Good morning everyone

Many thanks to you all for managing to come today. I would particularly like to thank xxxxxxxxxxxxx for his opening remarks, and acknowledge Mrs Mochotli, Dr Obakeng, and Mrs Ileka and the other members of the South African, Botswana and Namibia project teams. I would also like to welcome Mr Manfred Kaufmann who is representing the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation,

I would like to say a special thank you to the South African government for hosting this meeting and to the Water Research Commission for making available this splendid conference facility.

We are here today to talk about groundwater. It's worth remembering that 2.5 billion people depend solely on groundwater for their daily needs. Namibia and Botswana are both largely dependent on groundwater for their water supplies.

Yet groundwater faces a number of global challenges, from overexploitation and pollution, climate change and also from the weakness of institutions and shortages of information. These groundwater governance problems are particularly challenging in the case of transboundary aquifers.

UNESCO IHP is pleased to be involved in global programs to encourage the improved governance of transboundary aquifers, starting with the International Shared Aquifers Resource Management Program (ISARM) and followed by the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP).

The Groundwater Governance of Resources in Transboundary Aquifers project is from the Water and Diplomacy Cluster of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation which is generously providing the finance for this project.

The project is using methodology developed in the TWAP primarily by our UNESCO colleagues at the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre represented here by my colleague Geert Jan Nijstens to carry out a more in depth assessment of transboundary aquifers in three regions including here in the Stampriet region of southern Africa.

The project is one of the very few global projects on transboundary aquifers. It is also novel in two other ways. The project is incorporating the analysis of gender specific issues for the first time into a transboundary aquifers project using methodology developed by my colleagues from the World Water Assessment Programme, represented here by Francesco Greco. It is also preparing the ground for hydro diplomacy in the Stampriet region by introducing materials from UNESCO's Potential Conflict Cooperation Potential Programme, represented here by Ralph Mafoud.

We have a lot to talk about over the next three days. We will hear reports from the three national technical teams on the data they have collected and processed. We will discuss how to harmonise this data and develop and indicator-based joint assessment of the aquifer. I would like to warmly thank the national technical teams for their efforts in preparing presentations from this meeting.

Capacity building

I am looking forward to some very interesting discussions and being able by the end of this meeting to set a workplan for the integrated assessment of the Stampriet aquifer system, to be completed around April 2015.