

Policy Overview

Principles

Water is essential for life and a powerful tool for good, which must be valued, conserved, and managed, in an appropriate fashion for the benefit of all. It must feature high on a country's political agenda, and global development objectives. Above all, the institutions and entities entrusted with the custodianship for water management should be given the legal authority, and the technical and administrative instruments to manage the resource in a sustainable manner.

This National Water Policy (Policy) is the planning and management framework for providing the people of The Gambia with secure water resources. Its preparation has been the subject of a comprehensive consultation, participation, and validation process, which has included representatives from all stakeholder groups. The President's Office has endorsed the Policy and the underpinning principles, which entail a realisation, and acknowledgement of the need to:

1. Meet basic water needs in a sustainable manner while conserving resources and preserving the environment for future generations
2. Maintain an equitable balance between universal access to water supplies and the needs of individual users
3. Strengthen and develop human capital and build the economy of the country
4. Negotiate and discharge international responsibilities in a spirit of good will and cooperation

The Policy subscribes to the principles, and is in line with the approach to integrated water resources management (IWRM) outlined in the Dublin Statement, 1992, which asserts that:

1. Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment
2. Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels
3. Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water
4. Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good
5. An IWRM approach promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

The primary challenges for achieving sustainable water resources management have been reaffirmed in a number of subsequent proclamations, and international conventions. These include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were defined in 2000, and the development objectives and action plan enshrined in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Numerous other international and African specific directives and water related initiatives have been launched.

They have been taken into account and are reflected in this Policy, and include the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), and the African Ministerial Conference in Water, which forms part of NEPAD.

□ Objectives

The overarching Policy objectives are the establishment of a manageable and inclusive water resources framework based on IWRM principles, and the promotion of an enabling environment enforced through the rule of law that:

1. Acknowledges that access to water is a common right, which is held in trust by the Government on behalf of the people of The Gambia
2. Involves people and places them at the centre of the process, consults widely with stakeholders to achieve the Policy objectives, and builds consensus
3. Places environmental protection and the preservation of the country's ecological heritage at the forefront of development
4. Defines the necessary administrative structures and defines the procedures required to implement the Policy
5. Outlines the precepts, scope and time scale for a new Water Resources Strategy, which will provide the Policy's implementation platform
6. Establishes a sound technical rationale for managing water resources underpinned by verifiable information, and sound quantifiable hydro-meteorological and hydrogeological data
7. Recommends a set of IWRM instruments for assessing and quantifying the available river basin yield (surface and subsurface) for a range of climatic scenarios
8. Describes a process whereby demand can be balanced against available resources, and a

framework developed within which equitable and sustainable decisions can be taken on water allocation

9. Provides a long term humanitarian vision for water resources management and development maximising the use of social capital

10. Requires transparency and accountability of those responsible for the custodianship of the country's water resources

The Policy is broad based and the result of a consultative and participation process carried out with strategic stakeholders and with the support of the European Commission (EC). It is in sympathy with national development policies, designed to build ownership and is based on international best practice.

The Policy has been developed along two thematic principles:

1. Water Resources Management that deals with overall cross sector management objectives and provides a framework for the:

- Establishment of an appropriate enabling environment, which balances short term gains against long term socio-economic benefits.

- Building of a dynamic people centred technical and managerial capacity.

- Preparation of a strategy, which addresses short and long term demands.

 - Assessment of yield, allocation, and conservation through the application of the IWRM principles.

 - Management in the context of sustainable development and the balancing of socio-economic gain with environmental sustainability; and,
2. Water Resources Development and Utilization that deals with specific sector objectives, technical requirements, socio economic development, and the formulation of strategies in terms of:
- Providing potable water supplies in a sustainable and equitable manner.

 - Conserving water supplies and meeting the needs of agriculture in the short term and making provision for long term demands in an efficient manner.

 - Accommodating the water needs of fisheries, navigation, industry, tourism, recreation, and hydropower in an efficient and cost effective way.

 - Management of the natural environment in a sustainable manner.

The Policy implementation will require the preparation and establishment of an appropriate enabling environment. This will include a coordinated and complementary legal framework, accompanied by a parallel and wide-ranging capacity building programme designed to equip the primary actors with the necessary technical and managerial resources. A Policy execution timeframe with sector priorities and sequential outputs has been prepared which describes the way forward.