



Country Water Action: Nepal
Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS): Steering Nepal's
Water Sector
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- [Fighting Fragmentation in the Water Sector](#)
- [Working Towards Authority and Capacity](#)
- [Strategizing Towards better Water Management](#)
- [Promoting Regional Cooperation to Quench Asia's Thirst](#)
- [Related Links](#)

FIGHTING FRAGMENTATION IN THE WATER SECTOR

Nepal is a clear example of why governments need a central coordinating unit for its water sector.

More than 13 ministries and several more departments and line agencies have a stake in this landlocked country's water sector-its policy formulations, programming, utilities, resource management, and more.

To mitigate the risk of a fragmented water sector, Nepal created its Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) in 1981 as the coordinating arm of the Water and Energy Commission.

WECS is the overarching body that assists government entities in formulating water-related policies and projects in a way that coordinates their efforts. It is managed by an executive secretary and is organized across four directorates-energy planning, water resources, legal and institutional arrangement, and social, economic and environment.

The nature of WECS' mandate qualifies it as a "[national water sector apex body](#)" (NWSAB).

An apex body is a diverse body consisting of water sector experts that a government commissions to steer the water sector reform process. In effect, the collaborative, cross-sectoral body addresses the fragmentation that usually impedes reforms because of the many agencies involved in the sector.

[▲Top](#)

WORKING TOWARDS AUTHORITY AND CAPACITY

Much more than providing guidance on policy and programming, the Government of Nepal has mandated WECS to increasingly operate as a "central water planning unit," which broadens their scope to:

- Reviewing strategic plans and monitoring the related action plans
- Integrating sub-sector programs

- Compliance monitoring of all policy, acts and regulations for water resources development

To meet this mandate, WECS needs two things: Authority and capacity. While some water apex bodies struggle to operate without the necessary authority, the Government of Nepal has endowed WECS with authority and directed other water-related departments and agencies to "follow its advice and obtain its approval for water and energy resources development," said Mr. Sharada Prasad Sharma, executive director of WECS.

To get this job done, WECS pushes for increased capacity building programs. WECS specifically says it needs to improve its ability for strategic planning. It has also identified the need to increase both its technical and non-technical skill base. In the past, WECS has used the occasions of policy reviews, planning and studies to increase its capacity through preparation exercises.

 [Top](#)

STRATEGIZING TOWARDS BETTER WATER MANAGEMENT

In the past, WECS' major outputs have been research and study programs for policy formulation in both the water and energy sectors.

These days, however, WECS is preparing a nationwide water resources strategy and a national water plan. The plan will outline short-, medium- and long-term action plans for the water sector.

Mr. Sharma said the strategy and plan are focused on uplifting the quality of life of Nepal's people and reducing poverty by

- helping reduce incidences of poverty, unemployment and under employment
- ensuring health security by increasing access to safe and adequate water and sanitation services
- ensuring food security by increasing agricultural productivity
- generating hydro-power to satisfy national energy requirements and allowing export of surplus energy
- supplying the needs of the industrial and other economic sectors
- facilitating water transport, particularly connection to a sea port
- protecting the environment and conserving biodiversity
- preventing and mitigating water induced disasters

The goals are broad, and will need concerted action in the short term to ensure results. Activities in the next five years will therefore focus on

- developing and approving an integrated National water resources policy
- harmonizing and amending conflicting water resource laws
- clarifying and establishing equitable water use rights
- raising public awareness on water rights and responsibilities
- amending the Electricity Act to align with the hydropower development policy

 [Top](#)

PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION TO QUENCH ASIA'S THIRST

Asia is home to the largest number of people living without access to clean water and sanitation. The figures are staggering-700 million people without access to safe water and 2 billion without adequate sanitation.

Aside from the challenge of providing water utility services, the water sector must also ensure the proper management of water resources so that water services to a variety of users can meet the rising demand in ways that are sustainable economically, environmentally and socially.

Nepal is one of only [ten countries](#) in Asia with water sector apex bodies that can help meet these tasks.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), guided by its [Water for All Policy](#), assists governments in creating and strengthening water sector apex bodies as well as facilitating regional cooperation between them with ongoing activities and annual regional meetings.

Mr. Sharma, an active member of the regional water apex bodies group, believes that Nepal's participation in regional networks is having an impact on the country's policy work.

"It has helped to better understand the roles and responsibilities of an apex body and the way to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate other developmental line agencies," he said.

