



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FAO/NETHERLANDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS: THURSDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2005

On Thursday morning, participants in the FAO/Netherlands International Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems met in three working groups to discuss their draft conclusions and recommendations to the Conference. Plenary met in the afternoon to consider the synthesis report of the findings and recommendations of the working groups. A Ministerial Roundtable also convened in the afternoon to consider the same.

### WORKING GROUPS

The draft recommendations listed challenges identified by the participants of each working group. These challenges were considered in terms of good practices, instruments and actions, and the role of actors.

**FOSTERING IMPLEMENTATION:** This working group was co-chaired by Yacouba Samaké, Secretary General of the Ministry of Livestock and Fishery of Mali, and Martin Tofinga, Minister of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development of Kiribati.

The FAO Secretariat presented a summary of the working groups' draft recommendations, based on the four identified challenges. Referring to the challenge of access to and sharing of knowledge on the interrelatedness of water, food and ecosystems in river basins, participants raised concerns regarding the need to collect data before establishing information management systems. As for the challenge of building knowledge and know-how on the interrelatedness of water, food and ecosystems in river basins, participants raised issues, such as the need for: more research on how water is used in goods and services; differentiation between persistent and organic fertilizers; and greater financial resources.

On the challenge of making use of knowledge in decision-making processes on water, food and ecosystems in river basins, participants indicated the importance of: applying the Ramsar Convention principle on the wise use of wetlands; facilitating information sharing and communication between farmers at the local level; and transferring this information to policy-making, decision-making and scientific levels; and giving NGOs a more active role.

Regarding the challenge of monitoring and evaluating river basin development policies, participants emphasized the importance of: monitoring systems that perform adequate river basin appraisals; establishing guidelines; and promoting coherent management evaluation strategies. For all the identified challenges, participants stressed that any reference to river basins must refer to "various ecological systems."

**A "NEW ECONOMY" OF WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS:** This working group was co-chaired by Mouhyddine Mahamat Saleh, Ministry of Environment of Chad, and Anil Agarwal, Ministry of Agriculture of India. Co-Chair Saleh presented the draft conclusions and recommendations of the working group.

The FAO Secretariat said that the three challenges identified by participants were: promoting awareness raising and capacity building; increasing local water productivity; valuing water and allocating decisions; and using market mechanisms, charges and pricing. He highlighted some implementation instruments, such as: developing local markets; improving access to international markets; providing technical support and extension services for the efficient use of water; promoting access to credit for investments by small-scale farmers; facilitating dialogue between all stakeholders; establishing flexible water rights regimes; and using economic instruments to promote water savings and reduce pollution.

In the discussion that followed, a participant suggested including instruments to avoid wasting water in agricultural activities. Participants focused the discussion on the role of actors and implementation activities, including: adding practical ways to introduce environmental education into school curricula; listing universities and research institutes as actors for developing curricula; expanding the concept of capacity building for disseminating knowledge through long-term partnerships and joint-research activities; mentioning the importance of wetland ecosystems in IWRM strategies; developing research programmes for small-scale technology to support local communities; and involving consumer organizations, international organizations, NGOs, judicial and legislative institutions, local governments, women, indigenous peoples, water companies and large industries as actors. A participant highlighted the need to protect the water rights of indigenous communities in establishing water markets. Co-Chair Agarwal emphasized that the watershed development approach should be used for reducing poverty. Another participant highlighted the importance of providing conflict solving mechanisms to reconcile the interests of different stakeholders.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:** This working group was co-chaired by Patricia Kaliati, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development of Malawi, and Marina Pintar, Deputy State Secretary for Agriculture, Food and Forestry of Slovenia. The FAO Secretariat presented the four challenges listed in the draft recommendations.

On the challenge of harmonizing water policies, some participants highlighted that water management policies must be streamlined not only between national departments but also between different levels of government. The participants considered means for enforcing and monitoring compliance with water-related legislation. Several participants emphasized that women, as the main users of water in some areas, must be provided with education and training on water management issues.

Regarding the challenges of promoting efficient water use, several participants discussed means for enabling experts from different departments to "speak the same language" on water management. Participants considered the role of research centers in developing new technology for water efficiency. Many participants indicated that other forms of knowledge are also important for water efficiency, such as traditional farming practices. Some participants also commented on difficulties relating to developing water



management strategies in areas where water is not consistently available throughout the year.

On the challenge of equitable water use, participants referred to: enabling local stakeholders in catchment areas to participate in water management activities; and researching the reasons for inequitable access to water. Participants considered the role of environmental impact assessments in understanding the environmental effects of different water uses, and how to fund such assessments. Participants emphasized that where users pay for water, the poor must be ensured access to water. Several participants focused on the creation of river basin organizations to foster cooperation between countries on transboundary water issues.

Regarding the challenge of creating capacitated institutions for IWRM at the basin, middle and community levels, participants considered the use of periodic meetings, newsletters, databases, and training courses to capacitate water user associations. One participant also stressed the role of national governments in creating such institutions.

### **PLENARY**

Ton van der Zon, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, chaired this afternoon plenary session. He introduced the synthesis report on the findings and recommendations of the three working groups. He then called on a representative from each of the working groups to elaborate on the details of the synthesis report. The presenters outlined the key challenges identified by their working groups, and discussed good practices, instruments and actions, and actors associated with those challenges.

On the first theme of Fostering Implementation, the working group representative outlined four challenges: access to and sharing of knowledge and information on the interrelatedness of water, food and ecosystems in river basins; building knowledge and know-how on the interrelatedness of water, food and ecosystems in river basins; making use of knowledge in decision-making on water, food and ecosystems in river basins; and monitoring, evaluation and appraisal for policies of river basin development.

For Working Group Two on A “New Economy” of Water for Food and Ecosystems, the presenter reported that three challenges were identified: awareness raising, capacity building and increasing local water productivity; translating into quantitative values and allocation decisions; and using market mechanisms, charges and pricing.

On the third theme of Enabling Environment, the working group representative outlined four challenges: harmonization of policies on water for food and ecosystems; improvement of efficient and productive use of water; equitable water use and adequate access of the poor to water for agriculture and ecosystems; and establishment and development of institutions at basin, middle and community levels in IWRM for agriculture and ecosystems. Following the three presentations, plenary participants raised questions of clarification and suggested additional amendments to the draft recommendations.

A representative from IUCN – The World Conservation Union reported on the Niger River Basin Roundtable, which met on Tuesday and Wednesday and included representatives from the countries of the Niger River Basin, FAO, IUCN and the Netherlands Development Corporation. He reported on the conclusions of the roundtable, including that: donor agencies should support the “Shared Vision for the Sustainable Development of the Niger Basin” process currently being undertaken by the Niger Basin Authority; the Niger Basin Authority’s role in conflict prevention should be strengthened; and the costs of transboundary river management must be shared fairly.

Following these discussions, Plenary returned to consideration of the synthesis report. The Chair outlined amendments to be made to each of the challenges identified by the working groups in light of discussions carried out during the day. Participants

discussed further amendments to the identified challenges. Several participants also raised questions regarding the procedure for adopting the proposed amendments.

### **MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE**

HRH Prince of Orange, Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, presented the synthesis report. Cees Veerman, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands, reported on the tasks carried out by each working group and the challenges identified by them.

In the ensuing discussion on Working Group One on Fostering Implementation, a participant from the African region observed the importance of conducting social, economic and environmental assessments before implementing water use projects. Several participants noted that IWRM initiatives must take into account poverty alleviation, especially in rural communities.

Some African and Latin American participants stressed the important role that education plays in conserving water and ecosystems. Many developing countries mentioned the need for financial support for water projects. Some participants from Latin America emphasized that agricultural subsidies in developed countries increase poverty and environmental degradation in developing countries.

Several participants from Asia noted difficulties, particularly for small countries with high populations, in implementing the Conference recommendations. They underscored the need for international cooperation on transboundary river management.

In discussions regarding the theme of Working Group Two on A “New Economy” of Water for Food and Ecosystems, some participants from Asia stressed the need for financial resources for implementing recommendations that place costs on water and ecosystem services. Some participants from Asia also noted the uneven distribution of water rights and uses between upstream and downstream countries sharing the same river basin.

Observing that food production strategies must encompass water efficiency, a participant from Latin America said that education is a crucial tool for integrating social and economic development in rural areas. He noted that excessive subsidies in the agricultural sector and the use of pesticides are increasing water inefficiency. Noting the role that indigenous peoples play in protecting the environment, one participant from Latin America urged international financial support to implement conservation projects. She also suggested establishing a compensation mechanism for preserving ecosystems.

One participant from Africa noted that many developing countries have established a comprehensive legislative framework on water but do not have financial resources to facilitate implementation of the legislation and promote capacity and expertise on water management. He said that developed countries that have capacity may choose to assist developing countries in water management issues. Another participant from Africa emphasized the need to involve women and youth in the management of water.

In the discussion regarding the theme of Enabling Environment, some African participants called on donors to provide funding for poverty alleviation in the least developed countries. A participant from the Caribbean noted that desalinization projects may give rise to environmental pollution. Another participant from Latin America called for greater focus on the responsibility of mining entities to remedy any social and environmental damage deriving from their activities.

*Editor’s note: The Water for Food and Ecosystems Bulletin’s summary will be available online on Monday, 7 February 2005 at: <http://www.iisd.ca/sd/wfe/>*