World’s groundwater resources are suffering from poor governance, experts say

Nairobi – 29 May 2012 – UNESCO Nairobi Office
2.5 billion people worldwide depend solely on groundwater resources to satisfy their daily needs for water and hundreds of millions of farmers rely on groundwater to sustain their livelihoods. Yet, according to experts, most if not all aquifers are not being sustainably managed to conserve and protect these vital freshwater resources. The lack of effective governance is cited as one of the main causes of groundwater depletion and aquifer pollution. To reverse these worrying trends and close the governance gap, international experts and stakeholders are meeting in Nairobi for the 2nd regional consultation of the Groundwater Governance Project to discuss regional priorities and needs and feed in a Global Groundwater Governance Diagnostic. This diagnostic will serve as a basis for a Global Framework of Action to promote good groundwater governance practices.

Groundwater is the source for nearly half of all drinking water in the world and around 43 percent of all water effectively consumed in irrigation. In addition, aquifers offer an essential buffer to populations in dry regions by providing a reliable source of water even during long periods without rainfall.
In Africa alone there are more than 40 transboundary aquifers (www.isarm.org). However, the governance of the world’s groundwater resources is still in its infancy. Decision processes concerning their management and their use are often poorly informed, leading to patterns of use that cannot be sustained.

The African regional consultation, the second consultation out of five foreseen by the Groundwater Governance Project, is taking place in Nairobi, Kenya on 29-31 May 2012. On this occasion, over a hundred prominent African experts and key local stakeholders will identify specific regional characteristics, priorities, visions, gaps and challenges to contribute to the Global Groundwater Governance Diagnostic.

The Diagnostic is the first milestone in the elaboration of a global Framework of Action. It will provide the indispensable technical basis for the visioning process by compiling the best available and up-to-date scientific knowledge on groundwater resources and their governance.

The regional consultations offer an opportunity for an unprecedented interdisciplinary dialogue among local policy-makers and stakeholders to share regional priorities in groundwater governance.

The “Groundwater Water Governance: a Country Framework for Action” project was initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and the International Hydrological Association (IAH) to address emerging global concerns on groundwater resources management. It is a 3-year initiative funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The overall objective of the project is to increase the awareness of the paramount importance of sound groundwater resources management to tackle the global water crisis. The project intends to develop a global Framework of Action consisting of a set of effective governance tools for policy-makers and stakeholders including policy options, laws, regulations and customary practices.

Media inquiries and information:

- Stéfanie Neno, Communication and Information Specialist, FAO Land and Water Division, on the tel.: +39 06 57054079 or E-Mail: stefanie.neno@fao.org

- Lucilla Minelli, International Consultant - Groundwater Governance Project, UNESCO, Division of Water Sciences, on the tel.: +33 1 4568 4029 or E-Mail: l.minelli@unesco.org