
About this resource book

For several decades, improved watershed management has been a high priority for many countries. Since the 1990s, integrated and participatory watershed management has been seen as a promising approach for conserving water, land and biodiversity, enhancing local livelihoods and supporting broader sustainable development processes at the national and river basin levels.

During the International Year of Mountains, FAO and its partners undertook a large-scale assessment and global review of the current status and future trends of integrated and participatory watershed management. The general objectives were to promote the exchange and dissemination of experiences in implementing watershed management projects in the decade from 1990 to 2000, and to help identify the paradigm, approach and methods for a new generation of watershed management programmes and projects.

Experts from four continents contributed to the assessment through four regional workshops in Nairobi (Kenya), Kathmandu (Nepal), Arequipa (Peru) and Megève (France), and an international conference in Porto Cervo (Italy). Workshop and conference findings have been published in five volumes of proceedings in the FAO-FORC Watershed Management and Sustainable Mountain Development Working Papers series. This resource book provides a critical summary of the FAO review's findings and recommendations.

The resource book has been written primarily for field-level watershed management practitioners and local decision-makers involved in watershed management at the district or municipality level. It is also expected to be a useful source of information on the new generation of watershed management for other readers, such as senior officers, consultants, evaluators, policy-makers and watershed management students.

To facilitate the retrieval and use of information, the resource book allows for different levels of reading and learning. Page-side callouts and subheadings facilitate a rapid scan of the contents of each chapter. Core information is summarized in the main text. Boxes illustrate key topics, burning issues and expert opinions, or present real-life examples. Short fiction narratives (one prelude and two interludes) illustrate the link between the everyday professional life of watershed managers and the subject dealt with in the following chapter.

The resource book addresses the new paradigm of watershed management as outlined by the FAO review from four complementary angles.

The first chapter looks at the history of watershed management, emphasizing how a discipline initially based on water engineering and forestry has become a multidisciplinary approach rooted in general and human ecology and linked to agriculture, rural development, environmental economics and social sciences.

The second chapter summarizes the conceptual background inspiring many of the discussions made during the FAO review. It deals with new perspectives on watershed biophysical processes, human ecology and environmental economics.

The third chapter describes some ongoing changes in programme design and implementation strategy, and outlines the profile of the new generation of watershed management programmes and projects.

The fourth chapter links the new watershed management approaches to the policy environment of the new millennium. It also deals with critical factors for the successful implementation of the new approach, such as capacity building and financing.

The annexes provide additional information on specific methods and resources for watershed management.