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

Note by the Secretariat

BIBLIOTECA NACIONES UNIDAS MEXICO

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/INTRODUCTION



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INTRODUCTION

1. The recommendations and resolutions of the United Nations Water Conference, including those adopted by the preparatory meetings organized by the regional commissions, constitute the Mar del Plata Action Plan.^{1/} The plan comprises a set of policy guidelines and recommendations on operational activities to secure the efficient use of water resources at the national, regional and international levels, in order to promote economic and social development, while at the same time protecting the environment.
2. The Economic and Social Council adopted the report of the Conference ^{2/} and, on the recommendation of its Committee on Natural Resources, adopted a resolution urging the regional commissions to convene meetings in their respective areas in order to learn the views of Governments on the Conference as well as possibilities, needs and problems relating to the implementation of the recommendations of the Action Plan at the regional level. The General Assembly endorsed this resolution at its plenary meeting on 18 December 1977.^{3/}
3. In accordance with this resolution, the Executive Secretary of CEPAL invited the Governments of the region to participate in the Regional Meeting for Latin America on the Action Plan of the United Nations Water Conference held in Santiago, Chile, from 9 to 13 October 1978.^{4/}
4. Under resolution I of that meeting it was recommended that:
 - (i) 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;

^{1/} See document E/Conf.70/29.

^{2/} Economic and Social Council resolution 2121 (LXIII).

^{3/} General Assembly resolution 32/158.

^{4/} See document ST/CEPAL/Conf.63/L.4/Rev.1.

- (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 are recommended to send highly-qualified experts so that this procedure can become normal practice at all sessions.
- (ii) The CEPAL secretariat should:
 - (a) set up a water resources unit, of a permanent nature and of high technical level, to act as a focal point within the secretariat;
 - (b) prepare, on the basis of the recommendations of the Mar del Plata Action Plan, the Lima Consensus and the guidelines laid down at the present meeting, sufficiently in advance of the next session of CEPAL and in consultation with Member States and the appropriate specialized agencies, a report to help governments to take decisions regarding the programme of work to be carried out by CEPAL and its secretariat, including the relevant orders of priority and the financial implications of the measures proposed.

5. The purpose of the present document is to report to governments on the results of the consultations with Member States and the appropriate specialized agencies, by means of the Executive Secretary's letter and Aide-Mémoire of 10 November 1978 and some visits, as well as to aid in the taking of decisions on the future programme of work of CEPAL and its secretariat. In preparing it, account was taken of the documents submitted at the third special session of the Committee on Natural Resources (26-30 March 1979) available at that date.

/I. OBJECTIVES,

I. OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATION

6. The following objectives for the action of CEPAL in the water sector, suggested by the Secretariat in the Aide-Mémoire sent to governments, have received broad acceptance.

- (i) To support efforts by governments in the development and sound use of water resources in the countries of the region;
- (ii) To facilitate co-operation among the countries of the region in water resource matters;
- (iii) To improve 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;
- (iv) To ensure, with the general aims set out above, the implementation of the recommendations of the Mar del Plata Action Plan.

7. In order to achieve these objectives it would seem to be generally agreed that the best strategies would be the following:

- (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;
- (iv) To collect and disseminate, in conjunction with other specialized centres, information on the regional situation regarding water resource development and of the environmental effects of water management;
- (v) To promote and organize programmes of horizontal co-operation in research, training and technical and financial assistance for the development of water resources;
- (vi) To provide assistance, at the request of interested governments, in the establishment of subsidiary bodies to consider common water resource problems.

8. If the Commission endorses the recommendation of the Regional Meeting in Santiago by setting up a sessional Committee on Water a decision would be necessary on aspects relating to the organization and co-ordination of the work of the Committee with regard to its place as a permanent element in the structure of CEPAL, the periodicity of its meetings and the work to be carried out in the future through government experts or groups of experts and the secretariat. One point to be considered is the desirability of holding the meetings somewhat in advance of, rather than at the same time as, the session of the Commission in order to ease organizational difficulties.

II. THE WORK PROGRAMME

9. An initial basis for the work programme might be, as indicated in resolution I of the Regional Meeting in Santiago, the recommendations set forth in the Mar del Plata Action Plan on the basis of the Lima Consensus, which identify tasks for the appropriate international agencies. The Committee could consider these recommendations in order to reaffirm their priority status and modify them in the light of present circumstances (see Annex 1).

Within the priorities suggested by the Lima Consensus and the Mar del Plata Action Plan, and later confirmed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, the Regional Meeting in Santiago confirmed the interest in the inclusion of the following elements in the work programme of CEPAL,

- (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 activities of the international agencies;
- (iii) the identification of needs for the exchange of information, trained personnel and suitable training programmes;

/(iv) the

(iv) the identification of suitable areas for horizontal co-operation and promotion of such co-operation;

(v) the assessment and evaluation of water resources.

10. Review of progress in the region in the application of the Mar del Plata Action Plan. In order to encourage the implementation of the Action Plan in Latin America the Committee could review 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. For this purpose the secretariat would prepare a consolidated periodic report, (preferably every four years, for every other meeting of the Sessional Committee) on the basis of information provided by each country and specialized agency. A precondition to the undertaking of this survey would be the agreement on the part of the governments and the specialized agencies on the standardized form in which the information should be presented.

11. Review and co-ordination of relevant aspects of the activities of the international agencies in the region. In Resolution I of the Regional Meeting in Santiago it was suggested that "support to governments for the implementation of the Plan should be provided through the appropriate secretariat units of CEPAL and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, such support being mobilized through a focal point in CEPAL". In addition, in resolutions IV on the "Need for the Construction of Small and, Medium-Sized Irrigation Dams", and VII on the "Assessment of Water Resources", the Meeting recommended collaborative action by the specialized agencies, other international bodies and CEPAL. A number of governments have commented on the importance of this activity and the need to incorporate not only programmes of United Nations agencies but also those of other international organizations. It has been suggested that a working group of officials of the specialized agencies and CEPAL should be established to co-ordinate their activities. This working group could, on request, advise the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. It has also been proposed that the agencies should report to the Sessional Committee on Water on:

/(i) the

(i) the objectives and content of current and planned programmes;
(ii) the timetable for the achievement of these objectives and (iii) the resources both of the government and of the organizations to fulfil these objectives.

By letter of 10 November 1978, the Executive Secretary of CEPAL asked the specialized agencies of the United Nations and other international organizations active in Latin America for their views on how the achievement of the aims of the Action Plan could be facilitated through the co-ordinated support of CEPAL and themselves. Of the agencies which responded to the Secretariat's enquiry, UNESCO has indicated its interest in the co-ordination of its activities in the assessment of water resources with those of other agencies; PAHO/WHO is interested in the co-ordination with other agencies of its efforts related to the programme for the forthcoming international water supply and sanitation decade; FAO expressed full support for a co-ordinated programme within the limits of its resources; IBRD would be particularly interested in co-operation in project evaluation; WHO welcomed the possibility of broader collaboration, especially in water resource assessment; UNEP expressed willingness to co-operate in all areas, and the Central American Regional Committee on Water Resources ^{5/} has offered to co-ordinate activities related to the integration of programmes of international agencies in its area.

12. Identification of needs for the exchange of information, for trained personnel and for the executive of training programmes. In Resolution VI of the Regional Meeting in Santiago it was recommended that,

- (a) a system should be set up through CEPAL to permit the assessment of the technical capacity existing in the region, priority being given to the use of this capacity for horizontal technical co-operation;

^{5/} The Central American Regional Committee on Water Resources is an intergovernmental committee formed by all the governments of Central America and Panama.

- (b) CEPAL should promote the holding of courses and seminars in different countries of the region, make arrangements for the periodic exchange of information, and prepare a list of cases of special interest which could provide useful experience for all the member countries.

In general, the replies received from governments to the Executive Secretary's consultation have assigned very high priority to training. In addition, one government has expressed concern over the loss of trained personnel from public agencies involved in the planning and management of water, and has suggested that the committee examine alternative ways of alleviating the situation. In this connexion, the need is seen to develop a specific programme in this area, and thus the Sessional Committee on Water may wish to examine the desirability of submitting a proposal for funding a project, with resources from bilateral assistance and international financing agencies, to assess the technical capacity existing in the region and the need for additional courses and seminars and for the exchange of information and documentation.

13. The identification of areas for horizontal co-operation and promotion of such co-operation. Resolution V of the Regional meeting in Santiago recommended that,

- (a) measures should be taken, with immediate effect, to foster the launching of projects for horizontal co-operation in the field of water resources in Latin America. In particular, the bodies of the United Nations system should make the budgetary adjustments to absorb the cost of such measures in 1979;
- (b) at its eighteenth session, the Economic Commission for Latin America should request the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, and other competent bodies to assign to CEPAL in 1979 and subsequent years, from the regular budget of the United Nations, the sum of US\$ 300,000 to finance the launching of horizontal co-operation projects;

/(c) member

- (c) member countries should be invited to earmark the necessary funds, in their 1979 and subsequent budgets, to finance their own co-operation activities.

On this matter, in its Aide-Mémoire the secretariat requested member governments to indicate,

- (a) topics in respect of which they would be in a position to offer technical and/or financial co-operation with other countries in the region;
- (b) topics in respect of which they would be interested in receiving assistance from other countries of the region;
- (c) the possibility of preparing budget estimates for horizontal co-operation for the 1979 and subsequent financial years.

Due to time limitations, despite the generally high interest expressed by governments in horizontal co-operation, few concrete proposals have been received. It is suggested that governments may wish to specify topics at the meeting or ask the secretariat to survey the possibilities at a later date. The Committee may wish to consider the recommendation to allocate funds from the regular budget of the United Nations for horizontal co-operation and combine it with the proposal for a regional project on training and information mentioned in point 12.

14. Assessment and evaluation of water resources. At the Regional Meeting in Santiago the delegation of Bolivia submitted a draft resolution, for consideration at the eighteenth session of CEPAL, on data collection using existing operational satellites. The secretariat was also requested to take steps to determine the desirability, possibility, cost, etc., of installing receiving antennas for a system of data collection by satellite.

The secretariat began consultations with the United Nations Outer Space Affairs Division and the EROS Data Center, Geological Survey, of the United States Department of the Interior.

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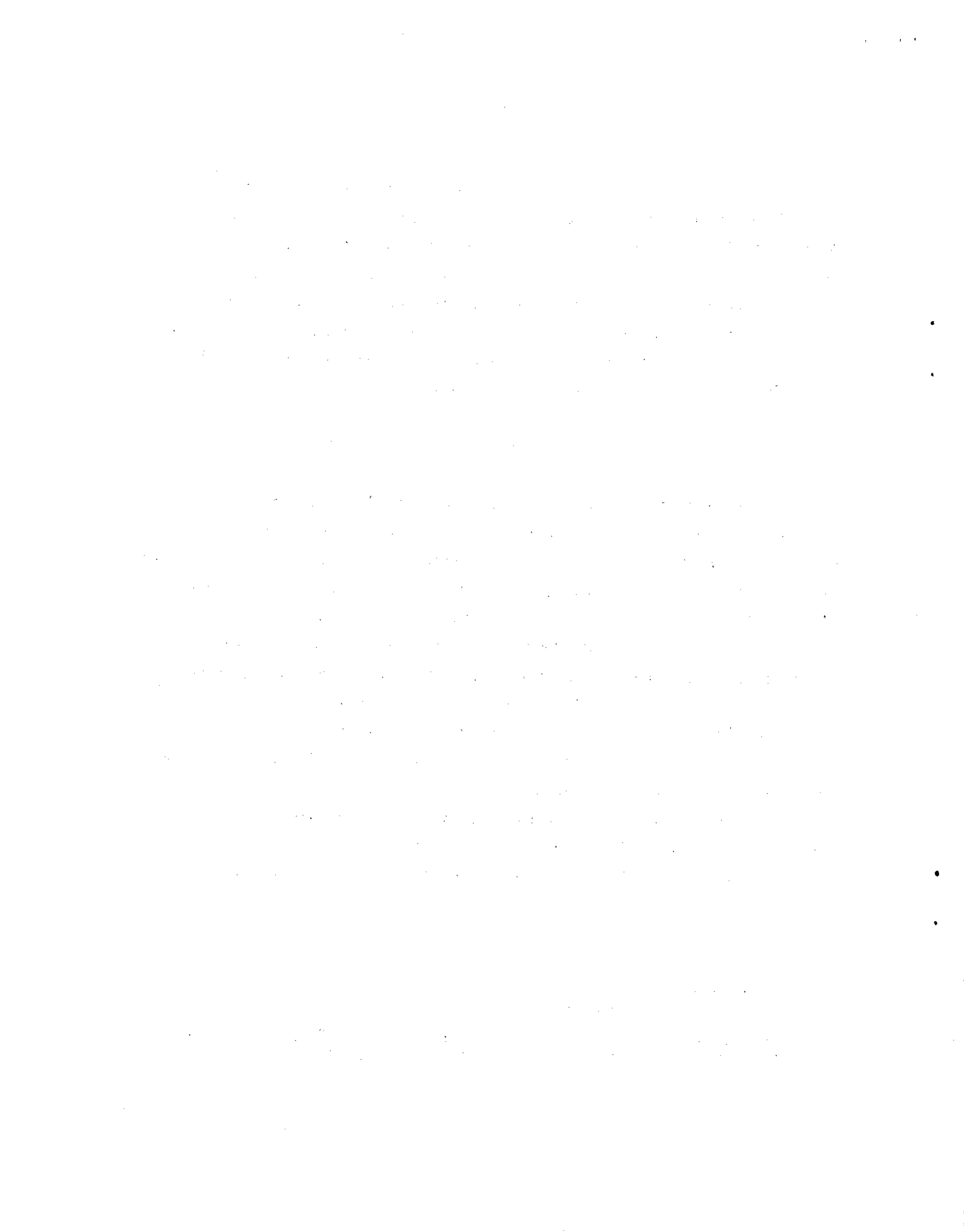
In its reply the EROS Data Center estimated that the cost of a semi-portable Landsat ground station would be 2 million dollars, and that the cost of digital image-processing equipment would vary appreciably according to the requirements, examples were given of half a million dollars and five million dollars.^{6/} There was presently one such station in Brazil and one under construction in Argentina. When the latter entered into operation at the end of 1979, the two would cover all of South America with the exception of Northwestern Colombia and Venezuela.

III. THE WATER RESOURCE UNIT IN THE CEPAL SECRETARIAT

15. Under resolution I of the Regional Meeting in Santiago it was recommended that the CEPAL secretariat should establish a water resources unit, of a permanent nature and of high technical level, to act as a focal point following-up the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan. At present the staff available to form such a unit within the Division of Natural Resources and Environment comprises two senior professionals, one research assistant and one secretary. The work programme approved by the Committee will establish the extent to which it will be necessary to expand this staff and increase the allocation to the Division for consultants, travel, publications and logistic support for meetings, seminars and courses. It is estimated that if the secretariat is effectively to service the Committee in launching a minimum work programme in the items outlined in this note it would be necessary to expand the existing staff of the Water Unit, at least, by one professional, one research assistant and one secretary.^{7/}

^{6/} Prices in US dollars of mid-1978.

^{7/} This would imply an addition of approximately US\$ 80,000 to the existing budget of the Natural Resources and Environment Division.



Annex 1

SPECIFIC REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS 1/

Latin America

The work that the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international bodies operating in the region have carried out or are carrying out has effectively contributed to the exploitation of water resources.

IT IS DESIRABLE THAT THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE REGION SHOULD BE CONTINUED, STRENGTHENED, CO-ORDINATED WITH AND COMPLEMENTED BY THE ACTIVITIES OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES.

In particular it is recommended that:

(a) Co-ordination at the regional level among the bodies of the United Nations system, and co-ordination between them and the other international organizations operating in Latin America and the Caribbean should be strengthened;

(b) The Economic Commission for Latin America should continue its work on studies of the optimum and integrated use of water with appropriate and timely participation by professionals and technical experts from the countries involved; it should include in its programme projects dealing with the interaction between water and the other environmental components; and it should co-operate with national and international bodies in the training of human resources;

(c) The studies on water in relation to the environment begun by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Economic Commission for Latin America, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization should be continued and enlarged, and further topics of interest should be included among those specifically studied;

(d) The work carried out on similar subjects by the International Law Commission should also be continued and expanded;

1/ See Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977 (E/Conf.70/29), pp. 61-63.

(e) The Pan-American Sanitary Bureau and the World Health Organization should continue and strengthen their technical co-operation activities in the field of the supply of drinking water, waste-water disposal, and water quality generally;

(f) The joint Inter-American Development Bank/Pan-American Sanitary Bureau project for the supply of water to small communities should be continued and strengthened;

(g) The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations should attach special importance to the execution of drainage works in agricultural land;

(h) The Centre for Natural Resources, Energy and Transport, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America, should carry out a study of river transport systems, taking into account the interests of the countries which share navigable international waters;

(i) International agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank should increase financing both for basic studies and for plans, feasibility studies, projects and the construction of necessary works for the exploitation of water resources, in view of the social benefits involved in such activities;

(j) Support should be given to the work of the Comité Regional de Recursos Hidráulicos del Istmo Centroamericano so that it can continue its activities on a permanent basis with an executive secretariat, and the United Nations bodies, especially the World Meteorological Organization and the Economic Commission for Latin America, can collaborate with the projects which that Committee may establish;

(k) Regional Central American programmes for sanitary engineering and hydraulic resources in the Regional School for Sanitary Engineering in Guatemala City and the Chair of Meteorology in Costa Rica should be strengthened and organizations of the United Nations should collaborate in their task through programmes of technical assistance, exchange with other similar regional centres and the granting of fellowships;

(l) An inventory should be made of the human resources in the countries of the region, while training in research and the development of water resources and exchange of personnel should be promoted in order to allow first-hand exposure to differing technologies and procedures;

(m) The Organization of American States should continue its technological efforts to help with the implementation of projects for the exploitation of water resources, in respect of which it provides regional technical co-operation, when so requested by the countries concerned;

(n) The Latin American Economic System (SELA) should be urged to give priority to its co-operation programmes for regional and subregional projects for the exploitation of water resources;

(o) The United Nations, availing itself of the experience of the Centro Interamericano de Desarrollo Integral de Agua y Tierra (CIDIAT), the Instituto Nacional de Ciencia y Técnica Hídricas (INCYTH) and other existing bodies specializing in the subject, to carry out research and the training of professional, subprofessional, technical and management staff in the various aspects of science and technology related to the development of water resources;

(p) Support should be given to the work being conducted by the institutional system of the River Plate Basin so that its activities may be continued and intensified with a view to attaining the objectives embodied in the River Plate Basin Treaty;

(q) The facilities of the programmes of the World Meteorological Organization, particularly the World Weather Watch, should be utilized with a view to supporting a better understanding of hydrometeorological phenomena in the region;

(r) Through appropriate action by the World Health Organization, the positive experience gained by the Centro Panamericano de Ingeniería Sanitaria y Ciencias del Ambiente (CEPIS) should be strengthened, increased and extended so that, through the establishment of similar centres, the developing countries of other geographical regions may enjoy similar benefits.

Annex 2

TEXT OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTION PRESENTED BY BOLIVIA FOR SUBMISSION TO
THE EIGHTEENTH SESSION OF CEPAL

System of data collection by satellite

The Latin American Regional Meeting on the Action Plan of the United Nations
Water Conference,

Bearing in mind Recommendation A of the Mar del Plata Action Plan,
and especially paragraphs 3(g), 3(n) and 4 thereof concerning the shortage
of basic information for development and its limited reliability.

Considering

(a) that developing countries do not possess facilities for gaining
access to the right areas for obtaining such basic information,

(b) that the collection of data from conventional stations has been
superseded technically and economically by the system of data collection by
satellite,

Recognizing the need to obtain data without delay and with economies
of scale, which will be reflected in the harmonization of the use of services
and in the costs of infrastructural works and services in general,

Requests the specialized agencies of the United Nations to study the
possibility of putting into effect, in all its technical and economic aspects,
the system of collecting data through the existing operational satellites.

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