthen the capacity of water managers and practitioners in ecosystems management at the global and local levels. For example, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (the German Agency for International Cooperation) used a publication on rainwater harvesting to train Moroccan water officials, and the Gansu Research Institute for Water Conservancy used an ecosystems manual in its global training programme.

17. To achieve tangible results, water managers and practitioners should implement the plans developed, use the guidelines and apply the knowledge and technical skills acquired to effect change on the ground. UNEP is implementing place-based projects to demonstrate the application of tools in the marshlands of Iraq, Lake Tondano in Indonesia, the Tana River in Kenya and Lake Faguibine in Mali.

18. Since 2004, UNEP has been supporting the Government of Iraq in the lengthy process of rehabilitating its degraded marshlands. Through awareness-raising activities, capacity-building and demonstrations, work has been undertaken to enhance water quality, restore wetlands and improve access to water and sanitation facilities using environmentally sound technologies. The project phases (2004–2009) resulted in the successful provision of access to safe water to 25,000 people, confirming the benefits of ecosystem restoration through pilot projects. At the same time, however, the project identified a need to prepare a long-term sustainable management plan.

19. Based on those findings, a new joint project with UNESCO was launched in 2009 using the operational guidelines for the implementation of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage as guidance for the management planning of the Iraqi marshlands to protect the area's unique environmental, biological, historical and cultural values. The accession of Iraq to the Convention on Biological Diversity promoted biological diversity as a national priority. The expected outputs of this project will be included in the long-term management and conservation plan for the marshlands.

20. A project to restore the ecosystem of Lake Faguibine is being implemented through activities such as clearing silted river channels, stabilizing riverbanks and sand dunes, strengthening the capacity of communities to participate in the development of the subcatchment management plan and water management tools, and extending monitoring networks. The project's impact can clearly be seen in the earlier-than-anticipated arrival of greater quantities of water into the lake, resulting in the communities' productivity and livelihood improving. Local communities are increasingly involved in modifying their use of rangeland, fisheries resources and the development of the subcatchment management plan.

21. The hydrological model prepared and ecosystems valuation and training undertaken as part of the project are being used to extend the hydrological monitoring network and to develop the subcatchment management plan. Subcatchment management groups were formed. At the national level, the project led to a dialogue with key line ministries, and an office was established to consider the long-term challenges associated with the lake's ecosystem. The positive results enabled UNEP to leverage over US\$6 million from the Central Bank of West African States to implement the next phase of the project.

22. In Lake Tondano, Indonesia, stakeholders developed a management programme following an ecosystem approach, replacing the previous uncoordinated management efforts that had minimal impact on the ground. The new programme reduced overlap and built synergies between actors, with government institutions and the private sector pledging to support the implementation of the programme within their resources.

23. In Guatemala, with the support of the private sector, UNEP collaborated with the Government of Guatemala and the Eastern University Centre of the University of San Carlos to raise awareness of the contribution of rainwater harvesting to ecosystems management and climate change adaptation in Guatemala. The project was implemented through the creation of a regional rainwater capacity-building centre at the University; the development of modules on rainwater harvesting training techniques; the training of some 300 local public institutions (representing the ministries of environment, agriculture and health, among others), women and community leaders, and cooperative organizations in rainwater harvesting techniques; and the building of demonstration rainwater harvesting systems at the University.

24. The project raised awareness, resulting in the inclusion of a rainwater harvesting training programme in the university curriculum and the consolidation of long-lasting partnerships between environmental authorities and local and regional councils. In addition, the Department Development Council approved Q1.6 million or some US\$203,000, much more than the budget for the entire project, for the promotion and implementation of rainwater harvesting projects, including training, in 2012.

25. In Kenya, the Tana catchment area developed a management strategy that is being implemented at the local level by water resource users associations. With the support of UNEP and its partners, the Ekalakala and Mathauta water resource users associations developed their subcatchment management plans using an ecosystem approach. The community and the Tana catchment area contributed financially to the implementation of the plans. Access to water was improved through the construction of sand dams to reduce the siltation of the Tana River. These initiatives also provide water for agriculture and development, thereby improving human well-being.

26. Chicualacuala, Mozambique, suffers from floods and droughts caused by extreme weather events. To build communities' capacity to cope with climate change, UNEP, in partnership with UN-Habitat and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, helped the community to develop a water resources management plan based on downscaled global climate change models, and raised awareness through a field visit to Kenya. The visit demonstrated the importance of storing water in various ways (soil, tanks and aquifers) and identified relevant technologies. The young people trained in rainwater harvesting acquired skills that they now use outside the project area to construct rainwater-harvesting facilities for residents, thereby improving access to water and creating employment in an area where jobs are scarce.

C. Water demand management and water conservation

27. UNEP is implementing water demand management and efficiency projects to ensure that highly water-dependent industries, water suppliers and Governments in developing countries promote improved water management through changes in operations and supply chains and public-private partnerships. In collaboration with the CEO Water Mandate of the Global Compact, and as part of a public-private initiative, UNEP is assisting companies to develop and implement water sustainability policies and practices. Capacity-building workshops were held in South-East Asia (Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam) and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico). In Asia, the improved capacity was used to analyse the water footprint in Viet Nam, as a water management tool and to develop pilot projects in the apparel industry. In Latin America, it was used to develop and implement water footprint pilot projects.

28. In 2007, UNEP established the International Resource Panel to provide scientific impetus for decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation. The Panel reports received wide media coverage and many downloads, indicating a great demand for such information. Two additional reports, one on decoupling economic growth from water use and the other on quantifying water productivity, are being prepared for consideration at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, in 2012.

29. A number of other relevant publications are also available. The chapter on water of the report *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication* shows how accelerated investment in water-dependent ecosystems, water infrastructure, water efficiency and management, coupled with effective policies, can boost water and food security, improve human health and promote economic growth. The publication *Water Footprint and Corporate Water Accounting for Resource Efficiency* provides an overview of public and private initiatives, in addition to the methods and tools for water accounting and efficiency worldwide, while *The Bioenergy and Water Nexus* provides recommendations and outlines options in respect of bioenergy in support of a green economy. Information from these reports is being used to prepare a report for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, given that one of the Conference's themes is the green economy.

D. Transboundary water resources management

30. Most rivers are shared by more than one country. Accordingly, there is a need for cooperative management in the form of, for example, institutions based on sound legal agreements, to manage the resources. Such institutions are key building blocks for environmental governance. The significant progress notwithstanding, river basin organizations continue to lack an adequate mechanism for sharing experiences and lessons learned that can also be used to articulate their priorities.

31. UNEP and the African Ministers' Council on Water held a consultative meeting for African river basin organizations on the margins of the first International Environment Forum for Basin

Organisations, in Bangkok in October 2011. The meeting stimulated dialogue between river basin organizations on their contribution to international processes, such as the sixth World Water Forum and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Since no global instrument specifically addresses freshwater resources, the African river basin organizations identified the ratification of the 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses as an urgent matter, deeming the Convention an important tool for strengthening cooperation and promoting the sustainable management of transboundary waters across more than 50 transboundary rivers in Africa. Consequently, the meeting participants and the Council requested UNEP to promote the ratification of the convention and to consider providing secretariat services

32. UNEP continued to implement a binational project on integrated water resources management in the Lake Titicaca, Desaguadero River, Poopo, Coipasa saltmarsh system. The project, intended to assess and update pollutant discharge levels, mainstreamed ecosystems in the binational information system that guides decision-making on water quality for drinking, fishing and agricultural purposes. As a result of the awareness-raising activities undertaken, a new culture of trust, collaboration, transparency and mutual support was fostered, as indicated by the willingness of the Governments of Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia to share information. Stakeholders (local and indigenous communities, national and local academic and research institutions) now actively participate in the management of the lake. The training of laboratory staff and South-South cooperation between countries enabled laboratories to analyse their samples domestically instead of sending them abroad, thus cutting costs. The results of the water quality surveys conducted as part of the project are used for joint planning for future investment to tackle water pollution.

33. In the Caspian Sea, oil and gas exploitation are booming and the risk of incidents is increasing daily. UNEP, as the interim secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Teheran Convention), and in close consultation with the International Maritime Organization and major oil and gas companies assembled under the Oil Spill Preparedness Regional Initiative, supported the negotiations of the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Cooperation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents. After over five years of negotiations, the five littoral States (Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan) signed the Protocol in 2011. This is a significant achievement in a region where tensions are strong and agreements difficult to reach.

34. Two key publications, on integrated water resources management in transboundary basins and on ecosystem approaches in integrated water resources management, were released at the World Water Week in Stockholm in 2011. These stimulated discussions among stakeholders in river basin organizations on the application of integrated water resources management at this scale and the adoption of the ecosystem approach.

E. Environment and security: post-disaster management

35. At any point in time, there is conflict raging somewhere in the world that results in human suffering, economic loss and environmental degradation. During the process of recovery, the focus is normally on social and economic aspects with minimum consideration of environmental issues. Nevertheless, in an effort to change that mindset, UNEP conducted an assessment of water issues in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that was subsequently used by the Government to develop its post-conflict water policy and strategy.

36. In the Sudan, UNEP assessment work highlighted the risks that camps for internally displaced persons faced from groundwater depletion as a result of uncontrolled drinking water withdrawal. That resulted in a joint groundwater programme involving the United Nations Children's Fund, UNEP and non-governmental organizations to integrate monitoring of groundwater levels and withdrawals in their operations. The assessment results were used to raise funds to implement the recommendations made in the report.

37. UNEP also facilitated technical meetings and field visits involving senior policymakers and technical experts from South Africa and the Sudan to exchange water management lessons. That led to the adoption of integrated water resources management as a key concept in Sudanese water policy and the development of integrated water resources management plans in selected watersheds in Darfur, with plans to replicate the process in other areas. In Nigeria, the results of the UNEP assessment of pollution in Ogoniland are being used by the Government to plan remedial measures.

F. Infrastructure and sustainable development

38. The failure to address environmental and social concerns of large infrastructure projects has contributed to the degradation of ecosystems, loss of livelihood and a decline in human well-being. UNEP has been strengthening countries' capacity to consider ecosystems when planning new and

retrofitting old infrastructure. Three training manuals developed by UNEP, on comprehensive options assessment, environmental management plans and benefit-sharing in large infrastructure, were used to train senior government officials from the Southern African Development Community and East African Community at workshops in Gaborone and Mbabane. The manuals were incorporated into the training programme of Waternet, the largest training network on water in southern Africa, ensuring the sustainability of the initiative.

39. In addition, UNEP published a 10-year review of the report by the World Commission on Dams, entitled “The World Commission on Dams +10: Revisiting the Large Dam Controversy”, and conducted an online survey entitled “WCD+10: Uptake, impact and perspectives”. The material, presented during the 2010 World Water Week, stimulated further discussions on the sustainable development of dams. Several development partners expressed interest in supporting a new dialogue on dams, an issue that was considered at the international conference in Bonn in November 2011 on the nexus of water, energy and food security.

G. Promoting environmentally sustainable technologies

40. UNEP is promoting environmentally sustainable technologies to improve water use efficiency and sanitation. In Bauang, the Philippines, UNEP helped communities to install ecological sanitation toilets that do not use water. Urine, instead of inorganic fertilizer, is used in gardens and on farms to grow crops such as guava trees, not only reducing the cost of fertilizer but also linking urban and rural dwellers. The project site is recognized as an advanced city in terms of its use of decentralized and environmentally sustainable technologies for sanitation. It receives many visitors, including from abroad, meaning that its success stories are broadly disseminated. This best practice will be analysed with a view to scaling it up in other Asian countries where sanitation is a major challenge.

H. Climate change

41. Since 2010, UNEP has been implementing a project on adapting to water stress induced by climate change in the Nile basin, in partnership with the Nile Basin Initiative and the Global Water Partnership Eastern Africa. The project aims to reduce the impacts of too much and too little water. It is increasing the resilience of those ecosystems and economies that are most vulnerable to such stress by building key adaptive capacity and piloting adaptation in hot spots with technical, policy and financial interventions. The project is operational in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, the Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. The results of the assessment undertaken were used to identify vulnerable areas and launch pilot projects. In addition, awareness was raised of ecosystem-based climate change adaptation and the importance of stakeholder participation, enabling communities to develop projects on ecosystem-based adaptation.

42. As ecosystems regulate the impact of floods and droughts in a river basin, it is important to quantify their contribution to flood and drought attenuation by type for planning purposes. UNEP is implementing a project to evaluate the role of ecosystems in flow regulation in the Zambezi basin, and has developed a simple methodology for quantifying ecosystems’ natural flow-regulating functions. The methodology used and information acquired are being used by the Zambezi Watercourse Commission as a key input into its decision-support tool on dams to attenuate the impacts of floods and droughts in the basin. The project also stimulated research to quantify the regulatory function of ecosystems for planning and management purposes.

I. Capacity-building

43. Under a project on integrated water and coastal area management in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 training courses were conducted at the national and regional levels on specific issues such as water quality, river basin organizations, glaciology, hydrogeology and integrated water and coastal area management. The training courses targeted medium and high-level government officials and journalists. In the case of the latter, they are now better acquainted with water-related issues, and have created virtual platforms for sharing knowledge, discussion and networking. The news, reports or interviews that they publish and broadcast reach decision makers and help raise public awareness in the region. The communities, local municipal and environmental authorities of the Coco River basin (covering southern Honduras and northern Nicaragua) improved their planning capabilities, there is increased participation by stakeholders and the information collected is used for decision-making. Training manuals were also developed.

III. Cooperation

44. UNEP recognizes that it alone has limited capacity to implement all aspects of the water policy and strategy. To forge synergies with other agencies to enhance its impact and avoid duplication, UNEP cooperates with other institutions. It is an active member of UN-Water, whose main objective is to facilitate effective support to Member States towards their achievement of water and sanitation-related, time-bound goals, targets and actions as agreed by the international community, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

45. In addition to holding the vice-chairship of UN-Water, UNEP also chairs the UN-Water thematic priority area on water quality, the task force on water resources management and the task force on wastewater management. In the water quality sector, UNEP led the process of producing the UN-Water policy brief on water quality, which guides United Nations agencies and their partners on issues related to water quality.

46. In 2006, UNEP, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, prepared an analysis of the progress made in developing integrated water resources management plans in response to the Plan on Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development for the Commission on Sustainable Development. In 2010, UNEP was requested to assess progress in improving water management for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. This information is being used by Governments and subregional and regional groups in their discussions and consultations as they prepare for the Conference.

47. The *World Water Development Report* is prepared by United Nations agencies, led by the International Hydrological Programme, and discusses significant water issues. It is a primary source of information on emerging issues and is used to plan and implement water-related activities by the United Nations system, its partners and stakeholders. UNEP was responsible for preparing the ecosystems and water quality chapters of the fourth report, enabling it to influence policy at that level.

48. UNEP is also involved in implementing the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme, as described above.

IV. Lessons learned and the way forward

49. The water policy and strategy guiding UNEP water-related activities will end in 2012. During the implementation of the policy and strategy, UNEP, in line with its mandate, focused on the environmental aspects of water resources management. Between 2010 and 2012, implementation of the water policy and strategy focused on the areas of work set by the six medium-term strategy priority areas, meaning that it was implemented in a cross-cutting manner.

50. A review undertaken in June 2011 to compile lessons learned from the implementation of the water policy and strategy concluded that: the policy and strategy remained relevant to the issues and challenges facing the water sector; the policy and strategy were too broad and an operational strategy that focused UNEP interventions matching resources available at that time was essential; there was need to articulate the added value of the freshwater programme to the UNEP programme of work using a results-based approach; considering the limited resources of UNEP and its lack of presence at the national level, more communication was needed and partnerships should be established and/or strengthened; and it was essential to scale up and replicate projects.

51. The recent freshwater operational strategy focuses UNEP activities and lays greater emphasis on its responsiveness to critical contemporary issues such as climate change, ecosystem degradation, the consequences of rapid urbanization, the need to tackle inefficient use of resources, and the holistic management of water within the framework of the green economy. The new strategy falls within the available human and technical resources of UNEP and meets the need to development assistance more effectively within the comparative advantages and niche of UNEP, both within the United Nations family and in relation to other agencies.

52. The overall vision of the operational strategy is influenced by the goal of the water policy and strategy and the vision statement of the UNEP medium-term strategy, in addition to continuing efforts to make a transition to a green economy. A UNEP interdivisional water group set out the elements of the operational strategy for the period 2012–2016, with the following proposed long-term vision statement: “Well-managed, healthy freshwater systems support sustainable development and human well-being”.

53. Three strategic priorities define the framework for the operational strategy and describe its expected outcomes. The expected achievements under the three strategic priorities are:

(a) *Meeting the global water quality challenge:* The importance of reversing water quality degradation in the world's freshwater systems through an integrated approach is recognized by Governments, businesses and communities and steps initiated for its improvement;

(b) *Benefiting from aquatic ecosystems:* Services provided by ecosystems are recognized and valued as part of sustainable development and the benefits are shared equitably;

(c) *Building resilience to climate change through water management:* The capability to mitigate and adapt to future water-related hazards and risks facing ecosystem functions and human communities is strengthened and embedded into existing planning and management systems.

54. It is envisaged that, on the basis of this new operational strategy, the future implementation and reporting of the water policy and strategy will show greater impact in terms of outcomes.
