



Intervention by the Mr. Sudhir Mital, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, on Agenda item 2: Policy options and possible actions to expedite Implementation: (a) Water; (b) sanitation; (c) human settlements: Water in the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for CSD-13. on March 1, 2005

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, let me thank you for steering the interactive discussions on policy options and possible actions to expedite implementation in the thematic area of water with vision and leadership. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed report on 'freshwater management'.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr. Chairman,

India recognizes the crucial and equal importance of initiatives in the sectors of water, sanitation, and human settlements in improving the quality of lives of the poor and has given these aspects considerable attention in its plans and programmes. Our national targets, however, significantly exceed the JPOI targets.

India's national programmes for access to safe drinking water have a genealogy of many decades. India is aware of the emerging challenges in the field of water resources. To address these, the National Water Policy of 1987 was revised and updated in 2002 to encourage participation by all stake-holders and give due weightage to ecological concerns. India has taken policy reform initiatives in water resources aimed at greater involvement of users in cost sharing as also in operation and maintenance. Private sector participation is also encouraged, wherever feasible. People's participation and involvement at every stage, ensuring appropriate role for women; a move from top-down to demand-driven; cost sharing; a holistic approach and flexibility, are some of the characteristics that mark the recent initiatives in the water sector. Legislation has been enacted to facilitate a participatory approach. More than 41,000 Water User Associations (WUAs) have already been formed. We have initiated the rationalization of water rates for various uses to cover operation and maintenance charges.

We have clearly articulated norms for provision of drinking water facilities. As per stipulated norms, 94 per cent of rural habitations are fully covered, about 5.5 per cent are partially covered, and about 0.5 per cent is not yet covered. These will be covered by March 2005. With regard to drinking water in urban areas, it is estimated that 89 per cent of people have access to water which means they have either tap water or hand pump, 22 per cent have a water source within 100 meters of the house, and the remainder have a water source more than 100 meters away. A paradigm shift has been made in the rural water supply sector where the emphasis will be on demand-responsive approaches, community participation and decentralization of powers for implementing and operative drinking water supply schemes.

Mr. Chairman,

We recognise that quality of water is an area of concern. Surface water, and to some extent, even ground water, are being affected by industrial pollution, urban sewage and agricultural run-off. A number of legislative steps have been taken, and institutional mechanisms put in place to ensure acceptable quality of water. In regard to this and other issues related to water, sanitation, and other aspects of JPOI, we consider that technology transfer poses the greatest challenge in achieving our goals. It is crucial, in our view, to look at this aspect if developing countries are to meet the targets.

The report of the Secretary-General estimates that roughly \$ 26 billion per year over the next 10 years would be the required level of financial resources to meet the JPOI targets just for drinking water. We agree with the Secretary-General that an augmented water-related ODA, particularly grant component focusing countries most in need, is key to meeting the water-financing gap. He has rightly observed that Governments may have a number of other financing options, not equally feasible in all countries.

We recognize that projects must be financially viable, however, the provision of safe drinking water to our citizens cannot be conditional upon their ability to pay. At the same time, we recognize that subsidies on water rates to the disadvantaged and poorer sections of society should be well targeted and transparent. Irrigation is the main use of water in India and therefore often remains the focal Issue in water resources development and management. Providing irrigation facilities to small and marginal farmers is central to raising their standards of living. The thrust towards rapid development and efficient management of irrigation, which may involve components of hydro-power, should be viewed in relation to its role in poverty alleviation.

The Secretary-General, in his report, has identified lack of understanding of the concept of integrated water resources management as well as technical capacity in and financial support to developing countries as some of the reasons for delay in meeting the 2005 target in this regard. In our view, the JPOI has provided the framework for the approach to integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans. We do not believe that lack of a common methodology, as identified in the report, is an obstacle to the development of integrated water resources

management. Given the multi-dimensional nature of water resources management, in our view, it is neither practical nor feasible to develop a common methodology. We, however, agree that lack of technical and financial support to developing countries continues to remain a major factor for the delay.

It is important to focus our attention on the implementation in accordance with the agreed framework for development of water efficiency plans rather than seek to engage in normative debate on new concepts such as 'ecosystem functions and services', 'sound ecosystem management' etc. mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. These concepts are still in the realm of technical discussion. We believe that it should be left to national governments for deciding which is the best approach to adopt keeping in view their national problems and challenges and as well as their national priorities.

As far as overall water resources management goes, several steps have been taken in a holistic approach, including afforestation, water conservation practices, watershed development, groundwater recharge, reviving traditional harvesting and conservation practices, etc. to meet the competing demands. In the context of management of transboundary waters, it has been our experience that bilateral approaches have worked well. There is great heterogeneity in the demographic, social and economic situations of watershed and river basins throughout the world, and we do not believe that it is at all possible to arrive at 'one size fits all' multi-lateral norms for management of trans-boundary water bodies.

Policy making for the water sector has multiple dimensions in both the aspects of quantity and quality of water, which in turn are inter-related. Water is the most critical of all natural resources, and impacts health, pattern of settlements, agriculture, industry, power, fisheries and many other sectors. Major infrastructural investments relate to or are impacted by water policies. For these reasons, in India, we have found it inadvisable to locate all operational and policy-making responsibilities for water in a single agency. Whereas we recognise the advantages of strengthening monitoring processes for water resources management and water resources development, it has to be essentially at the local level and where core policy issues are involved at the national level. We believe that it would be better to hasten slowly in our multilateral effort in this regard, and revisit this issue once we have comprehensively addressed the main questions of financial resources and technical assistance. In any case, CSD is the high-level Commission within the UN system for sustainable development, with the role of reviewing and promoting the implementation of Agenda 21 and JPOI.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)