



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FAO/NETHERLANDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS: WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2005

On Wednesday, participants in the FAO/Netherlands International Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems met in plenary to hear presentations on the preliminary results of each working group, keynote speeches, and the findings of the Electronic Forum (E-Forum).

### PLENARY

Chair Cees Veerman, Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands, called on the co-chairs of the three working groups to report on results of their discussions to date.

The results of Working Group One on Fostering Implementation were presented by Yacouba Samaké, Ministry of Livestock and Fishery of Mali. Referring to good practices, Samaké highlighted the need to follow-up on decision-making procedures. He emphasized the importance of developing regulations and ensuring their implementation. He also stressed the importance of including social and economic aspects in impact studies. Samaké recommended that water management studies take into account upstream and downstream effects. He stated that the working group had also indicated the need to inform local communities of IWRM initiatives. Samaké underscored the necessity of preparing studies on the functions of wetland and other ecological areas, such as mountain ecosystems, to support decision-making processes. He reported that the working group highlighted the importance of integrating the results of scientific studies with traditional knowledge, and raising awareness of water issues through education, training, and the transfer of knowledge and know-how.

Regarding the issues related to drawbacks and benefits, Samaké underscored the difficulties, especially for developing countries, of attracting financial investment for water projects. He stressed that, when considering investments, it is essential to focus on long-term results, as short-term results may be less economically beneficial, particularly when constructing dams. Referring to implementation mechanisms, Samaké stressed the importance of establishing public and private partnerships, especially with water users associations. Considering implementation, he indicated the necessity of taking into account obstacles emerging from transborder situations. Samaké also stressed the need to consider supply and demand technologies, and to coordinate research results.

Co-Chair Mouhyddine Mahamat Saleh, Ministry of Environment of Chad, summarized the results of Working Group Two on A "New Economy" of Water for Food and Ecosystems. He highlighted the recommendations relating to good practices,

identified their benefits and drawbacks, and pointed out the instruments for implementation. He noted that a general process towards a "new economy" needs to: promote awareness raising and capacity building; consider the river basin as a whole; integrate social and economic elements in the management strategy; foster stakeholder participation; and identify the costs and benefits of policies. He said that these recommendations would enhance dialogue between stakeholders towards better allocation of water, and facilitate agreement among stakeholders regarding water priorities. He highlighted the difficulties of applying the polluter pays principle and observed that a voluntary approach is essential in order to avoid free riding activities. On instruments for implementation, he emphasized the need to: establish river basin organizations representing all stakeholders; keep water resources in the public domain; and motivate water users to pay for water services through a conservation fund or a taxation system.

Co-Chair of Working Group Three on Enabling Environment, Cassim Chilumpha, Vice President of Malawi, presented the group's results. He reminded participants that it is vital to strike the right balance between the various uses of water. On the issue of proposed good practices, he highlighted the importance of: harmonizing policies to create win-win situations; creating development authorities to consolidate and administer water management policies; and fostering stakeholder participation in all aspects of the water management process. He emphasized that capacity building is necessary for ensuring that all stakeholders possess the means to understand what is at stake, their own roles, and the reasons why it is important for them to participate. He also mentioned that one of the challenges for water management concerns the attraction of additional investment and the role of the private sector in this regard.

On the issue of benefits and drawbacks, Chilumpha noted that while adequate funding is required to implement good practices, good practices will also attract funding. He pointed out that whilst it may be difficult to effectively combine and reconcile agriculture and ecosystem concerns, the benefits generally outweigh the costs. He stressed that it is important to make water efficiency technology user friendly at the local level where capacity may be lacking, and that management authorities can often help with the mobilization of resources and the full participation of key players. He stated that mechanisms for implementing enabling environments include: legislative reforms; economic and financial instruments, such as subsidies, tax advantages and incentives; and the encouragement of targeted activities, such as food production and ecosystem sustainability.

Chilumpha also raised some points for further discussion, concerning, *inter alia*: who should lead the process of enabling environments; who should prioritize issues in the national



agenda; and how to strike a balance between sustaining livelihoods and protecting ecosystems, especially wetlands.

David Coates, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat, spoke on behalf of Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the CBD. He said that CBD aims to promote conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources. Highlighting ecosystem, species and genetic diversity as the three components of the CBD, he noted that ecosystem diversity maintains the other two components. He pointed out that the highest rate of biodiversity loss occurs in inland waters. Coates said that inland waters are the most threatened of all ecosystems due to increased water demand. He underlined that institution and market failures cause biodiversity loss, including habitat destruction and fragmentation. He said that conservation measures should emphasize the protection of ecosystem functioning in addition to protecting specific areas. Coates noted that the CBD work programme on inland water biodiversity focuses on the need to: integrate conservation, biodiversity and sustainable use in all sectors and programmes; protect inland water ecosystems; rehabilitate ecosystems; and prevent the introduction of alien species. He emphasized that CBD promotes effective participation of all stakeholders, especially indigenous and local communities.

In responding to the speech by David Coates, Ton van der Zon, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, noted that as implementation of CBD increasingly involves sustainable use strategies, the involvement of the FAO in implementing CBD is also growing. Chair Veerman commented that the experiences presented in Coates's speech demonstrate that positive impacts can flow from concerted implementation efforts at the national and international levels.

Inviting Tekalign Mamo, State Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Ethiopia, to address the plenary on the results of the side event "The Unseen Role of Wetlands," Chair Veerman highlighted the important role that NGOs and civil society play in making implementation happen.

Mamo explained that on Tuesday afternoon, Wetlands International and other organizations held a side event to discuss the role of wetlands in water resource management. He said that participants concluded that: wetlands are important for food supplies, livelihoods and other purposes; there is a lack of awareness about the value of wetlands; and sectoral approaches to resource management often lead to wetlands being overlooked in decision-making processes. He also said that it was noted that many countries have not included wetlands management in their poverty reduction strategies.

Mamo reported that, in the side event, participants unanimously agreed that the plenary should recognize that wetlands play a critical role in the provision of water supply, food and livelihoods for individuals, and habitats for dependent, semi-dependent and migratory species. He noted that participants also urged the plenary to recommend: including assessments of the role of wetlands and biodiversity in IWRM; establishing platforms for interdisciplinary information sharing and decision-making processes; empowering local communities; and encouraging transboundary cooperation.

Gerardo van Halsema, FAO, presented the results of the E-Forum that took place in November and December 2004. Van Halsema stated that the objective of the E-Forum was to provide the Conference with informed recommendations on the advancement of sustainable water management for food and ecosystems, based on experiences and good practices. He

reported that the E-Forum had 170 participants who reviewed 78 case studies, six of which are being presented at the Conference. As for Theme One on Fostering Implementation, van Halsema explained that participants focused on: generating knowledge on water for food and ecosystems; advancing new production and management approaches in agriculture and ecosystems; merging these into a common management strategy; and mobilizing stakeholder participation. He outlined some of the conclusions and recommendations produced during the E-Forum, including: generating problem-oriented participatory knowledge; developing continuing learning strategies; changing from sectoral to multiple purpose problem solving frameworks for management systems; and generating common views for implementing common actions.

On Theme Two on A "New Economy," van Halsema noted that discussion focused on ways to assess the value of water and incorporate these values into management practices. On water valuation, he stressed the need to mix economic principles with government regulations so as to safeguard vulnerable uses that are in the public interest. Van Halsema also considered how to incorporate such values into water management practices at the local, catchment and international levels. He said that such values include, *inter alia*: cost-effective local water production; payment for environmental services; and rights-based approaches. Van Halsema outlined some of the findings, including the gap between valuation in theory and practice, and the uncertainty in valuation. As for the recommendations, he suggested that, *inter alia*: stakeholder-oriented and adaptive valuation approaches should be carried out; and market instruments should only be used under certain conditions.

Referring to Theme Three on Enabling Environment, van Halsema stated that participants should focus on institutional arrangements that effectively enable stakeholders to manage water resources and how these institutions accommodate diverse water uses and users. He stressed the need for governments to enable collaborative, adaptive and transparent water management strategies for food and ecosystems. He suggested governments move from administrative management and service provider activities towards policy making and regulating initiatives in order to strengthen regulation capacities. Van Halsema suggested that recommendations would ensure coherency and consistency, and stimulate decentralization of water management to local water users, municipalities, NGOs, and the private sector. He stated that water management arrangements should build on existing local institutions and arrangements as far as possible. He emphasized the need to adopt measures that effectively combat poverty, including: adopting rights-based approaches that guarantee minimum levels of water access; and adopting explicit programmes that aim at enhancing the productivity and livelihoods of the poor.

Following the presentations and keynote addresses, Chair Veerman, offered some guidance on the upcoming Conference recommendations and conclusions. He urged participants to focus on how to "make it happen!" when synthesizing their working group discussions. He recommended that participants: build on the lessons learned from the presentation of case studies; consider key successes and failures; and relate them to concrete activities. He also highlighted the importance of linking the discussed experiences to existing international commitments, such as those stemming from the WSSD and World Water Forum. Veerman also requested that participants consider which actors are important in water management and at what levels they operate.