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MID-DECADE CONFERENCE

An Intergovernmental Conference Held at the Mid-Point
of the International Hydrological Decade at the UNESCO House
in Paris, France, December 1969

The Mid-Decade Conference not only provided the opportunity to assess the progress made during the first half of the Decade and to take bearings for the second half, but it also provided an occasion to look beyond the Decade period toward a long-term plan of action for international co-operation in hydrology. The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. R. Maheu, in his inaugural address said that UNESCO is ready to assume the responsibilities for a new program concerning man and his environment, and that UNESCO will intensify its efforts to contribute to the general progress of hydrology as an integral part of the environmental sciences. He further said that UNESCO would welcome any suggestions for a permanent system of international co-operation for scientific hydrology.

The Secretary-General of WMO, Mr. D. A. Davies, mentioned the extensive WMO contribution to the IHD activities and referred to the full co-operation extended by WMO. But he stressed the need for more co-ordination and said that WMO would be of greatest help in the operational aspects of hydrology.

The Conference, the decisions of which will govern international collaboration far beyond 1974, was attended by some 150 delegates from 69 countries. Many U. N. agencies and scientific associations were also represented.

The Conference, while reviewing the work and the results during the first half of the IHD (1965-1969), discussed in particular the World Water Balance, the Influence of Man on the Hydrological Cycle, River Channel Phenomena, Soil Erosion and Sediment Transport, Hydrological Forecasting, Network Planning and Design, and Floods and Their Computation.

It was generally agreed that the IHD had stimulated the development of hydrology at the national level and in the field of international co-operation.

Mid-Decade Conference

The program was, however, considered too wide - priorities should be established.

UNESCO, which initiated the IHD and is providing the Secretariat, was criticized for the slow progress in the publication program, but any improvement could not be foreseen in the future. It was interesting to note that the Nordic Regional Collaboration was recognized as setting a good example for regional collaboration. The Conference agreed that in the future IHD Program (1970-1974) priority should be given to those activities which promise practical benefits and can be expected to be completed by the end of the Decade. Moreover, it was proposed to concentrate efforts on practical results so as to reduce the gap between developing and developed countries. In particular the African countries pressed for more assistance. The Nordic countries stressed the importance of the scientific aspects of the program and proposed that ICSU should have a stronger position in the IHD Program.

Many important and far-reaching decisions were taken in connection with the discussions of the long-term plan of action for international collaboration after 1974. The most important of them are mentioned below.

The preparation of the long-term program of regional and world-wide collaboration in hydrology was assigned to the IHD Co-ordinating Council, which should send this plan to all national IHD committees before it is submitted to the 17th UNESCO General Conference in 1972.

UNESCO was requested to continue and develop its program in scientific hydrology after the end of the Decade in 1974, and to convene an intergovernmental meeting of experts in 1974 to elaborate the details of this program to be launched in 1975.

Member states were requested to maintain their national hydrological committees as essential parts of the future organizational system for international collaboration.

The need for a continuing international forum also after the Decade and the necessity for an effective permanent co-ordination was recognized. The Director-General of UNESCO was requested to plan in consultation with the Co-ordinating Council machinery for future co-operation in the long-term hydrological program with due regard to co-operation with other relevant organizations. The proposal for this planned machinery should be transmitted to all concerned organizations of the U. N. system so that a decision could be taken before the end of 1973. However, reservations were made to these decisions on the long-term plan of action by U. N., FAO, and WMO.

The Co-ordinating Council met after the Conference and discussed mainly the working groups of the Council.

Next session of the Council will be held at WMO in Geneva.