

**Statement by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Deputy Director,  
UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) to CSD13  
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The Arab world is considered one of the most water stressed regions in the world. The per capita share of renewable water resources is currently under 500 m<sup>3</sup> per capita per year in about 70% of Arab countries. These severe conditions have led many countries in the region to fossil groundwater exploitation, and sea water desalination, which eventually translates into high water development costs and adverse impacts on the environment. Water in this region is therefore not only vital to life, but essential for development.

This stark reality was captured in our widely read Arab Human Development Report 2002, which has elaborated the elements of a water strategy that stresses the need for management of water resources in a far more integrated manner rather than the fragmentation of water affairs management.

In the area of water, UNDP has therefore articulated an integrated strategy to support countries address their water management challenges. Capacity development and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) practices are two of the key approaches employed by UNDP to support the Arab region in meeting their water and sanitation targets of the MDGs and WSSD.

Two key policy options and their corresponding practical measures contained in the Chairman's summary of interactive discussions, are not only fully endorsed by the Regional Bureau for Arab States, but ongoing implementation of these recommendations have already yielded positive results.

The Arab Region, with the support of UNDP is already mainstreaming water in national development strategies. Several countries (for example, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, among others) have already undertaken water sector planning in close coordination with broader development planning.

The Arab Region is devising and implementing mechanisms for cross-sectoral co-ordination in planning; and devising and implementing mechanisms for coordination between different levels of their administration. For instance, at the regional level, UNDP has partnered with the recently established Arab Water Council (AWC) and its Interim Technical Secretariat, the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), to carry out a review of the status of IWRM plans in the Region and an assessment of the capacity development needs of countries to implement them.

This draft report, which we are happy to make available at this meeting, is therefore the important first step in formulating a regional capacity building programme in the water sector in the Arab Region. Close monitoring of the water targets is very encouraging, making the Arab Region the only one to have systematically compiled such a status report.

One key conclusion is that Arab countries recognize the importance of an integrated approach to water management. Political will and commitment that are motivated with enough awareness and backed with sufficient capacity building are key elements that determine the capabilities of governments to formulate integrated water resources management plans by 2005 and to further implement them.

Some Arab countries including Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine have approved national water policies. Some countries have developed frameworks, which contain elements of policy, in the form of action plans or master plans. Others are beginning to recognize the importance of a systematic approach to water management, with policy formulation as the first step in the process.

An example of these countries is Egypt that has created an IWRM-plan-committee to tailor its existing water policy and national water resources plan towards an IWRM plan, and Saudi Arabia that is following a systematic four-phase approach to finalize an IWRM plan by the year 2005.

In addition to supporting the preparation of IWRM plans and interagency coordination mechanisms, UNDP is building capacities for IWRM and seeking capacity building partners in the Arab region, UNDP works directly through its 17 country offices (COs) in the Arab region to target capacity-building development assistance based on the needs of each Arab country, whether it is an LDC (Least Developed Country) or NCC (Net Contributory Country).

UNDP's regional programme for the Arab States, namely the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), focuses on programmes of a regional nature with a minimum of three countries participating. UNDP, in collaboration with the Arab Water Council (AWC) and CEDARE, is working in the field of water resources in the Arab Region emphasizing the spreading of knowledge and exchange of technical experience, good practices, and outcome of various research and applications in the water sector.

In addition to these programmes, UNDP's regional Capacity 2015 Programme has witnessed impressive results with tangible successes in Jordan, Yemen and Morocco. The support provided to these countries is fully aligned with another key recommendation contained in the chairman's report: "to ensure full participation of all relevant stakeholders in planning and decision making."

The support provided in these countries and interventions by the Capacity 2015 programme have shown the importance of participatory approaches to decision-making, as well as capacity development for planning processes, as necessary and interdependent elements of sustainable development.

In Jordan, Capacity 2015 has just launched a project on "Assessing and Strengthening National Capacities for Implementing and Monitoring the MDGs and Gender Equality." Through this project, Capacity 2015 will capitalize on the process which was initiated in 2004 for the preparation of the first Millennium Development Goals Report (MDGR) for Jordan.

The Report's preparation was an actualization of participatory approaches to MDGR formulation where civil society's organizations were brought in through several consultative workshops to provide their inputs to the Report.

UNDP's project will assess national capacities and develop the technical capabilities of key stakeholders within the government and civil society on policy/programme formulation, implementation, and monitoring.

The Arab Region is also implementing another recommendation contained in the chairman's report, namely the involvement of women in project development and implementation. In Yemen, women's groups, represented by the Supreme Council for Women of the Women National Committee, worked with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation to gender mainstream the thematic working groups' deliberations for the MDG-based Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The government was very supportive and has included gender mainstreaming within the process from the outset. The Council requested and received from UNDP training on how to mainstream gender into development planning processes, MDGs needs assessments and long-term development plans.

And in Morocco, in the area of human settlements, the "Local Agenda 21 in Urban Area" Programme conducted a series of workshops. One remarkable outcome of these workshops was the "City Contracts/Urban Pacts", drawn up by civil society organizations in cooperation with municipalities' officials. These contracts represent a real commitment to forging strategic partnerships to achieve sustainable development.

In spite of the great diversity that characterizes Jordan, Yemen and Morocco, and the different nature of the processes undertaken, there are three issues that unite these success stories: 1) they actualize the unfolding of the MDGs at the grass-root level; 2) they aim at institutionalizing the processes and the mechanisms of participatory approaches to decision making; and 3) citizens' voices were heard and the beneficiaries

of development endeavors were given the opportunity to influence decisions that impact their lives.

The RBAS looks forward to continuing our work with the AWC, CEDARE, ESCWA, and others to support the needs of the countries we serve in addition to reaching out to other partners that are already engaged in similar efforts in the region.

Effective coordination and mobilization of partners will make the Arab states one of the first regions of the world to work collectively to achieve the water-related WSSD and MDG targets which is essential if we are to ensure a more rational and sustainable use of this region's precious water resources.