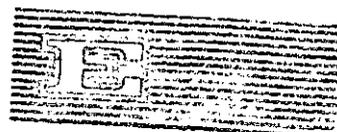


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PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAR DEL PLATA  
ACTION PLAN AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Note by the secretariat



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## A. BACKGROUND

At the eighteenth session of the Economic Commission for Latin America, held in La Paz in April 1979, it was resolved to entrust the permanent responsibility for the promotion of the implementation in Latin America of the Mar del Plata Action Plan adopted by the United Nations Conference on Water to a Sessional Committee which would have the following functions,

- "(i) to assume the central role referred to in the Mar del Plata Action Plan, by reviewing relevant aspects of the work carried out and planned in the various water programmes of the United Nations system and other international organizations;
- (ii) to encourage and undertake research to improve knowledge of water resources and the possibilities of developing them;
- (iii) to encourage and conduct training activities on topics related to water resources;" (Resolution 411 (XVIII). Annex 1).

In the same resolution it was decided to establish the following objectives for action by CEPAL in water resources,

- "(a) to support all efforts by governments for the development and sound use of water resources in the countries of the region;
- (b) to facilitate co-operation among these countries in water resource matters;
- (c) to improve the co-ordination of the work being carried out within the region in the field of water resources by the United Nations specialized agencies and other world or regional agencies;
- (d) to ensure, within the general aims set out above, the implementation of the recommendations of the Mar del Plata Action Plan;"

and to recommend that the CEPAL secretariat establish a permanent water resources unit within the secretariat to act as a focal point for all activities in the field of water.

## B. WORK IN THE FIELD OF WATER RESOURCES SINCE THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SESSIONAL COMMITTEE

For most of the period since the first meeting of the Sessional Committee, the work of the secretariat has concentrated on the organization of the new Water Unit, on the recruitment of additional staff and on substantive activities, including horizontal co-operation and information exchange, related to the forthcoming International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD), although some activity has been undertaken in all areas of the work programme.

/A unit

A unit has been formed within the Division of Natural Resources to act as the focal point for activities in the field of water within the secretariat. Three professional posts at a high technical level have been assigned to the Unit from the Division and an additional Regional Advisor position has been transferred from Headquarters. For most of the period under review, however, only one staff member has been assigned full-time to water activities and this has limited achievement of the goals of the work programme.

1. Review of general progress in the region in the application of the Mar del Plata Action Plan

At the first meeting of the Sessional Committee, in order to permit the Committee to carry out its responsibilities to support the efforts by governments in the development and sound use of water resources, the secretariat was asked to prepare a consolidated periodic report on progress in the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan in the Latin American region. The first report, due every four years for every other session of the Commission, is not required until the twentieth session of the Commission in 1983.

A precondition, however, for the preparation of the report is the collection of information from governments and the specialized agencies. In consequence, work has begun on the development of a standardized form in which the information required for the periodic report should be presented to the secretariat.

The secretariat has assisted the secretariat of the Committee of Natural Resources of the Economic and Social Council in developing a questionnaire on the "Present Status of Water Resources Development: Progress and Prospects since the United Nations Water Conference" pursuant to Economic and Social Council Resolution E/1979/68. The results of this questionnaire will form the basis for a report to the seventh regular biennial session of the Committee on Natural Resources in New York in May, 1981.<sup>1/</sup>

2. Review and co-ordination of the relevant aspects of the activities of the international agencies in the region

At the eighteenth session of the Commission, the Executive Secretary was requested "to take the necessary measures to carry out the programme of work in this field in collaboration with the appropriate specialized agencies" (Resolution 411 (XVIII)). Pursuant

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<sup>1/</sup> Eleven countries from the CEPAL region replied to this questionnaire: Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay.

/to this

to this request, the Executive Secretary of CEPAL convened the Inter-Secretariat Meeting on Water Resources in Latin America which was held at the headquarters of CEPAL in Santiago, Chile, on 23 and 24 June 1980.

The following were represented at the meeting: from the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); from the specialized agencies of the United Nations, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and its Pan-American Centre for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences (CEPIS); and from other intergovernmental organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

After a full exchange of information on the activities of the different organizations taking part in the meeting in the field of water resources in Latin America, areas of common interest were established in general terms and the importance was stressed of possessing an established system of a permanent nature to exchange information on these activities.<sup>2/</sup>

Given the importance of improving the system of co-ordination among international institutions connected with the field of water, it was agreed that the formation of a permanent inter-secretariat working group on water resources in Latin America would be the most adequate means of satisfying the petition of governments for better co-ordination of the relevant aspects of the regional activities of international institutions in the field of water.

The terms of reference, modus operandi and functions of the proposed permanent Inter-Secretariat Working Group were discussed and a copy of the terms proposed is attached as Annex 2.

Finally, it was agreed that the CEPAL secretariat should prepare a model format to assist the specialized agencies in the task of reporting to the sessional committee on the following aspects:

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<sup>2/</sup> A full report on the proceedings of the meeting is contained in the Report of the Inter-Secretariat Meeting on Water Resources in Latin America (E/CEPAL/G.1126; E/CEPAL/L.224).

- (a) the objectives and content of current and projected programmes;
- (b) the schedules established for achieving these objectives;
- (c) the resources, both of governments and of the agencies themselves, to carry them out.

3. Activities in support of the preparations for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade

At its eighteenth session the Commission entrusted the secretariat with the task of participating in the work carried out by PAHO/WHO with the aim of concerting the efforts of the countries of the region to ensure the fulfilment of the objectives of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD).

As the principal concern of the activities the secretariat was requested to:

- "(a) the study of the sources of financing for the investment required for the programmes prepared for the Decade and of the form in which internal resources of the countries can be channelled for that purpose, as well as whatever financial surpluses may be available;
- (b) the definition of criteria for the appraisal of projects ensuring that they incorporate the social benefits of such projects and take account of the nature of programmes for the more needy sectors of the population;
- (c) consultation with governments for the exchange of experience on progress achieved and difficulties encountered, and possibly the convening to special meetings of representatives of national and international agencies connected with the implementation of the programmes for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade."

The study mentioned in subparagraph (a) above has been completed and a report circulated to all countries and interested international agencies.<sup>3/</sup> The report concludes that (i) continued investment in the sector at past rates will not generally result in the achievement of the goals set by the countries of the region and certainly not in the complete provision of adequate services to the whole population of the region by the end of the Decade; (ii) if greater resources are to be invested in the sector during the Decade, the bulk of the financing required will have to be found within the countries. From the analysis

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<sup>3/</sup> "The Financial Demands of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade in Latin America" (E/CEPAL/G.1165).

made in the study it would seem that, in general, the countries of the region with larger or medium-sized economies will be capable of generating the required finance. In contrast, with some exceptions the smaller economies will have considerable difficulty, unless the overall amount of gross fixed capital formation is raised or a very high proportion is dedicated to the sector. (iii) External loans have assisted in the financing of water supply and sewerage investments in the past. In the period 1970-1977, loans received in the region for investment in the sector totalled some US\$ 1.700 million but were unevenly distributed between the countries. This sum was equivalent to 8 per cent of the total investment in the sector. If this proportion is maintained during the next decade, then the contribution required from external loans would reach some US\$ 378 million a year at a maximum compared to US\$ 209 million in the 1970's. The pattern of external financing in the past, heavily weighted to a few of the larger countries and to urban water supply and sewerage, must change if the goals in the smaller and less-developed countries and for the rural population are to be met. Such a shift in the pattern of lending may be difficult unless the management and operation of the sector is improved in many countries. (iv) Finally, it cannot be concluded that financial support or the lack of it is the only element which will determine the successful achievement of the goals of the Decade in the region. Of equal importance is good management which must include the adoption of stable policies toward the sector, viable long-term strategies for its development, the availability of adequate and trained staff and the development of rational management practices to conserve existing installations and maximize their utility.

In response to points (b) and (c), with the generous financial assistance of the Government of the Netherlands CEPAL has organized a seminar on horizontal co-operation for the IDWSSD in relation to the social, economic and financial aspects of water supply and sanitation programmes. The first session of this seminar was held at CEPAL headquarters in Santiago, Chile, from 9 to 13 March 1981, and a second session is planned for July in the CEPAL Office in Mexico City.<sup>4/</sup>

Finally, in co-operation with the Pan-American Health Organization CEPAL has organized a special event during the plenary session of the Commission to formally launch the IDWSSD in Latin America.<sup>5/</sup>

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<sup>4/</sup> The report on the first seminar will be available at the meeting of the Sessional Committee.

<sup>5/</sup> A joint report has been prepared on the water supply and sanitation situation in the region: "International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade: The situation in Latin America on the eve of the Decade and the prospects for the future (E/CEPAL/G.1166).

#### 4. Other activities of the water resources programme

The other activities of the water resources programme have focussed on the environmental dimensions of the administration of water resources. These have included participation in the project "Styles of Development and the Environment in Latin America", and in the current project "Horizontal Co-operation in Latin America related to Styles of Development and the Environment". In addition the secretariat has participated in various technical advisory missions, seminars, conferences and courses. A list of the documents prepared by the secretariat over the last two years is attached as Annex 3.

#### C. THE WORK PROGRAMME 1981-83

Concerning the possible elements of the work programme for the next two years, it would be useful to have recommendations on the priorities established at the eighteenth session of the Commission. Within these priorities emphasis will need to be maintained on,

- (i) the review of progress in the region in the application of the Mar del Plata Action Plan;
- (ii) the review and co-ordination of the relevant aspects of the regional activities of the international agencies;
- (iii) the identification of suitable areas for horizontal co-operation and the promotion of such co-operation;
- (iv) support of the activities of governments to incorporate the environmental dimension into water resource management; and
- (v) support of the activities of PAHO/WHO and of governments related to the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

##### 1. Review of progress in the region in the application of the Mar del Plata Action Plan

In order to carry out the mandate established at the eighteenth session to review, by means of a periodic report, the situation in water resource development and its prospects, as well as the extent to which the Committee's recommendations and resolutions have been fulfilled, a survey in some form will be required. For such a survey to be successful, prior agreement on the form and content would be advisable. During this period the staff of the secretariat will be visiting the different countries of the region to discuss the nature of the report and the development of an information system to provide the required input to the report. Consideration might also be given in the Committee, however, to the convening of a meeting of experts drawn from the different countries and the specialized agencies to recommend on the final form of the report and on the collection of the necessary information.

##### /2. Review

2. Review and co-ordination of the relevant aspects of the activities of the international agencies in the region

The agreement to recommend the formation of a permanent Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Water Resources for Latin America has been a good first step towards the improvement of the co-ordination of the activities of CEPAL and the specialized agencies. It is necessary that the Group should meet regularly and develop an active work programme directed to the achievement of the co-ordination of activities through the exchange of information on actual and planned programmes as well as the discussion of work areas of common interest. The first meeting of the Working Group is programmed to take place immediately following the conclusion of this Committee's discussions. Consideration should be given to the endorsement of the recommendations made at the Inter-Secretariat Meeting in Santiago particularly those relating to the mandate and functions of the Working Group (see Annex 2).

3. Identification of suitable areas for horizontal co-operation and the promotion of such co-operation

It is suggested that governments may wish to specify topics at the meeting to add to those already established as suitable areas for horizontal co-operation namely, co-operation in the economic, financial, social aspects of water supply and sanitation activities in support of the IDWSSD and in the environmental dimension of water resources management.

The most promising areas for horizontal co-operation appear to be related to overall water resource management, such as planning, improvement of information systems, organization, administration and other management activities related to the integrated management and use of the water resource to support economic and social development. Some specific areas for horizontal co-operation include the improvement of information systems for the integrated management of the water resources, management of the integrated development of the water resources in Andean watersheds and water quality monitoring and control.

The committee may wish to consider a more general modus operandi for horizontal co-operation in water resources which would permit the development and maintenance of an on-going programme of activities in the region.

/4. Support

4. Support of the activities of governments to incorporate the environmental dimension into water resource management

The incorporation of the full and proper consideration of the environmental dimension in water resources management has been a continuing concern of CEPAL for a number of years. Recently the results were published of a major study made of this problem by CEPAL.<sup>6/</sup> This publication should not, however, be interpreted as the culmination of these activities and the Committee may wish to consider the continuation of these activities, particularly in respect of the preparation of methodological manuals for the better incorporation of the consideration of the environment into the planning and management of water resource development projects.

5. Support of the activities of PAHO/WHO and of governments in relation to the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade

CEPAL has participated in the activities both of PAHO/WHO and of governments related to the preparations for the IDWSSD. This participation appears to have been of mutual benefit and it would seem to be advantageous to continue it at both the inter-agency and governmental levels.

In this respect, in its resolution proclaiming the IDWSSD (Resolution A/35/18) the General Assembly called upon "the regional commissions to review periodically, on the basis of national reports, the progress being made by the Governments of their respective regions in establishing national targets and carrying out programmes to attain those targets;". The Committee may wish to consider how best this should be done. One possibility would be to call for a special meeting under its auspices and to ask the secretariat, in co-operation with PAHO, to prepare a report on the progress observed towards the Decade's goals in the region as a basis for a review prior to the appraisal to be undertaken by the General Assembly at its fortieth Session.

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<sup>6/</sup> United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America, Water Management and Environment in Latin America, Water Development, Supply and Management, Volume 12, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1979.

Annex 1

411 (XVIII) ORGANIZATIONAL MEASURES TO PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE MAR DEL PLATA ACTION PLAN

The Economic Commission for Latin America,

Taking account of the recommendations and resolutions adopted by the United Nations Water Conference which go to make up the Mar del Plata Action Plan,

Considering that paragraph (a) of resolution VIII of the Action Plan requests the regional commissions "to play a central role in the promotion of intergovernmental co-operation" in the field of water resources in their respective regions and makes specific recommendations to them on areas of action and institutional arrangements for co-operation among the countries,

Bearing in mind that General Assembly resolution 32/158 "requests the regional commissions to strengthen and intensify their responsibilities in the water sector and, to this end, assign specific responsibilities to an intergovernmental committee within the regional commissions ... with the allocation, if necessary, of additional resources", thus confirming earlier decisions made by the United Nations Water Conference (resolution VIII) and the Economic and Social Council (resolution 2121 (LXIII)),

Taking account of the resolutions of the Regional Meeting on the Action Plan of the United Nations Water Conference (Santiago, 9-13 October 1978), which point out, inter alia: (i) the need for institutional machinery within CEPAL to make a systematic follow-up of the implementation of the Plan by the countries of the region; (ii) the desirability of mobilizing through a focal point in CEPAL, support to governments of the region by the secretariat of CEPAL and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, in order to promote the convergence of efforts; and (iii) the need to make maximum use of the existing intergovernmental machinery in order to avoid the dispersal of resources and ensure efficiency in the action to be carried out,

Recalling CEPAL resolution 379 (XVII) on natural resources,

Also recalling that General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system stated that the regional commissions "should exercise team leadership and responsibility for co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level",

1. Decides to promote the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan at the regional level by directly assuming concrete permanent responsibilities at its regular sessions, through a Sessional Committee;
2. Urges governments to send to all the sessions as a normal practice experts who are highly qualified to take part in this Committee;
3. Establishes the following objectives for action by CEPAL in the field of water;

(a) to support all efforts by governments for the development and sound use of water resources in the countries of the region;

(b) to facilitate co-operation among these countries in water resource matters;

(c) to improve the co-ordination of the work being carried out within the region in the field of water resources by the United Nations specialized agencies and other world or regional agencies;

(d) to ensure, within the general aims set out above, the implementation of the recommendations of the Mar del Plata Action Plan;

4. Entrusts the following functions to the sessional committee:
  - (i) to assume the central role referred to in the Mar del Plata Action Plan, by reviewing relevant aspects of the work carried out and planned in the various water programmes of the United Nations system and other international organizations;
  - (ii) to encourage and undertake research to improve knowledge of water resources and the possibilities of developing them;
  - (iii) to encourage and conduct training activities on topics related to water resources;

5. Recommends that the CEPAL secretariat establish a water resources unit to act as a focal point within the secretariat on a permanent basis and at a high technical level;

6. Requests the Executive Secretary of CEPAL to prepare for consideration by the General Assembly at its next session, a request for increased resources to expand the secretariat's activities in the field of water. This increase has been estimated at a minimum of 80,000 dollars a year, including one professional post;

7. Also requests the Executive Secretary of the Commission to take the necessary measures to carry out the programme of work in this field in collaboration with the appropriate specialized agencies.

209th Meeting  
26 April 1979

Annex 2

INTERSECRETARIAT WORKING GROUP ON WATER RESOURCES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

(a) Background

At the United Nations Water Conference, held in Mar del Plata in 1977, under the terms of resolution VIII, "Institutional arrangements for international co-operation in the water sector", it was recommended, inter alia:

"That the regional commissions should, taking into account the central role of the Economic and Social Council and the Committee on Natural Resources at the global level, and the special needs and conditions of the respective regions:

- (i) assist the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations specialized agencies and organizations, at the request of the Governments of developing countries concerned, in identifying intersectoral subregional, regional and interregional projects and preparing programmes;
- (ii) intensify their efforts in the water sector, and, with the assistance of the competent organizations of the United Nations system and at the request of the Governments concerned, enlarge co-operation among the countries in the water field at the subregional, regional and interregional levels;
- (iii) assign specific responsibility on water to an existing intergovernmental committee within the regional commissions, or if necessary, create a new one, and establish or strengthen, as appropriate, the secretariat units of the commissions dealing with water, which would serve as the secretariat of the intergovernmental committee referred to in this subparagraph;
- (iv) establish ad hoc groups of experts, as and when necessary, who should preferably be drawn from the countries of the region concerned;"

In the light of these recommendations, first the Economic and Social Council in resolutions 2115 (LXIII) and 2121 (LXIII) and then the General Assembly in resolution 32/158 which endorsed the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, requested the regional commissions,

"to strengthen and intensify their responsibilities in the water sectors and, to this end, assign specific responsibilities to an intergovernmental committee within the regional commissions, in accordance with the recommendations of the Conference and with resolution 1 (V) of 16 May 1977 of the Committee on Natural Resources,<sup>1/</sup> with the allocation, if necessary, of additional resources".

At the Latin American Regional Meeting on the Action Plan of the United Nations Water Conference, Santiago, 9-13 October 1978, it was recommended, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/158, that:

"The Economic Commission for Latin America should:

- (a) in order to promote the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan at the regional level, directly assume concrete permanent responsibilities to this end at its regular sessions, preferably through a sessional committee;
- (b) in order to expedite the implementation of this aim, include as a first step in the agenda of its next session, to be held in the first half of 1979 in La Paz, the item "Implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan", and it should set up a sessional committee for the discussion of this item, to which governments should be recommended to send highly qualified experts so that this procedure can become normal practice at all sessions".

At its eighteenth session held in La Paz in April 1979, the Economic Commission for Latin America in resolution 411 (XVIII), "Organizational measures to promote the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan," established as one of the objectives for CEPAL's action in the field of water "to improve the co-ordination of the work being carried out within the region in the field of water resources by the United Nations specialized agencies and other world or regional agencies".<sup>2/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Sixty-Third Session, Supplement No 1 (E/6020).

<sup>2/</sup> For the complete text of the resolution see document E/1979/51, E/CEPAL/1083/Rev.1, vol. II.

The Sessional Committee on Water included the following among the tasks approved in the work programme for the secretariat:

"Review and co-ordination of relevant aspects of the activities of the international agencies in the region. The secretariat would explore ways and means of establishing a working group of officials of the specialized agencies and CEPAL to co-ordinate their activities; this working group will, on request, advise the United Nations Administrative Committee on Co-ordination".

(b) Mandate

The Working Group will be comprised of representatives of the United Nations Secretariat and the specialized agencies. Regional intergovernmental bodies will also be invited to take part. The Director of CEPAL's Division of Natural Resources will act as secretary of the Group.

The meetings will be held periodically, at intervals determined according to the needs of the agencies taking part. They will be held at least once a year and once during the session of the Commission. In order to facilitate the work of this group a nucleus will be set up comprising representatives of the agencies with regional offices in Santiago or represented there which will be able to meet more frequently.

(c) Functions

To facilitate the regional, subregional and interregional co-ordination of the activities in the water sector of the agencies which integrate the Working Group.

Special importance will be given to the follow-up of how the Mar del Plata Action Plan is implemented, including aspects of any other activity which it might be advisable to develop as part of this general objective.

The Working Group will advise its own agencies pursuant to the mandates of the CEPAL Sessional Committee on Water.

As part of its work the group will promote and facilitate technical co-operation among the countries of the region in the field of water.

In order to implement these activities it will carry out the following functions:

- (a) It will submit recommendations to the CEPAL Sessional Committee on Water and, when appropriate, to the governing bodies of the other agencies taking part with the aim of bringing the regional work programmes in the field of water into line; it will also formulate recommendations as regards inter-secretariat co-operation and co-ordination projects.
- (b) Through the secretariat it will maintain a system for the exchange of continuous information on relevant activities of the specialized agencies and other international bodies in Latin America in the field of water and related areas.

The activities described will be carried out in the context of the global co-ordination offered by the Inter-Secretariat Group on Water Resources at Headquarters with due consideration of the priorities established in relation to the broader functions of the agencies taking part.

Annex 3

LIST OF DOCUMENTS PREPARED ON WATER RESOURCES, 1979-1981

Documents

1. "Las grandes presas: Expresión concreta de un estilo de desarrollo", Carlos Plaza V. and Terence R. Lee, September, 1979 (E/CEPAL/PROY.2/R.19).
2. "Coordinación entre los organismos especializados y la CEPAL en el campo del agua, Nota de la secretaría", June 1980 (E/CEPAL/L.221).
3. "Actividades de la CEPAL en materia de recursos hídricos", June 1980 (E/CEPAL/L.222).
4. "Actividades de la CEPAL en materia de recursos hídricos", June 1980 (E/CEPAL/L.222/Add.1).
5. Report of the Inter-Secretariat Meeting on Water Resources in Latin America, Santiago, Chile, 23 and 24 June 1980 (E/CEPAL/G.1126). Also available in Spanish.
6. "The provision of drinking water and sanitation to the rural population in Latin America", September 1980 (E/CEPAL/L.232).
7. "La planificación para el desarrollo, aprovechamiento y manejo de los recursos hídricos", Axel Dourojeanni, October 1980 (Documento CDA-24).
8. "Horizontal co-operation in support of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, Note by the secretariat", February 1981, (E/CEPAL/L.241). Also available in Spanish.
9. "The financial demands of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade in Latin America", February 1981 (E/CEPAL/G.1165). Also available in Spanish.
10. "International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade: The situation in Latin America on the eve of the Decade and the prospects for the future", joint report prepared with the Pan American Health Organization, February 1981 (E/CEPAL/G.1166).
11. Report of the First Seminar on Horizontal Co-operation for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, Santiago, Chile, 9-13 March 1981 (E/CEPAL/G.1171). Also available in Spanish.

Publications

1. Water management and environment in Latin America, Water Development, Supply and Management, Volume 12, Pergamon Press, Oxford, England, 1979.
2. Agua, desarrollo y medio ambiente en América Latina, CEPAL, Santiago, Chile, 1980.