



## **Statement by the Executive Secretary of SADC on World Water Day – 22 March 2018**

Today, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) joins the rest of the world in commemorating the World Water Day. The World Water Day, celebrated every year on 22 March, is about focusing attention on the importance of water. This year's theme, 'Nature for Water', explores nature-based solutions (NBS) to the water challenges we face in the 21st century. It asks the pertinent question of: *How can we reduce floods, droughts and water pollution by using the solutions, we already find in nature.* Solutions inspired and supported by nature ("nature-based solutions") use, or mimic, natural processes to address contemporary water management challenges, improve water security and deliver co-benefits, vital to all aspects of sustainable development.

Damaged ecosystems affect the quantity and quality of water available for human consumption. Today globally, 2.1 billion people live without safe drinking water at home; affecting their health, education and livelihoods and for SADC *approximately 40% of the region's people still do not have access to safe drinking water, while about 60% have no access to improved sanitation facilities.* Sustainable Development Goal 6 commits the world to ensuring that everyone has access to safe water by 2030, and includes targets on protecting the natural environment and reducing pollution.

On this day, SADC Member States commemorate the importance of water and create the much needed awareness on water as an important resource to realise our national and regional development objectives. The SADC Regional Strategic Action Plan for Integrated Water Resources Management and Development (RSAP-IWRMD) is a plan through which the SADC Region implements its water sector programme. The RSAP is currently at its 4<sup>th</sup> Phase that covers 2016 to 2020. The RSAP IV focus is on water infrastructure development to enhance water security and increase resilience against Climate Variability and Change.

To effectively respond to the region's challenges, the RSAP IV proposes a suite of participatory and delivery approaches to water and services such as nexus approaches, indigenous knowledge-based solutions, disaster risk management-based systems, climate resilience building, blending both built and ecological infrastructural solutions, ground-surface water integrated planning and development among others. The role of Nature based solutions to the above challenges cannot be over-emphasised and needs to be promoted across the water sector at all levels.

It has a specific Programme that addresses the current theme of the World Water Day celebration, namely Programme no 6: Water Resources Management for

Sustainable Development. There are specific interventions that address practical issues of water resources management and in particular the following:

- i. Surface water resources management and planning;
- ii. Groundwater Resources Management; and
- iii. Environmental Water management with components on ecosystems services, environmental water requirements, Water Quality and Aquatic weeds control.

We are in solidarity with the rest of the world and want to share the following messages with the global community as we commemorate the World Water Day and join the global celebrations currently being held at the World Water Forum in Brazil:

The water sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors to the extreme hydrological events (disasters, floods, droughts and rising sea levels). In order to achieve the goals of the 2030 agenda, it is imperative that governments and private partners increase investments to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change on water and human activities.

To achieve the goals of the 2030 agenda, local and national governments must commit to the effective implementation of appropriate and integrated public policies, considering sectors such as land use and occupation, energy and agricultural policy.

Infrastructure for the access to safe drinking water and sanitation are costly and their proper maintenance, operation and renovation require adequate investment, tariff and regulation mechanisms to ensure this human right is secured in the present and future, even where it currently already exists. Society, governments and service providers must pay constant attention to the regulatory mechanisms of the drinking water and sanitation services in order to guarantee the sustainability of investments and tariffs, taking into consideration the capacities of the population to pay and consumers' rights to water and sanitation.

The combined planning of the energy, food and water and sanitation sectors, including multipurpose infrastructure projects, may optimize the use of water resources, reduce human pressure on nature and lead to lower overall cost to society. Governments, companies and society must consider the water-food nexus with methodologies appropriate to local realities as a way to improve governance models and ensure synergy between the different policies for the Integrated Water Resources Management.

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**Executive Secretary of SADC**