



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Opening Remarks by Honourable Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs South Africa, Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi on the occasion of the Global Environment Facility International Waters Science Conference in Bangkok, Thailand

24 – 26 September 2012

H. E. Dr. Prodprasob Surasawadee, Minister of Science, Ministry of Science and Technology, Thailand;

Scientists;

Policy Makers;

Managers of International Organisations

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and gentlemen

I am gratified by the opportunity given to me to address you on this august occasion of the official opening for the Global Environment Facility International Waters Science Conference.

When I was looking at the conference objectives I was impressed by the objective of creating a forum for scientists, policy makers and ecosystem managers to develop a common agenda.

The Global Environment Facility and its partners through the International Waters Programme over the last two decades, has demonstrated that countries in regions can come together to protect and enhance the delivery of ecosystem services to the society.

As a representative of the developing countries I must emphasise that we are more dependant to these ecosystem services for our livelihoods, food security and protection from pollution as they naturally improve our water quality. In the protection of our ecosystems we must invest in the most cost effective ways with regards to human capital development and finance.

To this end, I would like to stress that nations who share ecosystems such as international waters can most effectively plan for their management if they have common regional agendas. These must be informed by common data bases, management plans and common indicators which could be informed by our local plans.

There should be clear definition of how these indicators and thresholds will be monitored by individual countries beyond the life span of any particular research project. These indicators must be as efficient as possible and provide knowledge that allows us to make environmental interventions at the regional, national and community levels. Importantly there needs to be clear linkages that demonstrate the contribution that local and national interventions have towards regional or ecosystem objectives.

It is important that we involve communities in the decision making process in ecosystems management to ensure their protection and benefit to society.

Research and science must inform and support policy implementation. We need to ensure that the research results are communicated to all stakeholders involved including communities.

In conclusion, I think we need to focus our deliberations on the following:

- Regional cooperation and sharing of information;
- Investment in human capital and technology;
- I want to encourage us to think about how we establish regional and ecosystem wide indicators taking lessons from those countries that are more advanced in this area;
- Enhance community participation and utilise indigenous knowledge in the management of ecosystems.

These are the real challenges when we are deciding on the establishment of freshwater ecosystem protection areas and placing marine protection areas or building coastal cities or ports.

I do hope that South Africa and Africa as a whole will be included in future programmes of this nature.

I thank you.