WATER DECADE EVALUATION PROCEDURES IN THE EUROPEAN REGION OF WHO

A report from the programme on the International Water Decade

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Regional Office for Europe
COPENHAGEN

TARGET 20

Water pollution

By 1990, all people of the Region should have adequate supplies of safe drinking-water, and by the year 1995 pollution of rivers, lakes and seas should no longer pose a threat to human health.

Index:

WATER SUPPLY
SANITATION
DRINKING WATER
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WATER DECADE EVALUATION PROCEDURES IN THE EUROPEAN REGION OF WHO

Report on a Consultation

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Note

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CONTENTS

Introduction

The Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization, in collaboration with the Regione dell'Umbria in Italy, organized a Consultation on the Water Decade Evaluation Procedures in the European Region of WHO in Perugia from 26 to 29 October 1988. This meeting was attended by 25 water and sanitation experts from 16 European Member States and two officers from the Water Decade programmes in WHO headquarters and the Regional Office.

The present evaluation methods had already been reviewed at the Fourth Consultation organized by the Regional Office in Nancy, France, in November 1987. That Consultation recommended that the Regional Office should study the constraints on the present system for collecting and analysing Decade data, and should submit new procedures for the assessment of the Programme to a group of national experts.

To this effect the Regional Office, within the framework of a collaborative agreement signed with the Centre international de l'Eau de Nancy ("NANC.I.E."), France, sought the agreement of the Ministry of Health for commissioning NANC.I.E. to carry out a review of the existing monitoring system and to prepare a new set of evaluation questionnaires. In order to accomplish this, NANC.I.E. decided to create an intersectoral working group composed of national experts from the various institutions involved in water and sanitation activities in France, such as the environment, health, agriculture, industry, municipalities and water agencies.

The working group, after several months of studies involving internal consultations in France, submitted a draft of a set of questionnaires to the Regional Office

in July 1988. This draft was subsequently reviewed in Copenhagen by NANC.I.E. and Regional Office staff, and a consolidated version was then prepared and sent to those Member States who were to be invited to the Perugia meeting.

The Consultation was made possible thanks to the support received from the regional authorities of Umbria, who agreed not only to host the meeting in Perugia but also partially to finance it. The Inter-University Centre for the Environment in Perugia assisted the Regional Office in the organization of the event and acted as the host institution.

Objectives of the meeting

The main objective of the meeting was to review the draft Water Decade evaluation questionnaires prepared by the NANC.I.E. working group, with a view to:

- providing the Regional Office with an accurate assessment of the situation regarding water and sanitation services in each country of the Region;

- enabling each Member State of the Region to analyse the situation in its own water and sanitation sectors in relation to the results achieved by European countries as a whole; and

- assisting United Nations agencies and multilateral bodies to draw up their post-Decade plans, not only for Europe but also for the rest of the world, taking into consideration the technological achievements as well as the successes and failures of the Decade programme in Europe.

The new information system is expected to take into account the possibility of standardizing the terminology

in use, and the constraints to be encountered in countries where, because of administrative decentralization, problems exist in centralizing information on water and sanitation works carried out in various national administrative subdivisions.

The specific objectives of the Consultation were:

- to examine the feasibility of implementing a common evaluation system in the European Region;

- to detect in the proposed set of questionnaires the relevance of questions, important missing evaluation elements or any redundant questions needing to be deleted;

- to present a critical review of the proposed new set of evaluation questionnaires, and to analyse whether it corresponds or not to an evaluation system appropriate to European conditions; and

- to examine the procedures to be established for collecting the information and transmitting it from regional to central levels in the countries concerned and eventually to the Regional Office.

Results

Professor Lucio Ubertini, Director of the Hydrological Department of the Ministry of Civil Protection, Perugia, and Professor L. Migliorini, Director of the Inter-University Centre for the Environment, welcomed the participants on behalf of the host institution. The meeting was officially opened by Professor V. Lorenzini, President of the Regional Council of Umbria. The participants elected Professor Mario Pitzurra, Director of the Health Department of Perugia, as Chairman, Mr Peter Newman of

the Water Research Centre, United Kingdom, and Mr Andras Homonnay of the Institute for Water Pollution Control, Hungary, as Vice-Chairmen, and Mr X. Bonnefoy as Rapporteur.

A press conference took place on the morning of the first day and was attended by all national and international experts participating in the Consultation. Its main purpose was to discuss the role played by the mass media in disseminating information on water and sanitation services, and the importance of this dissemination for the protection of the health of the population.

In the late evening, the host institution organized a technical round table on the question: "What water for the future?". A panel of six national and international experts analysed the problems related to the exploitation of water resources in the years to come, including the need to protect the quality of these sources against increasing contamination resulting from the uncontrolled dispersion of pollutants in the environment. The discussions were also covered by the local press.

The participants in the Consultation spent two and a half days discussing the different sections of the proposed evaluation questionnaire, and proposed modifications when they considered them appropriate. They decided to set up subgroups to study the following three main areas of concern further:

- the problem of water supply and sanitation under emergency conditions;

- the mechanism for collecting and transmitting data at national and international levels; and

- the problems related to the lack of an accepted standard terminology.

A fourth subgroup was formed to review the general aspects of the new evaluation procedures and to formulate recommendations on this subject.

Conclusions

1. The Consultation endorsed the decision taken by the United Nations agencies to prepare a post-Decade strategy and recommended that, as regards Europe, the strategy should be based on the results of the proposed questionnaire.

2. The Consultation considered that the past approach of sending questionnaires on water supply and sanitation to health and/or environment ministries had several drawbacks:

- the ministry of health was not normally the sole organ of government responsible for the services;

- as a result, a considerable burden was placed on ministries of health in identifying appropriate agencies and collecting and collating data from them; and

- incomplete and/or inaccurate information could be provided.

3. Although the objective should be to obtain as much information as possible, the questionnaires should be kept as short, concise and comprehensible as possible. Overcomplicated questionnaires could be a deterrent to completion.

4. The proposed new approach of having separate sections to the questionnaire (water for agriculture, industry, domestic supply, etc.) might facilitate dissemination of the questions for completion and simplify the understanding of the document.

5. The participants endorsed the content of the questionnaire as revised in Perugia, but asked the NANC.I.E. group to reformulate it, adopting a tabular form when applicable and possible.

6. To adequately complete the questionnaire, it would be necessary to translate it into the languages of the countries concerned. The coordination of this task should be the responsibility of national focal points, and governments will be requested to support this activity.

7. Considering that the Water Decade programme period was nearing its conclusion, it was suggested that the questionnaire should be given the title "Evaluation of the water and sanitation sectors in Europe".

8. The Consultation considered that the precise framework for data collection at national level would depend on the administrative structure of individual countries, and suggested the following guidelines:

- where a collaborating centre for water supply and/or sanitation existed in a country, WHO should request that it become the national institution responsible for collecting and collating the data;

- where a collaborating centre did not exist, a focal institute should be indentified and proposed by WHO to the national authorities;

- in preparation, an inventory could be made of institutions responsible for the different aspects of water supply and sanitation in each country that could probably fulfil this role of focal point; and

- on request from governments, support might be made available to the institutions referred to above in the form of WHO staff or consultants or through other mechanisms, to clarify the questionnaires and provide guidance on their completion.

9. The Consultation requested WHO and United Nations agencies involved in the water and sanitation sector to provide the maximum support possible to the national network of focal points.

10. Countries should adopt precise policies regarding the need to interrupt the distribution of drinking-water that does not meet the required standards, and for restoring services.

Recommendations

1. Where possible and applicable, national coordination committees on water and sanitation should be reactivated or created so as to ensure the attainment of the post-Decade strategy.

2. To maintain the continuity of the Water Decade programme, national officers who have been collaborating with the programme in the past should be given priority as potential candidates for national focal points.

3. In view of the multisectoral aspects of the programme, a network of national sub-focal points should be created.

4. Focal points should promote the development of a horizontal flow of information through autonomous organizations, in addition to the vertical flow through administrative levels.

5. The study of problems of thermal waters should be included in that on recreational waters.

6. The definitions of the terms included in the "glossary" of the proposed evaluation questionnaire should be reviewed, taking into consideration other glossaries issued by various institutions. This review should be undertaken by the NANC.I.E. group.

7. The present glossary should be enlarged, adding 32 new terms to facilitate comprehension of the questionnaires.

8. Countries should establish priorities for distributing water in emergency situations. Such plans should take into consideration the needs of special population groups and institutions.

9. Countries should consider making available additional manpower for drinking-water treatment plants in the case of emergencies, such as strikes or disasters.

10. Work on the new evaluation system in south-eastern European countries should be initiated, with the aim of reviewing the situation in those countries at a meeting to be held in late 1989 or early 1990.

11. Regarding follow-up to the present Consultation, the following steps were recommended:

	Duration in months
Amendment of questionnaire	2
Final review, acceptance and completion of questionnaire	1-1/2
Distribution of questionnaire under covering letter[a]	1/2
Compilation of data by government	9-12
Transmission of questions to WHO/NANC.I.E.	1/2
Analysis of information	1-1/2
Publication of results	2
Review of whole exercise and planning of future activities at a meeting	(to be decided)

[a] The covering letter to be sent to health ministries in the European Region should preferably indicate not only the names of national institutions involved in the water and sanitation sector, but, if possible, the names of focal points in these institutions capable of participating in the provision of data.

Annex 1

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