

# IWRM Planning Process

## The Bahamas Experience



Global Water  
Partnership  
Caribbean

Briefing Paper



**T**he Bahamas is an archipelago of about 700 islands and 2,400 uninhabited islets and cays lying 50 mi off the east coast of Florida. They extend for about 760 mi (1,223 km). Only about 30 of the islands are inhabited; the most important is New Providence (80 sq mi; 207 sq km), on which the capital, Nassau, is situated. Other islands include Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Andros, Cat Island, and San Salvador (or Watling's Island).

The Bahamas is a water scarce country and as such faces challenges of water supply and ongoing scenarios of a lack of potable water supply. The control and administration of water resources of The Bahamas rests with the Corporation within the portfolio of the Ministry for Public Enterprises. Eighty-three percent of the country's water systems are owned, operated and managed by the Water and Sewerage Corporation (WSC), while the private sector accounts for the remaining 17%. The water resources of The Bahamas are in a perilous position, threatened by over-abstraction, misuse and pollution. One of the biggest concerns however was the financial costs associated with producing water and the affordability of water by consumers. The need to improve the management of water resources was becoming more and more urgent as issues become more complex.

The Bahamas, like most of its Caribbean counterparts, practices a single sector approach to water whereby matters related to water remain within the sole remit of the Corporation. Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) as a strategy provided the opportunity to secure the involvement of all stakeholders and achieve the level of integration for effective water resources management. The decision of the Corporation to take concrete steps to adopt and implement an IWRM Plan for the Bahamas was born out of the strong realisation that the way business was being undertaken in the water resources sector was in need of remedy. Efforts to establish an IWRM Plan began in 2002 with a national stakeholder meeting and later a workshop organised by The Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission (BEST) in 2004. However, the process languished until WSC underwent institutional reform and at its completion, there was a renewed interest in IWRM. In September 2007, the WSC retained a consultant to assist in the planning process.

Conservation plays a visible role in the IWRM Plan. The overwhelming criterion for decision-making – at least in the absence of actual alternatives to consider - was the ability of the Plan to protect the environment, and to promote “sustainability”. This criterion was voiced unanimously by the Management Committee and stakeholders alike, outranking cost in importance. IWRM therefore seeks to reach an appropriate balance between the need to protect and sustain water resources on the one hand, and the need to develop and use them on the other.

### IWRM Vision

As a starting point of agreement as to how on future water resources planning should be conducted stakeholders agreed on the following vision:

**“ To collaboratively manage a world-class and affordable water supply and sewerage system in order to enhance and protect health and the environment. ”**

This vision emphasised cooperation and coordination as opposed to fragmented and narrowly focused responsibilities as well as emphasising the social value of water and the integral relationship between water and environmental concerns.

### IWRM Initiatives

**The IWRM activity resulted in the following initiatives:**

- Involvement of other sectors in water resources management.
- Highest level political commitment to the process.
- Understanding of the linkage between IWRM and programme delivery in other related sectors.
- Commitment to reform the legal and regulatory framework to implement the Plan.

**The IWRM process identified key areas that the Plan must deal with:**

- A. Governance:** An adequate governance structure that establishes, inter alia, institutional arrangements, interagency collaboration and compliance and enforcement measures.
- B. Financing:** The financial costs associated with producing water and recovering the true costs from consumers.
- C. Environmental Concerns:** This includes water conservation measures in all sectors, health of the citizenry, pollution prevention and control, wastewater reuse and water supply.
- D. Stakeholder Involvement:** Public, private, non-governmental, local communities, not just the Corporation, have an interest in water and must be involved in decisions pertaining to water.
- E. Capacity Building:** Water resources management requires adequate technical expertise and reliable and adequate hydrologic, meteorological, and water quality data.
- F. Disaster Preparedness and Flood Management:** This issue affects water supply and must be integrated into decisions pertaining to water.

## **IWRM Focus**

**With a commitment to pilot IWRM forward, actions were taken to:**

- Improve public participation with the inclusion of governmental and private sectors, local communities and the general public.
- Develop firm IWRM policy.
- Advance political commitment to the IWRM process.
- Recognise the role and programme linkages between all sectors and IWRM.

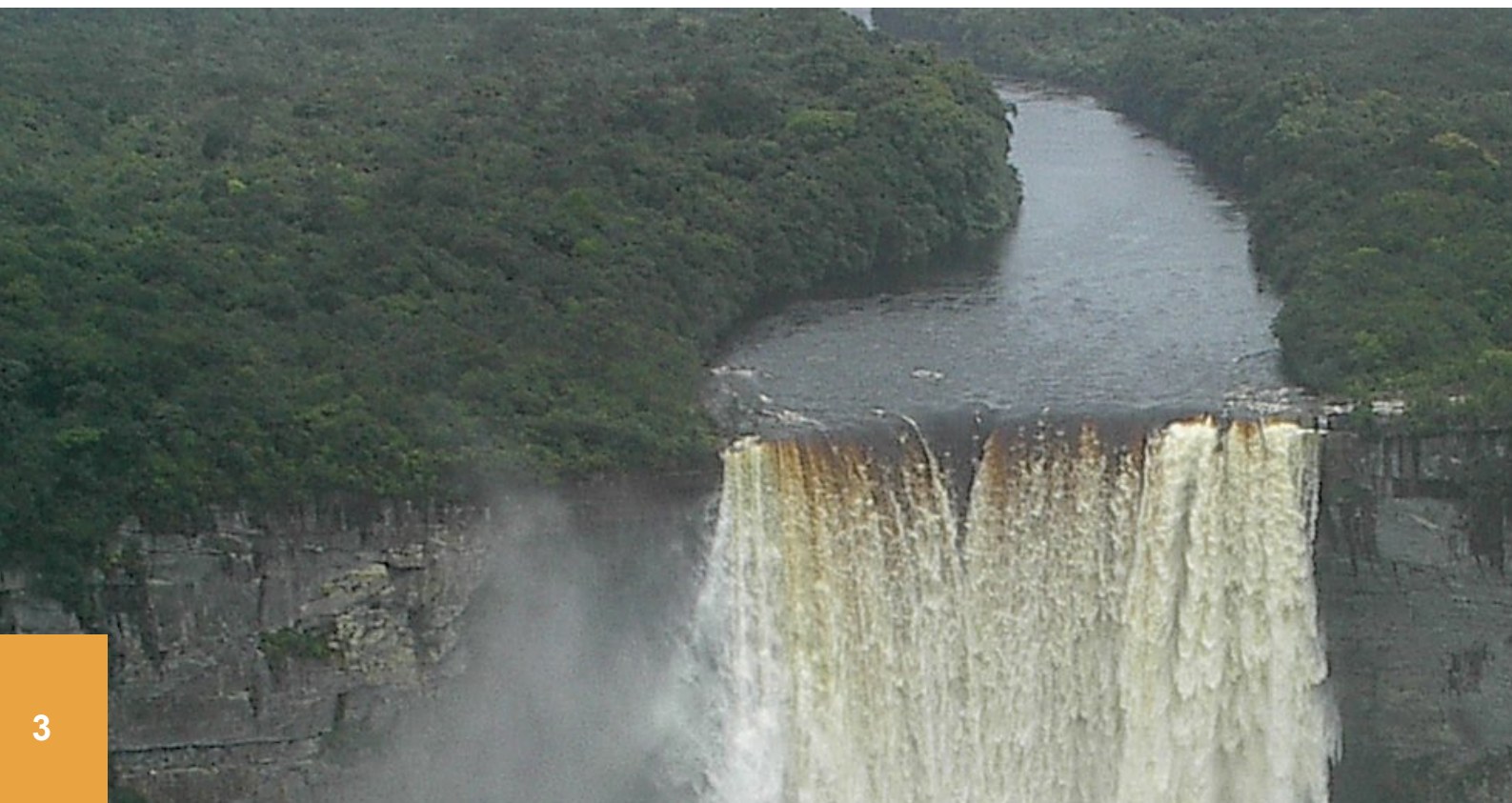
**Specific key actions were taken to put the commitment to IWRM into operation:**

- A draft Plan that includes project activities to support IWRM and agreed to by all relevant sectors.
- Individual, sectoral and national consultations to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Agreement to monitor progress of IWRM.

## **Future IWRM Actions**

**IWRM is not an end in itself but an ongoing transaction carved out by stakeholders as a means of achieving effective water resources management. In recognition of this the following actions are being pursued:**

- Continuing collaboration to establish a level playfield among stakeholders on water resources issues.
- Maintaining credibility on the IWRM process through governance reform.
- Seeking out resources to implement agreed project activities.
- Taking steps to assert leadership on IWRM issues.



Two acute situations loomed large and made it attractive for The Bahamas to seek out a better way of doing business, a new strategy, in the water resources sector:

- (a) The Bahamas is a water scarce country and as such faces challenges of water supply and ongoing scenarios of a lack of potable water supply.
- (b) Conflict is increasing among sectors requiring collaborative measures to be put in place to conserve water supply.

### Lessons Learnt

- The Water and Sewerage Corporation is the statutory body responsible for water resources management in the country. The entity underwent institutional reform during which it became clear that the need to increase water supply was a pressing concern; advancing a renewed interest in IWRM. Water needed to be managed more efficiently. As a new strategic approach, IWRM encouraged interagency collaboration on issues pertaining to water – conservation, water quality and valuing the resource. IWRM mirrored such a strategic approach.
- There were two earlier efforts to address these concerns in The Bahamas. The first effort comprised two activities - a National Stakeholders Meeting on the 18 February 2002 and a later Workshop organised by the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission (BEST) on “Synergies and Cross-cutting Issues” on June 15, 2004. At that Workshop issues pertaining to the management of water resources, water availability, cost and legal and institutional framework were identified as critical challenges to effective water resources management in the country. The second attempt amounted to a literature review and recommendations for a change in the governance structure regarding water resources management. Despite these initiatives, the momentum was not maintained and the need to improve the management of water resources continued to become more and more urgent and more complex to resolve.
- Earlier efforts to establish IWRM was attempted as an in-house activity and did not reap the intended results. Thus in September 2007 the WSC retained an independent Consultant to provide the momentum and expertise that the task required. An independent Consultant minimised bias, bridged conflicts that may exist among agencies, expanded the research effort to include all sectors, held consultations with all sectors, and individuals and maintained the momentum and interest that the new IWRM strategy. Further, the consultant’s activities built on the valuable earlier initiatives to establish IWRM in The Bahamas.
- Although IWRM has been set on a good footing in The Bahamas the elements of the change have not been fully operationalised. That the process was managed through an independent Consultant, rather than as an in-house effort, provides the added attraction that it can just as easily be resumed and taken forward to establish favourable and comprehensive IWRM in The Bahamas in the future.





**Published by the Global Water Partnership – Caribbean (GWP-C) © 2011**

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