



United Nations Environment Programme

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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT · PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

PAN AFRICAN IMPLEMENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE ON WATER (ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 8-13 DECEMBER 2003)

Statement by
the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Delivered by:
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“The Decade of Implementation and Partnership in Africa”

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me to represent Dr. Klaus Töpfer, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, at this historic meeting which has brought together African Governments and institutions, United Nations agencies and other partners of Africa, and African Civil Society and media representatives.

This conference represents a significant milestone in efforts to ensure the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the targets of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Africa. It highlights the African continent's determination to address its most urgent sustainable development problems.

The United Nations Environment Programme has given the highest priority to supporting Africa. We have worked with African Governments bilaterally and in sub-regional and regional contexts and contributed to the work of the UN system for promoting the progress and wellbeing of the African peoples. Our support for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) and our contribution to the preparation of the environmental component of NEPAD are significant features of our solidarity with this continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the African continent, integrated and sustainable management of water is and will remain a priority challenge. Too many of the adults and children who die from too little water in droughts, too much water in floods or too polluted or too disease ridden water, are in Africa. Many of these deaths could be prevented by better water management policies and practices.

Undaunted by failure to meet previous targets, the international community recently agreed to new global targets to reduce by one-half the proportion of people without access to safe water and sanitation by 2015 and to provide safe water and sanitation for all by 2025. The new targets present a huge challenge to political leaders and water management policy makers in Africa as well as to Africa's external partners.

To meet that water target in Africa, an additional 405 million people must get access to some form of improved water supply by the year 2015 with an average of over 36 million every year, 690,000 every week and 138,000 every day. To meet that sanitation target an additional 247 million people must get improved sanitation, with an average of over 22 million every year, 425,000 every week and 85,000 every day.

The UNEP paper for this conference, "A UNEP CONTRIBUTION TO THE DIALOGUE ON THE WATER POLICY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES" identifies nine key issues that must be addressed. These include the following:

Tripling access to water and quadrupling improved sanitation: With only 64 percent of the population with access to improved water supply, Africa has the lowest proportional coverage of any region of the world.

Closing the sanitation gap of the urban poor: Tens of millions of household, especially in informal settlements, only have access to overused and poorly maintained communal or public toilets. In many cities only 10 to 30 percent of all urban households' solid wastes are collected.

Reducing high water related diseases and deaths: For African children under five the health burden that arises from diarrhoeal disease linked to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene is up to 240 times higher than in high-income nations.

Preventing water pollution from cities : As is common throughout the developing world, very few cities in Africa have rivers flowing through them that are not heavily polluted and much the same applies to nearby lakes, estuaries and seas.

Rising food insecurity: While the total number of undernourished people world-wide has fallen, the proportion in sub-Saharan Africa has remained virtually unchanged.

Expanding irrigation for agriculture: Africa's dependence on cereal imports is expected to continue to grow with a widening net trade deficit, and 60 percent of food production is from non-irrigated agriculture. Such low proportions of irrigated land point to underdeveloped infrastructure.

Doubling hydropower generation and services : In many countries across central Africa, hydroelectric power generation, mostly from large-scale schemes, is dominant. The economically exploitable potential is huge. There is potential for small and micro-hydro schemes in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in support of rural household.

Rising costs of water related disasters: Over the past ten years nearly 135 million people have been affected in Africa by water-related (flood and drought) events. Economic losses from a poor household do not have to be high to be a very significant disruption.

Sharing water among sectors and countries: Within catchments where water is already under stress, agriculture is the dominant sector. Sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by shared international river basins, and Saharan Africa by shared groundwater systems.

Africa's Water challenges are largely the consequence of policy failures. Water resources have been poorly monitored and poorly managed. Clean water has too often been subsidized for too few while being a luxury for the poor. Water has too often been too little or been too inefficiently used to produce enough food. Many so-called development projects have destroyed water ecosystems. Too many lives have been lost because of too little, too much or too polluted water. Water has been unevenly distributed by nature and then unfairly allocated by humans. Water has been a mismanaged public good because decision-making was too exclusive. Shared water has often not been shared fairly or wisely among communities and countries.

Renewed and concerted efforts will be needed to meet the water targets in Africa. These include a higher level of political commitment expressed by appropriate policies and institutions and mobilisation of local and external resources and effective participation of all stakeholders in the management of water resources. Greater attention will have to be paid to improving and expanding knowledge base on water resources, protecting ecosystems, and promoting equitable sharing of water among competing sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We hope that this conference will help in the adoption of decisions on addressing all these challenges and in forging partnerships within and among African countries enlisting the participation of external partners.

It is our hope that the outcomes of this great Conference will usher in an era of accelerated implementation of the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals and WSSD's plan of implementation. The NEPAD initiative in general and its environmental component in particular must receive your endorsement and support.

We also hope that outcomes of this conference will include a firm commitment, on the part of all the member states of AMCOW, to promptly embark on the preparation of national, sub-regional and regional plans for achieving greater access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation as envisaged in the 2015 targets.

Furthermore, we hope that this Conference will lend an additional impetus for strengthening and nurturing the great potential in the EU-Africa Water Initiative. This strategic partnership, which responds to the call for implementation in the Johannesburg Political Declaration, is a hallmark of South-North Co-operation and will help achieve the development goals adopted at the Millennium Summit.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the United Nations Environment Programme's commitment to work much closer with the African Ministers' Council on Water, along with our sister UN agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and other partners, to ensure implementation of the outcomes of your deliberations.

UNEP wishes this Conference a very successful and fruitful outcome.
