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# Facing the Facts

ASSESSING THE VULNERABILITY  
OF AFRICA'S WATER RESOURCES  
TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE





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# Facing the Facts

Assessing the Vulnerability of Africa's Water Resources  
to Environmental Change





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## Foreword

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As we proceed with the twenty-first century, one-third of the world's population lives in countries with moderate to high water stress. UNEP was designated as the lead agency of the United Nations for the commemoration of the World Water Day in 2003 during which the first United Nations World Water Development Report was released. The concluding chapter of the report is entitled "The World Water Crisis: Fitting the pieces together". The Report highlighted the water-related threats and vulnerabilities confronting humankind. These vulnerabilities are on the increase.

- Development has put additional pressures on water resources and the environment, and those pressures are set to mount further still.
- Freshwater ecosystems continue to be hit hard by reduced and altered flow patterns, deteriorating water quality, infrastructure construction and land conversions. More rivers have been disrupted, fewer rivers retain good ecological status. Biodiversity and fisheries are in a global decline as freshwater ecosystems have been more severely disrupted than land or sea.

- There are also rising costs of water-related disasters, which require practical solutions for mitigating risks and sharing water.

Water is the most vital for human survival; it is also one of the most widely shared resources on the planet. It has the capacity to unite peoples and states that share a source of water, and to incite conflict among them as they compete for it. Throughout the world people are becoming increasingly aware of the degradation of water bodies. Disasters from floods and droughts are now considered to be closely linked with the ongoing global climate change. There is also increasing public concern about the declining quantity and quality of water resources which have culminated in mounting pressure on Governments and decision-makers to institute new and innovative policies to manage water resources in a sustainable manner. The political composition of the world's international river basins, which account for nearly one-half of the earth's land surface, generate 60 percent of global freshwater flows and are home to approximately 40 percent of the world's population, highlights their vulnerabilities.

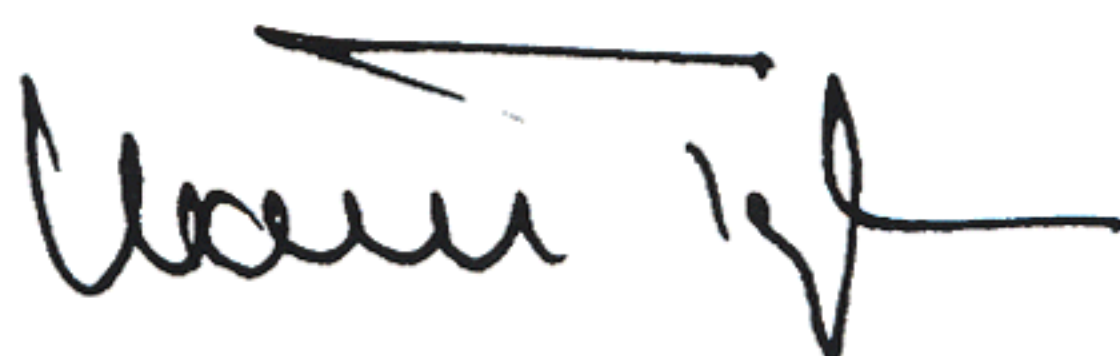
It is against this background of growing concern about vulnerabilities of water resources to environmental change and human activity that UNEP has significantly strengthened its water assessment and capacity-building activities.

- The GEF-funded and UNEP-implemented Global International Waters Assessment Programme has issued several regional reports on the health of transboundary rivers, lakes, aquifers, and their ecosystems in terms of the environmental, social and economic impacts;
- The Atlas of International Freshwater Agreements, prepared by UNEP in close cooperation with a number of partners, looks at the efforts being made to encourage co-riparian cooperation;
- At the recent 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Governments adopted the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building;
- UNEP released, in February of this year, the Guidebook for Policy and Legislative Development on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Freshwater Resources; and
- The UNEP GEMS Water Quality Programme continues to make an invaluable contribution to global monitoring of the state of the planet's water resources.

The water problems and vulnerabilities confronting us on the eve of the 2005 World Summit can be addressed effectively. But, we must have the will to deal with long-term environmental problems as well as the environmental underpinnings of the vulnerability of water resources. In this regard, we are encouraged by the firm support



being extended by a number of governments. The Irish and Belgian governments, respectively, have provided funding for our vulnerability assessment of water resources. African intergovernmental bodies, institutions and experts have joined hands with UNEP in addressing the threats to Africa's ecosystems and related vulnerabilities of the continent's water resources. The ongoing efforts involve the African Ministers' Council on Water, New Partnership for Africa's Development and others. These regional commitments and the international solidarity with Africa have begun to yield tangible results.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Klaus Toepfer', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Klaus Toepfer  
*United Nations Under-Secretary General  
and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme*



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