



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FAO/NETHERLANDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS: MONDAY, 31 JANUARY 2005

The FAO/Netherlands International Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands, opened on Monday at the Netherlands Congress Centre, in The Hague, The Netherlands. In the morning, participants listened to the opening statement and keynote addresses, and convened a plenary session to introduce the themes of the Conference. Three working groups met in the afternoon to consider the themes of fostering implementation, a “new economy” of water for food and ecosystems, and enabling environment.

### OPENING SESSION

In his opening statement, Cees Veerman, Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands, emphasized that water management plays an essential role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. He cited the Conference motto, “Making It Happen,” in calling for immediate actions to integrate agriculture, ecosystems and water management with the ultimate goal of combating poverty. He stressed the importance of involving governments, private sectors, civil societies, and particularly local communities in water management.

HRH Prince of Orange, Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, said that water consumption must be stabilized by 2015 and food production must be increased to meet the ultimate goal of combating poverty. He emphasized that such a task would require commitments from all levels. He reminded participants that the objectives of the Conference are to: learn from each other’s experiences; make concrete recommendations; and accelerate implementation. He expressed hope that the result of the Conference will send a message to countries recently affected by the tsunami that water brings both destruction and opportunities.

David Harcharik, Deputy Director-General of FAO, noted that more effort must be made to reduce hunger and increase food security. He said that continuing investment in agriculture, especially in rural-based economies, is crucial for alleviating poverty and generating income. Harcharik stated that investments must come primarily from national budgets. He also highlighted the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) as an important initiative for fostering stakeholder participation.

Summarizing the outcome of the “African Pre-Conference Water for Food and Ecosystems,” held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 4 to 6 November 2004, Addisu Legesse, Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia, noted the importance of: putting sustainable development policies into practice; fostering the participation of local stakeholders; and scaling-up good practices and lessons learned. He urged participants to identify concrete

steps for: promoting capacity building and its adaptation to local circumstances; increasing and sharing data collection; and integrating local experiences and traditional knowledge.

### PLENARY

Participants in the first plenary session, chaired by Minister Veerman, listened to an introduction to the Conference themes and considered the Conference objectives and working methodologies.

In his overall introduction to the Conference themes, R. Rabbinge, InterAcademy Council, presented an analysis of Africa, highlighting its water-related obstacles, including: low productivity; endemic plant and animal diseases; a lack of investment in agricultural research; and a lack of functioning local and regional markets. He recommended water development options, including: developing irrigation; promoting field scale conservation; and applying a watershed approach. Regarding the theme of fostering implementation, Rabbinge suggested focusing on ways to translate strategies and plans into action. On the theme of a “new economy” of water for food and ecosystems, he said the key issue is considering users’ willingness to pay for various water services. On the theme of enabling environment, Rabbinge stated that attention should be given to issues such as: investment in agriculture activities and infrastructures; promoting capacity building, institutions and good governance; and investing in science and technology.

Presenting Theme One on Fostering Implementation, B.P. Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry of South Africa, stressed the need for fundamental change to water management through legal and policy measures. She emphasized that legal changes do not automatically modify water users’ attitudes and behavior. She indicated that the present challenges are to implement the policies, while avoiding any harm to the economy, and to ensure long-term sustainable use and greater efficiency of water use. She noted that implementation must involve various governmental departments. Sonjica suggested that water use may be regulated through authorization and licensing processes. She also stressed the need for governments, especially in African countries, to focus on developing infrastructure, and to allocate and redirect funds for water management.

Regarding Theme Two on A “New Economy” of Water for Food and Ecosystems, Kerry Turner, University of East Anglia, noted that water scarcity will become more intense in the future. He said that, in order to mitigate this problem, water management processes need to move from a sectoral approach to an integrated one. Turner noted that the integrated approach requires investment in a range of areas, including infrastructure, governance and technology. Stressing that investments must be economically efficient, socially acceptable and sustainable, he said that a functional ecosystem approach is fundamental to resource management, and that it will operate in a water basin scale and replace the old sectoral approach. He concluded that economic measures need to be combined with technology innovation and institutional reforms in order to manage natural resources.



Introducing Theme Three on Enabling Environment, Margaret Catley-Carlson, Chair of the Global Water Partnership (GWP), outlined three elements identified by GWP as key to creating an enabling environment: setting goals for water use; establishing appropriate legislative frameworks; and developing financing and incentive structures. Discussing mechanisms for promoting enabling environments, Catley-Carlson stressed that substantive policy changes require commitment at the highest political level. She emphasized the need for water sector representatives to demonstrate to governments how the integration of water management, environmental protection and food production policies can produce positive results. She also highlighted many specific aspects of fostering change in water use and management, including: promoting gender equality, especially in education; consulting with all stakeholders; establishing coalitions of donors, regional banks and governments; coordinating activities between the water sector and other sectors; developing realistic national water plans; improving crop productivity; and using new technology.

Chair Veerman cited the objectives of the Conference, encouraging participants to focus on learning lessons from one another and formulating concrete recommendations for action. He said that the three working groups would hear case presentations and identify recommendations, and that their results would be reported back to the Plenary.

### **WORKING GROUPS**

**FOSTERING IMPLEMENTATION:** This working group was chaired by Luis Espinosa, Dominican Republic, with Yacouba Samaké, Ministry of Agriculture of Mali, acting as Rapporteur. Participants heard a presentation by Bakary Kone, Wetlands International of Mali, on the Economic and Ecological Outcomes of Effective Water Management in the Upper Niger River Basin of the Inner Niger Delta. He focused on the case study of two existing dams, Markala and Selingue, and the proposed Fomi dam in the upper part of the Niger basin. He emphasized that the direct and indirect costs and benefits for both upstream and downstream inhabitants are to be taken into account in planning dam construction. Kone noted that flooding by dams has effects on ecological diversity and fishing. He outlined lessons learned from the study, including that in the dry period irrigation will depend on additional water released by the Selingue dam, the need to transfer welfare from downstream to upstream inhabitants, and the necessity to promote integrated rice management.

In the ensuing discussion, some participants indicated that dams may give rise to benefits which were not initially foreseen. Participants raised questions regarding displacement of inhabitants and their compensation mechanisms. Some participants stated that even if an overall benefit is derived from dam construction, it is necessary to consider how these benefits will be shared. Participants emphasized the need to perform in-depth studies before the constructing dams to identify direct and indirect potential effects and consider alternative solutions. Participants also emphasized the need for broad and integrated water resource management strategies. Participants highlighted the benefit of enabling local communities to take responsibility for water management. Participants also underscored the need for proper water legislation. Several participants emphasized the necessity of agricultural diversification. Some participants highlighted the difficulty in financing water projects for developing countries.

**A "NEW ECONOMY" OF WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS:** This working group was chaired by Ricardo Zarati Rojas, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Paraguay, with Anil Agarwal, Ministry of Agriculture of India, acting as Rapporteur. Margarida García-Vila, University of Córdoba, presented the case study: Towards a More Sustainable Use of Water for Food

and Nature under Scarcity in Andalucía, Spain. She outlined the water supply and uses in Andalucía, especially in the tourism and agriculture sectors. She noted the expansion of irrigated lands in her region and said that less than 1.5% of irrigation supply originated from the re-use of water. García-Vila described some of the problems faced in her region, including: fast irrigation expansion that creates water scarcity; unreliability of water supply during drought periods; and association of fertilizer consumption with pollution of superficial waters. She noted that the EU Common Agricultural Policy does not promote water efficiency in irrigation activities. For future water management plans, García-Vila recommended: decentralization of management; flexibility in the allocation of water rights; active involvement of all stakeholders; integrated management of surface, ground and non-conventional water; and the development of protocols for the best management of agricultural practices.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed: allocation of water rights; calculation of water prices; and the need to include infrastructure, maintenance and administrative costs in the water price. Some participants from developing countries noted the difficulty of implementing water charges and stressed the need for long-term investments in infrastructure and access to water, especially in African countries. Participants also noted the need to internalize the environmental cost of water pollution in the water price, and highlighted the importance of establishing economic instruments to motivate water efficiency among water users.

Co-chair Rojas noted that some mechanisms could promote a 'new economy' for water, such as: raising awareness of water prices in urban and rural areas; motivating the introduction of good practices and water saving activities; increasing stakeholder participation; and managing water resources at the basin level.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:** This working group was co-chaired by Cassim Chilumpha, Vice President of Malawi, and Marina Pintar, Deputy State Secretary for Agriculture, Food and Forestry of Slovenia. The Rapporteur for the working group was Harold George Douglas, the Minister of State of Jamaica. Waldemar Mioduszewski, Institute for Land Reclamation and Grassland Farming of Poland, made a presentation on the Water, Food and Environment Dialogue on the Implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in Agricultural Water Management in the Central Eastern European Region (CEE WFE Dialogue). Mioduszewski explained that the CEE WFE Dialogue aims to consider possibilities for dissemination of information on the Directive and to stimulate cooperation between water management, agriculture and environment specialists. He outlined the questions and issues discussed by the participants during the CEE WFE Dialogue and presented the conclusions of the Dialogue, which include the need to: consult local farmers and the public; recognize the principle of equity in water management strategies; and identify the environmental limits of agricultural development.

In the ensuing discussion, participants considered a range of issues including the question of who should be responsible for developing enabling environments, with some participants emphasizing the role of national governments and others suggesting that all stakeholders should have responsibilities. Both developing and developed country participants stressed the importance of equity and equitable access to water. The role of gender was also emphasized, with several participants observing that, in many instances, women are the main users of water for domestic and irrigation purposes. Participants raised other issues, including: the unpredictability of water supply in parts of Africa; the need for cooperation on transboundary water issues, harmonization of policies within government institutions and investment in water management activities; and the unique dilemmas facing Small Island Developing States. Several participants provided examples of water problems and solutions in their own countries.