

Sri Lanka: National Water Resources Authority

I. Description of NWSAB

(i) Introduction

Sri Lanka's water sector reforms are influenced by number of warning signs related to water and non-availability of cost effective water resources to expand safe drinking water supply to targeted population in spite of massive investments made in the water sector in the past three decades. Degradation of water quality and also of critical watersheds are among the other major issues for priority intervention. Because of the warning signs and emerging competition for water, Government of Sri Lanka has taken action to implement reforms in the area of water resources management. Sri Lanka lacks a comprehensive approach to water allocation or an adequate system of water rights. Water is managed as an input to a number of major national sectors.

The government's water policy initiative, which commenced in 1996 with the establishment of Water Resources Council and Water Resources Secretariat (the WRS) with assistance of the Asian Development Bank and Food & Agriculture Organization of the UN, completed its activities with formulation of water policy and draft National Water Act. This action was the result of the recommendation made after the institutional review of the current institutional framework conducted under technical assistance funded by ADB. The National Water Resources Policy and Institutional Recommendations were completed with the guidance of a Water Resources Council and through consultation and dialogue with an Inter Agency Coordinating Committee represented by the major water agencies. In addition to this, an extensive stakeholder consultation was carried out at district and divisional administrative levels involving stake holders from government, non-government and water users. The consultation followed an agenda to create awareness on the current and future issues related to water and promoted the need of a national policy for water resources management and institutional development to fill the gaps, eliminate overlaps and strengthen the capacity of agencies, for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM).

Water Resources Council(WRC) formed as a neutral, interim apex body, has its membership derived from government, non-government, farmer organisations and private sector representation.

- The Water Resources Secretariat (WRS) was formed to assist WRC to formulate and draft policy and water law for government approval. The WRS was manned by a Director and 8 professional staff on contract and full time secondment derived from major water agencies representing sub-sectors of Irrigation, Water Supply, Hydropower Agriculture and Environment to satisfy the multidisciplinary approach needed for IWRM.
- A campaign was launched by WRS to educate stakeholders on the need of a water policy for transparent decision making and to eradicate the unfavourable trends associated with water.

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- Policy and the draft law were finalized in the year 2000 and in March 2000 national water policy including proposed institutional arrangements were approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and the legal drafting of the act was completed.

The policy recommendations included passage of water Act with the provision of establishing the water sector Apex body for over all water resources management in the country.

Government strategy was to establish an Interim body and reach broader consensus among stakeholders to pass the water law and build the capacity of the agency through pilot testing of major policy recommendations. This process commenced in the year 2001 by establishing Interim **National Water Resources Authority (NWRA)** under the **Ministry of Irrigation and Water Management** with key specialised staff appointed on a temporary basis to facilitate emergence of National Water Resources Authority.

(ii) Mandate of NWRA (approved under water policy and institutional recommendations)

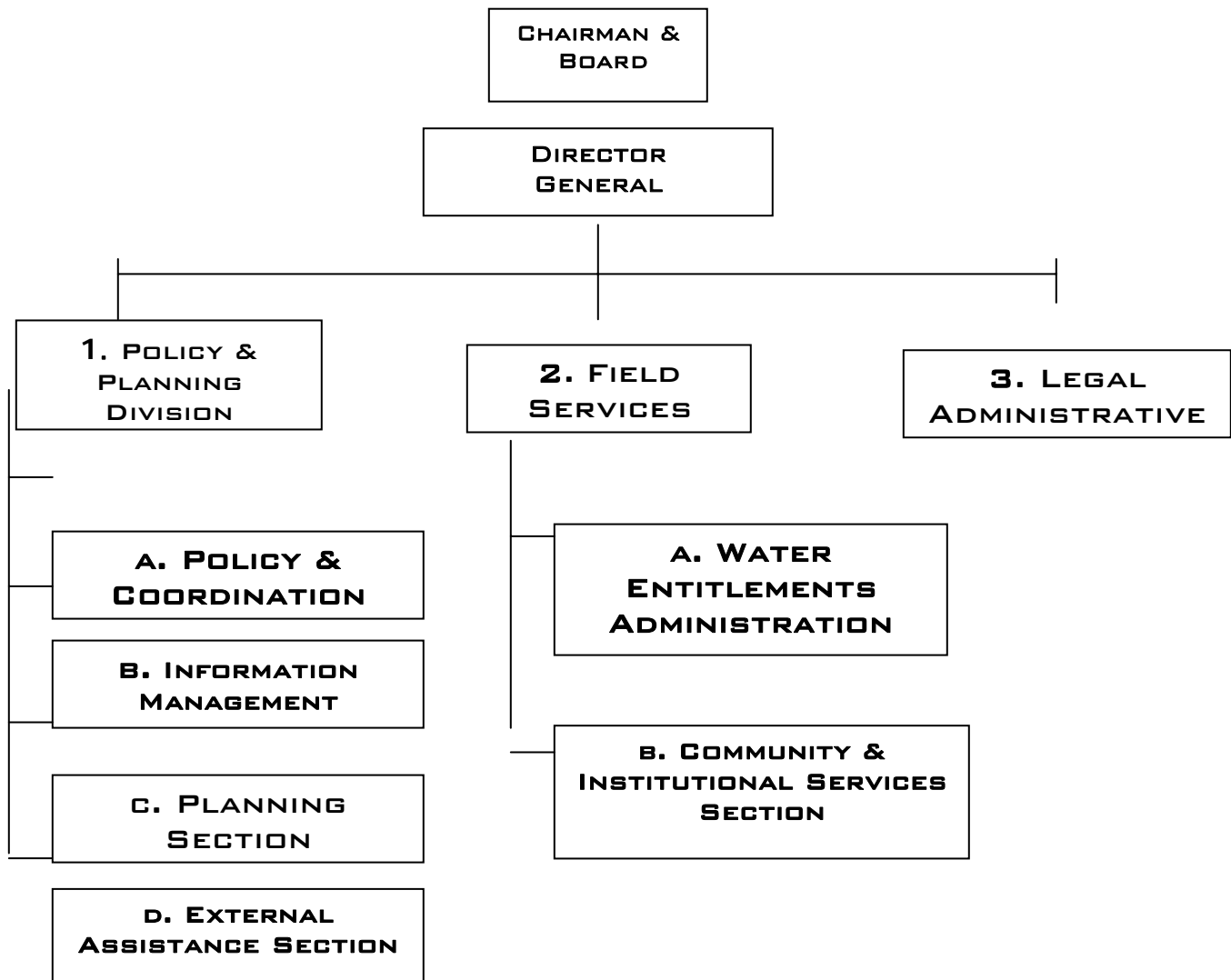
Functional Area	Specific Role of National Water Resources Authority
1. Water resources Management Policy	Formulation of policy proposals. Co-ordination with catchments management, environmental and pollution control aspects.
2. River Basin Planning & Other Water Planning	National, regional and long-term river basin planning. Involvement in seasonal planning. Institutional development at basin level
3. Coordination and Collection of Data	Improvement of data management, including monitoring, evaluation and commissioning of research.
4. Water Allocation	Issuing water user right permits to bulk and large water users; monitoring and enforcements.
5. Drought/Flood Management	Advisory on response to disasters and planning measures for mitigating
6. Control of Riverine Activities	Policy guidelines and, advice and monitoring of implementation
7. Public Information & Awareness	Education, dissemination of information

Structure of the Interim NWRA and the manpower and composition are given in the annex1.

(iii) Core Functional Areas during the interim period

- a. Consultation and awareness to build consensus on the policy objectives and legal framework
- b. Water Resources Management Strengthening through agency support for surface and ground water monitoring under water resources management project funded by ADB.
- c. Implementation of structural methods to improve water data gathering & storing.
- d. Pilot basin studies and planning involving stakeholders, institutional development at basin level for implementation of comprehensive plans.
- e. Stakeholder mobilisation for conservation and protection of watershed and riverin areas under pilot basin activity.
- f. Collaboration with sector agencies to develop a national water resources plan

**ORGANISATION CHART OF
National Water Resources Authority**



Vision Statement of NWRA and Scope

‘to ensure the use of water resources in an effective, efficient and equitable manner, consistent with the social, economic and environmental needs of present and future generations’

Mission Statement

‘Establish a regime for Integrated Water Resources Management’

Part II
A. Brief description of Activities and Accomplishments of I-NWRA

Functional Area	Subject matter	Responsibility	Output	Targets/ Comments
Policy Formulation	National Water Policy	Water Resources Secretariat	National Water Policy and Institutional Recommendations	Approved by the cabinet of ministers in 2000 March
Public Consultation and Awareness	Water Policy Water Act	DG/Director Policy and Planning Service Providers and Support Staff of I-NWRA	Public opinion in favour of Smooth Passage of Water Act by the parliament	Revised several times since 2001 December. General elections in April 2004
Institutional Collaboration to implement IWRM	Water Resources Planning and IWRM targets	I-NWRA and Partner agencies	Core planning team derived from major water agencies Consensus for a multidisciplinary approach	Activities are in progress in selected basins. Suspension of the ADB loan is seen as a set back.
Institutional Development	Water Sector reforms Establish NWRA Mahaweli River Basin Authority MRBA	I-NWRA, Water agencies Provincial and district administration	River basin organizations and re-structuring of other agencies Satisfactory stakeholder representation in basin organizations	Process is slow, consensus reached in pilot basins for basin organizations Three Ministerial committees appointed for the establishment of NWRA, restructuring of ID and MASL
Pilot Basin Studies	Comprehensive Plan for Water resources Management	I-NWRA and Basin entities	Test IWRM goals at pilot scale through implementation of water policy objectives	On going, suffered setbacks due to suspension of project support of ADB.
Water Resources Management Strengthening and Implementation of WRM Project under ADB assistance	Assistance to improve hydrometric net work, monitor surface and ground water	I-NWRA, support to ID,WRB,CEA and NWSDB to achieve	Provision of equipments and facilities to improve water resources management and partnership building	Partially fulfilled
Data and Information	Sharing and Dissemination	Major water agencies and	Data Sharing Agreement	Consensus on the draft

	of data and information	stakeholders		agreement reached.
Training and capacity building	IWRM dimensions	I-NWRA, other agencies and donors	Acquisition of tools and know-how for IWRM specially on water resources planning and assessment	On going

(ii) B. Sector Strategies

The ongoing policy action in the water sector is influenced by number of warning signals and emerging issues related to water due to lack of a regulatory domain. Traditionally past water resources planning and development were focused on maximizing the utilisation of water for agriculture and hydropower. Currently country is facing water shortage in other vital economic sectors and further resource development has become unaffordable as all the cost effective water resources are already exploited. Need for more efficient use and legal frame work for equitable water allocation to competing demands have been emphasised in the recent past. The current reforms and achievements in the water sector is largely based on establishing a regulatory domain to optimise already developed resource. Sri Lanka's quest for self sufficiency in rice paddy has utilised major share of developed resources. Since Sri Lanka has already developed almost all cost effective water resources, socio economic demands in the national development efforts need to depend on the existing resource. The main strategy in the management of water resources is demand management and transfer of resources to other vital economic sectors. Fundamental approaches for these have been for formulated under the water rights and regulation of bulk water use.

Apart from core functions presently carried out, I-NWRA is providing technical support to other national policies and programmes related to environment and natural resources.

(iii) Main Feature of Ongoing Reforms

The water Act has been drawn to provide for the reforms in the other institutions as well in order to subscribe to NWRA mandate and to perform delegated functions. These include transformation of current institutional set up in the Mahaweli river basin under Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka to a Basin Water Management Agency which is in line with the proposed regional set up in the draft water Act. Creation of the Ministry of River Basin Development under the new government came in to power in April 2004 demonstrates that the government's intention is to manage the water and environment considering the natural boundaries. To achieve this objective, associated institutional arrangement proposed under the draft water Act is required to be set up.

(iv) Lessons Learned

Overcoming obstacle to implement reforms in a society where the people suspect the credibility of the government is a challenge to the decision managers and policy makers. It is important to make a concerted and pre-emptive effort to educate the people, create

awareness and to build consensus before opinion makers try to exploit the situation for political mileage.

Delays in implementation or intervention with a vision are the cause for irreversible damage to natural resource. Countries need to understand that there is no room to postpone action or to compromise water and environmental issues.