



**United Nations
University**

*13th Session of CSD
11-22 April 2005
New York*

Linking the Regional and the Local: Innovation and Capacity Building for Sustainable Development

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Mr. Chairman,

As a think-tank within the United Nations, United Nations University (UNU) has a great deal to contribute to CSD's discussions on water, sanitation and human settlements.

The UNU International Network on Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), based in Ontario, Canada, is focused exclusively on water and sanitation issues. UNU-INWEH has developed a "Water Virtual Learning Centre", a training curriculum for practicing professionals to develop skills and understanding about integrated water resource management. It also undertakes research and training on groundwater and water quality management. The UNU has carried out studies on water, sanitation and human settlements, some of which have been presented at the CSD sessions.

The UNU research on water and sanitation offers a number of useful findings. Our work indicates that appropriate knowledge of water and sanitation technologies is especially important to meet the goals of sustainable development. Technologies should suit local conditions in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms in order to facilitate sustainable management. Since it is not an easy task to evaluate which technologies are appropriate, education and capacity building of local experts, engineers, community leaders and other service providers should receive high priority. Continuous collaboration between knowledge-based institutions, such as universities and local community leaders is another key for successful selection and operation of appropriate technologies.

Research undertaken by the UNU also indicates that the task of securing access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation will be most effective when local residents actively participate in projects, and these efforts are accompanied by intensive hygiene education. Once aware of the needs and

benefits of clean hygiene conditions, communities show much stronger interest in and ownership for ensuring sustainable operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation facilities. Thus, education and capacity building is a key component of the successful implementation of water and sanitation projects.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, the UNU has been making significant efforts to strengthen collaboration between scientists and educators, together with other foremost scientific and educational institutions who signed the Ubuntu Declaration. The UNU has also been emphasizing the important role of educators, and encouraging them to be more active in promoting sustainable development at all levels of education and in all sectors.

As you are aware, to further strengthen the role of education in promoting sustainable development, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN/DESD) started in January 2005. To promote its implementation, the UNU has put particular emphasis on regional and local initiatives, and especially those focused on water, sanitation and human settlements. The UNU has proposed creating regional centers of expertise on education for sustainable development (RCEs); these innovative mechanisms aim to strengthen communication and collaboration among different partners at regional/local levels. RCEs will strengthen collaboration between different levels of formal education, between formal and non-formal education, and between science and education. Participants in RCEs may include school teachers, university professors, experts in research institutions and museums, local government officials, media and local industries. The UNU believes that RCEs and their networks will demonstrate how education can serve as means of implementation to achieving sustainable development. Thus, as the CSD considers what measures should be taken to advance the international community toward the goals set forth in the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, we ask that education, through efforts such as the RCEs, continue to be viewed as a critical component of any strategy.

We are happy to note that the role of educators in the CSD process has been strengthened based on decisions at CSD11. We firmly believe that education, in close collaboration with science and technology, is the key agent for change, especially at the regional and local levels. It is our sincere hope that the growing recognition that education and capacity building must be the foundation for all future efforts will motivate the CSD to further strengthen the role of educators in the CSD

process, and the role of education as the means of implementing Agenda 21 and the commitments made in Johannesburg.