World Water Day 2016
“Water and Jobs”

Message from Dr Poonam K Singh, Regional Director
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Every year, 22 March is observed as World Water Day to highlight the multiple uses of water and to advocate for managing water resources sustainably for current and future generations. The theme for 2016 is “Water and Jobs” – to give special attention to those who work in water-related sectors.

On this day, I would like to take the opportunity to commend a special group of people who work tirelessly to provide safe drinking water for everyone and irrigation water for farmers and others in the agricultural sector, ensuring the availability of drinking water and food. Without their contribution, human health would certainly not be fulfilled.

As we enter into the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) era, there remain many challenges to be overcome in achieving the SDG goals for water and food security. The South-East Asia Region in 2015 managed to provide improved drinking water to more than 90% of its population. Major challenges lie in providing water to the remaining 10% of the population – which resides mostly in the hard-to-reach areas – and to ensure safe and available drinking water at all times. The roles of individuals working in these sectors have become ever more important. Adequate numbers of skilled workers are essential for fulfilling the water goals. WHO’s Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking water survey in 2014 shows that only half of the countries in South-East Asia have sufficient skilled workers in the drinking water sector. Of all countries in the Region, only one third has devised human resource strategies for drinking water and only a few countries have action plans available to fill the human resource gaps. As countries continue to develop economically, it is time to reflect on these worrying statistics and plan for improvement in a progressive manner.

At WHO South-East Asia Region, we have observed firsthand the need to develop human resources in this sector. Through our Water Quality Partnership for Health, we have worked with national and local governments, utilities and communities to increase the understanding of what is involved in supplying safe water. Through the development of training materials, delivery of countless training sessions, review and support, we have significantly increased the capacity of countries to manage water, thereby reducing risks of disease outbreaks. Our master trainer programme has produced many experts in our countries; successful trainees are qualified...
to train, review and advise governments on water safety issues. We are also working with the thousands of staff in Ministries of Health across the Region who will be responsible for water quality surveillance and auditing of water safety plans.

Individuals who work in the drinking water sector are a passionately committed group of individuals. They work around the clock seven days a week, and often in difficult circumstances. They aim to ensure the availability, adequacy and safety of water to be used for consumption and for irrigation. Supplying drinking water is a highly responsible job and if it is done incorrectly, it can have a serious impact on the health of people from all walks of life. We value and appreciate all their efforts, and will continue to do all we can to support and improve their situation.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh
Regional Director