



*a High-level event on
Interlinkages between Water and Climate Action
ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ
27 March 2019, 10.00am – 01.00pm*

Remarks

*Taikan Oki
Senior Vice-Rector, United Nations University*

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We would like to thank the organizers for convening this High-level event on interlinkages between Water and Climate Action, and for giving us the opportunity to deliver remarks.

I am Taikan Oki, Senior Vice-Rector of the United Nations University (UNU). As a global think tank for the UN system, the United Nations University focuses on solving the crosscutting challenges of sustainable development, including water and climate issues. Among its 14 global research institutes, at least 5 institutes have program components that address various aspects of water and climate: UNU-INWEH in Canada, UNU-FLORES and UNU-EHS in Germany, UNU-INRA in Ghana, and



UNU-IAS in Japan. UNU is active in the areas of climate insurance, wastewater management, evaluating the potential of unconventional water sources for water scarce areas, water resilient cities – to mention a few. We also coordinated the Freshwater resources Chapter of the 5th Assessment Report of IPCC.

I would like to make a few specific points related to adaptation to changing climate.

First, I would like to emphasise the importance of expanding and maintaining monitoring capability of hydrological cycle for better implementation of early warning systems that help managing water-related disaster risks, such as flood and drought. "You cannot manage what you do not measure" is a long-familiar saying to many, nowhere more so than in professional water circles at almost every level, and some people optimistically believes that satellite observations are perfectly suitable replacements for observations on the ground. However, due to fundamental principles of measuring rainfall or river discharge from on-board sensors, as well as their observational frequencies, their measurement accuracies are not satisfactory and in-situ observing stations are quite relevant and should



be maintained. As our water management and climate change detections are highly dependent on the past record of rainfall and river discharge, often dating back to the 19th century, we are obliged to measure and record the current state of the water and climate reliably for the next generations.

Second, as water scarcity is increasing in many areas, triggered by both climate and social changes, amongst other drivers, it is important that we pay more attention to how we manage water that we have. In this context, groundwater may be particularly important. It may provide a good source of water for drinking water supply and irrigation particularly regions where it is underutilised at present – such as Africa or Central Asia. In Africa the current groundwater use is some 3 orders of magnitude lower than in Asia. But it is in Africa where groundwater can revolutionize the progress towards food security, if properly managed. UNU recently showed that groundwater underpins multiple SDGs globally. Further sustainable development of groundwater should be utilised as a strong climate-proofing strategy. UN-Water recently decided to focus its 2022 World Water Development Report entirely on groundwater.



Finally, it is worth underscoring the relevance of poverty alleviation for solving current water issues and adapting to future climates. As we articulated in an Analysis to be published soon on *Nature Sustainability*, increased access to improved water sources during the MDGs period from 1990 through 2015, was tightly associated with economic development of nations.

In particular, without China and India, the MDG Drinking-Water Target could not have been achieved. Poverty reduction can have positive symbiotic impacts both on better water management and adaptation to climate change through increasing resilience and reducing vulnerability.

We hope these suggestions based on research evidence would help accelerate water-focused action in adaptation to climate change.

Thank you very much.