Why is water managed so poorly?

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Prof. Hubert Gijzen, UNESCO Regional Director speaks

The UNESCO Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, Prof. Hubert Gijzen has bemoaned poor management of water, especially ground water in many parts of the world. He was speaking during the University of Zimbabwe Seminar on Integrated Urban Water Resources Management Plan for Harare (Zimbabwe) held on 30 July 2021.Â

"Water is life" - we all know this slogan. Without it, our life expectancy shrinks to merely a few days. This is captured well by British poet Auden who said: "Thousands have lived without love, not one without water". So indeed, water is life, yet judging from the way we manage water, it seems that water continues to be one of the most under-valued resources on planet earth,"Â said Prof. Hubert Gijzen.Â He added:Â "It is absolutely amazing for such crucial resource as water, on which our lives and that of future generation depend is so undervalued, and therefore mismanaged. In fact, I would go further and say, I don't know any other main resource that is so poorly managed like water."Â Particularly, management of ground water is extremely worrisome, as people cannot directly see the water.Â

The Regional Director said some of the reasons leading to poor management of water include: ignorance; unawareness of the negative impacts of poor water management; negative attitude; poor and uncoordinated institutional arrangements; lack of ownership; and lack of vision and leadership. Offering solutions, Prof. Gijzen said there is need for a better understanding and awareness of the water vulnerabilities and challenges. He said there is need to generate a broad understanding about the fact that if managed properly, water can be an instrument of poverty alleviation, economic development and can potentially bring prosperity to all.Â "In Agenda 2030 water is covered under SDG 6, but if managed properly, water can become the catalytic driver of all SDGs. This is true also for the SADC region, which in recent years, has experienced both extreme droughts, floods and cyclones. The extent of the impacts is difficult to imagine, but I would go as far as saying that "water is the defining issue for sustainable development here in the SADC Region", and this is probably so for many other regions as well."Â He also said there is need for a vision that links long term sustainable water management to all other relevant sectors: energy, food, economy, health and environment; a compelling yet simple/concise strategy, agreed and operationalized at large scale; as well as commitment (political, financial, intellectual and general public).

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