

## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND WATER

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### Summary

Just as water is essential to human development, human development is a key condition for sustainable management of water resources. Human development is the process of enlarging people's opportunities to live a healthy and happy life and takes into account the level of the actually achieved well-being. The Human Development Index reflects socio-economic aspects that are left out in other indexes such as the Gross National Product. It serves to monitor progress and to make comparisons between different countries. Through disaggregation, the HDI allows to study inequalities between the values that led to the HDI and highlights for example disparities between regions within a country.

Water is more and more recognized as a vital resource. Water resources assessment can provide the necessary information for more awareness and political decision-making on the availability and distribution of the water resources. It is foreseen that access to water, both in terms of quality and quantity, can become a major limiting factor in sustainable development. Internationally the issue has already received quite some attention but improvements that have been made are only the first small steps and the road to go is a long and tedious one.

### 1. Introduction

The key role water plays in human development is well accepted. Human development however should also be considered as an important contributor to the adequate management of water resources. The win-win situation can only be achieved if the link between the two aspects is understood and if this understanding is translated into

integrated policies and programs.

The following article deals with the relation between human development and water, starting with the explanation of what is meant with human development and how this subject has gained political interest in the past decade. In order to avoid confusion and to underline the main focus of the concept of human development, other similar terms are briefly also explained.

The term water is used in this article to refer to non-saline water resources available for human activities. The regional availability and use pattern and their evolution in time reflect the actual situation and the tendencies. These tendencies indicate how water related activities should be integrated in human development policies and the impact of development on the use of water resources.

## **2. The concept of human development**

The term development indicates the process of progress, but the concept of human development is used to focus on the ends rather than the means to achieve it. As indicated in the Human Development Report 1999, Human Development is the process of enlarging people's choices what people do and can do in their lives. The real objective of development is to create an environment in which people have the possibility to enjoy a healthy and long life. Human Development reflects both the process of widening people's alternatives in life and the level of the actually achieved well-being. The concept distinguishes between the formation of human capacities on the one hand and the use that people make of the acquired capabilities on the other hand. The formation of human capacities includes improved knowledge.

The concept of human development has often been misconstrued and confused with the following concepts and approaches to development (Doraid, 1997).

- *Economic growth* is a means and not an end of development. There is no automatic link between high Gross National Product (GNP) growth and progress in human development. Global experience shows differing patterns of progress and shortfall in achieving growth and translating it to human development.
- *Theories of human capital formation and human resource development* view humans as means to increase income and wealth rather than as ends. These theories are concerned with human beings as inputs to increasing production.
- *The human welfare approach* looks at human beings as beneficiaries rather than as participants in the development process.
- *The basic needs approach* concentrates on the bundle of goods and services that deprived population groups need – food, shelter, water. It focuses on the provision of these goods and services rather than their implications on human choices.

The concept of human development is a holistic one putting people at the center of all aspects of the development process. People are perceived to be the main actors as well as the beneficiaries and the aim is not only to achieve a wide range of possibilities but also the actual use of the alternatives offered.

At all level of development a few basic capacities are essential for human development. Without these basic capacities, people do not have choice to improve their well-being. These capacities are to lead a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living (HDR, 1999). These resources are reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI) which is a contribution in the search of index reflecting the complexity of a nations wealth.

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