



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FAO/NETHERLANDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS: TUESDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 2005

On Tuesday, participants in the FAO/Netherlands International Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems met in three working groups to continue addressing the themes of the Conference. A plenary session also convened in the morning to hear presentations on the results of each working group. Keynote speeches were delivered to participants during the plenary.

PLENARY

Chair Cees Veerman, Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands, invited Agnes van Ardenne, Minister for Development Co-operation of the Netherlands, to address the plenary. Noting that the poor often live in environmentally unsafe conditions, Minister Ardenne emphasized the close link between the Conference's topics and poverty issues. She called for immediate action to integrate issues relating to water, agriculture and ecosystems.

Yacouba Samaké, Ministry of Livestock and Fishery of Mali, presented the conclusions of Working Group One on Fostering Implementation. He highlighted the importance of: involving local communities in decision-making processes; information sharing between stakeholders; using technology to improve agricultural production; and training in land-use regulations.

Ricardo Zarati Rojas, Ministry of Agriculture of Paraguay and Co-Chair of Working Group Two on A "New Economy" of Water for Food and Ecosystems, highlighted the importance of: taking into account the difference between willingness to pay and ability to pay; promoting interaction between beneficiaries of water and providers; and considering whether water pricing can reduce positive social and environmental externalities. He summarized some of the conclusions reached by the group, such as: developing clear water rights allocation systems; clarifying the roles of the public and private sectors; and supporting further studies on rainwater harvesting.

The conclusions of Working Group Three on Enabling Environment were presented by Spyros Kouvelis, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat. Regarding good practices for water management, Kouvelis emphasized the need for: harmonizing policy; enhancing the participation of development authorities, the private sector and stakeholders; and promoting capacity building targeted at institutional strengthening. He noted that mechanisms for implementation should include legislative reforms, use of economic instruments, and encouragement of targeted activities.

In response to the working group presentations, Minister Ardenne stressed the role of governments in mediating conflicts over water use and setting up long-term commitments. She also

highlighted the role of the private sector, women's groups, and farmers' organizations in this regard.

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary-General of the Ramsar Convention, recalled the political pledges made by world leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and recommended ways forward, including: establishing institutions and governance for water management; linking marine and terrestrial systems; and enhancing communication, education and public awareness.

WORKING GROUPS

FOSTERING IMPLEMENTATION: This working group was co-chaired by Luis Espinosa, Vice Minister for Soils and Water of the Dominican Republic, and Martin Tofinga, Minister of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development of Kiribati.

In the morning, participants heard a presentation by Celso Marcatto, Ministry of Environment of Brazil, and Rob Jongman, Alterra Landscape Centre of the Netherlands, on Knowledge for Decision Making in the Pantanal: Integration of Technical, Ecological and Socio-Economic Aspects. They stressed that the study aimed to understand the ecological issues faced in the area, including increased erosion, sediment transport, and land-use change and related vegetation changes.

In the ensuing discussion, participants proposed water resource management solutions based on national experiences, including: establishing legal frameworks for water management; decentralizing water resource management; taking into account traditional knowledge; and seeking co-operation among all actors, including neighboring countries.

In the afternoon, Henk Tiesinga, Association of Water Boards of the Netherlands, made a presentation on Interest, Pay and Say of Farmers and Nature Conservers in Dutch Local Water Management. He outlined five mechanisms for achieving sustainable water management: legislative frameworks; stakeholder participation; decentralized taxation; external capital funding; and institutional development. He stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders in water management so as to obtain sustainable and economically viable water use.

After the presentation, participants referred to their countries' experiences, emphasizing: stakeholder involvement in planning and decision-making processes; decentralization of water management; the need for varied solutions and approaches in different areas; education in water management; and international cooperation for common water use.

Bingsheng Ke, Research Center for Rural Economy, Ministry of Agriculture of China, and Pierre Gerber, Livestock, Environment and Development Initiative of FAO, gave a presentation. Gerber considered water management issues associated with livestock production in China, focusing on pig farming. Ke emphasized that the concentration of livestock farming creates water pollution



and indicated that the aim of the study was to find ways to reduce the amount of flushing water and liquid waste in pig farms. Ke proposed solutions, including: establishing laws and policies; regulatory enforcement; financial and technical incentives; social pressures; and market incentives for clean products.

In the discussion that followed, some participants, citing national experiences, highlighted difficulties associated with water permit authorizations. Others suggested the establishment of committees for managing conflict between various water users.

A “NEW ECONOMY” OF WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS: This working group was co-chaired by Anil Agarwal, Ministry of Agriculture of India, and Ricardo Roja, Ministry of Agriculture of Paraguay.

In the morning, Leon Hermans, FAO, outlined proposed recommendations towards a “new economy,” including: the need to recognize that scarcity of water resources or scarcity of access to exploit water resources are central to the problem; the importance of awareness raising and capacity building; and the need to further elaborate on the role of different stakeholders in implementing “new economy” arrangements.

Presenting a case study on In-field Rainwater Harvesting in South Africa, J. J. Botha, Institute for Soil, Climate and Water, noted that the study demonstrated that Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) improves livelihoods, especially for rural communities and individuals living below the poverty line. Botha observed that in-field techniques: increase crop yields; reduce the risk of crop failures; promote conservation of natural resources; and increase incomes from farming. He also noted that these techniques are economically viable and socially acceptable.

In the discussion that followed, participants considered how to apply in-field rainwater harvesting techniques in areas hillier than those in the case study. Some participants referred to the need to assess the impacts of these techniques on the ecosystem and ways to promote conservation of natural resources. Several participants highlighted potential environmental and social concerns over up-scaling in-field harvesting techniques, while others highlighted positive impacts of these techniques on ecosystems.

In the afternoon, Laurence Smith, Imperial College London, summarized the case study on New Perspectives on the Impacts of Irrigation on Fisheries for Laos and Sri Lanka. He noted the importance of inland fisheries for generating income, and providing protein and nutrients, especially in rural communities. Smith observed that irrigation development can have major environmental, economic and social impacts on fishing. He discussed the policy recommendations of the two case studies, which included: engaging stakeholders to ensure diverse uses of water; improving the knowledge base when designing irrigation plans and elaborating measures to mitigate negative impacts on fisheries; and IWRM in enhancing fish production without major compromise of agricultural production. He concluded by suggesting: that Laos maintains a policy where fishing contributes to the income of most rural households; and that Sri Lanka adopts a policy mix to promote small-scale commercial fisheries in reservoirs, restore and sustain the ecology of coastal lagoons, and maintain fisheries as a social safety net for vulnerable individuals.

Summarizing a case study on the Environmental Fund in Ecuador, Pablo Lloret, Water Conservation Fund of Ecuador, noted that the Fund has a well-defined purpose of protecting natural resources, especially water. He explained that the Fund receives voluntary financial resources from the sale of water services to end-users and additional funds provided by the private and public sectors. He noted that the Fund is currently financing the

implementation of seven projects in five river basins to promote environmental education, reforestation, conservation, reduction of pollution, research, and monitoring of water quality. He noted that the actions implemented in such projects were based on a “basin culture” through IWRM.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed issues relating to: the possibility of integrating water and forest management; the structure of Fund management; and the contribution of water users to the Fund.

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.

In the morning, C. L. Trisal, South Asia Office of Wetlands International, presented a case study on The Restoration of the Chilika Lagoon, a Coastal Wetland in India. Trisal discussed aspects of the successful adoption of a micro-watershed management concept, with a ‘sustainable rural livelihood’ approach, for managing the Chilika Lagoon. These aspects included: wide participation by local communities and stakeholders in planning and implementing activities; promotion of capacity building and networking of local communities and NGOs; empowerment of women through Self Help Groups and skills training; establishment of a non-bureaucratic organizational structure; and promotion of good governance. Participants raised questions regarding: the impacts of the project on biodiversity; the importance of regional ecotourism; and the role of women, environmental impact assessments and the Ramsar Convention in managing the project.

In the afternoon, Julius Sarmett, Pangani Basin Water Office (PBWO), presented a case study on Managing Water Conflicts through Dialogue in Pangani Basin, Tanzania. Sarmett discussed the dialogue process established by PBWO, a local NGO called Pamoja, and IUCN to address water-related conflicts in the basin. He highlighted lessons learned from the process, including: the way dialogues can strengthen Water Users Associations; the need to accommodate traditional arrangements for managing water conflicts; and the importance of addressing issues affecting local populations, such as equity, land tenure, and water rights.

In the following discussion, participants considered: water trading and water rights; water efficiency incentives; the role of watershed development in basin management; and alternatives to dam construction. In the general discussion that followed, participants pointed out the importance of: promoting awareness and agency-building through dialogues; using clearing-house mechanisms to ensure departmental synergies in managing water problems; and changing attitudes towards water as an economic asset.

Jorge Mora-Portuguez, Urban Development Foundation of Costa Rica, presented the case study on A Common Policy for Water Initiated in the Grande de Tárcoles River Basin in Costa Rica. He discussed the role of the local NGO, Urban Development Foundation, in: establishing the Grande de Tárcoles River Basin Commission; reforming Costa Rica’s water legislation; and harmonizing national water legislation in the region. He said that these activities highlight the importance of: long-term dialogues with political authorities to develop water management models at the local level; positive relations with mid-level government officials; and national and regional frameworks for addressing water issues. The proceeding discussion centered on: reconciling differing conceptions of water; and the use of principles, such as the polluter pays principle, in facilitating dialogue between stakeholders.