

I would like to thank Mr. Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP for inviting me to the World Water Day 2010 event here at the UNEP/UN-Habitat headquarters.

I thank you for giving me once more an opportunity to join my voice to the many which are raised to bring the attention of each woman and men from all over the world to the importance of water and in particular to the water quality for the living creatures and for the life of the humanity.

As I said during the Pan African Chemistry Network (PACN) Sustainable Water Conference, "without water there is no life, indeed, without access to clean and sustainable water supplies, our continent's economic development will stall, communities will wither, famine will become unbearable and conflict will increase".

Consumption of bad quality water by human beings debilitates their capacity to produce the food, and other goods they need to sustain their livelihood because bad quality of water is the source of illnesses such as cholera and diarrhoea. Stagnated water by lack of good sanitation is an ideal habitat for the reproduction of the mosquitoes that transmit malaria. These two diseases together with HIV/AIDS are the biggest challenges for the health services and for the economy in my country, Mozambique. They are the main cause for the high infant mortality and for the low life expectancy. Water contaminated by bad elements such as those coming from the waist from industrial activity and from chemicals applied in agricultural farming, just to name a few, may create other types of diseases which may be detrimental to the development of human resources.

The diseases which I mentioned as examples in a large part of Africa not only bring down the productive capacity of individuals but are the cause of the death of millions of persons who could contribute to create wealth for the world.

When we conceive plans for socio-economic development we put the development of human resources at the fore front of our priorities. A lot of financial and material resources are invested for that. So, when after all efforts these human resources cannot be utilized for many days in a year because of illness, or cannot be utilized at all because of their demise the social economic development not only slows down but it tends to regress.

In many cases it is not only the physical men power we lose but foremost the intellectual power which could multiply many folds our capacity to produce goods including new technologies. We loose the capacity of managing and making better use of the so many natural resources which our continent is endowed with.

Good water quality does not benefit only the human being but also the other living organisms, such as plants which absorb their nutrients from the soil using good water. But if that water carries excess of salt or other damaging elements the plants may not be able to grow or may die even if they are already grown. The impact of salt-water intrusion on available water resources is one of the crucial challenges which reduce the possibility of using water for drinking or for irrigation.

Without plants we cannot have vegetal food for us the human beings nor for the animals which provide us with meat. Without plants we cannot have forests which we need to extract timber for multiple uses for our social and economic development. Besides timber the plants also are necessary for recycling the oxygen we need to breath every seconds of our life.

Socio-economic development is not possible without good water. Water pollution, water contamination are enemies of development, are enemies of life for the present and future generations.

That is why it is important that in planning for social and economic development the leaders of the world, particularly

those in the African Continent have to give priority to the preservation and good management of clean water, whether they are focusing on health and educational development, or on agricultural and industrial development.

Preventing deadly diseases by avoiding water pollution and investing in the supply of clean water decreases expenditure in the health sector and provides high returns.

This requires effective water quality monitoring action which is a big challenge for poor countries like Mozambique due to the high cost of laboratory analysis. In the specific case of Mozambique we are also challenged by the fact that this is a downstream basin territory with vast low lands at the sea level. The burden of over exploitation of water in the shared river basins by neighbouring countries has serious implications for the sustainable development of water resources within Mozambique. Our way out is to persist in advocating for an integrated water resource management.

I cannot resist congratulating those who so ably drafted and adopted the UN Water Statement on water quality.

Let me repeat what from that statement is most relevant to show in short and clear words the importance of good water quality in socio-economic development.

First it says:

“Every year, more people die from the consequences of unsafe water than from all forms of violence, including war. And the greatest impacts are on children under the age of five. The economic losses due to the lack of water and sanitation in Africa alone are estimated at USD28.4 billion or about 5% of GDP. Water contamination weakens or destroys natural ecosystems that support human health, food production, and biodiversity. Studies have estimated that the value of ecosystem services is double the gross national product of the global economy, and the role of the freshwater ecosystems in purifying water and assimilating

wastes has been valued at more than USD400 billion. Most polluted freshwater ends up in the oceans, damaging coastal areas and fisheries”.

Here I would like to add that water is a basic right and everyone has a role to play to enhance its value and the protection of river ecosystems and other water ecosystems.

A vigorous public awareness campaign for improving the understanding of key issues at the political level should be promoted at the national, sub regional and regional levels.

All stakeholders including private sector, communities, interest groups and individuals as well as governments must have the will to participate in tackling the water pollution problems in a curative but also in a preventive manner.

The management of present and future water quality in the world is fundamentally important if the continued existence of both, the resource and the populations reliant on the resource is to be secured.

I find no better way to conclude my attempt to explain why good water quality is important in socio-economic development than to repeat the relevant section of the UN Statement on water quality which I quote:

“As global community, we must refocus our attention on improving and preserving the quality of our water, a challenge that requires bold steps internationally, nationally, and locally. Directing global priorities, funding, and policies to improve water quality can ensure that our water resources can once again become a source of life. We already have the knowledge and the skills to protect our water quality. Let us now have the will. Human life and prosperity rest on our actions to be the stewards, not polluters, of this most precious resource.

Clean water is life.”

I thank you.

