

**Some Remarks About the Role of Water for Food Production and
Ecosystems Development and the Outcomes of the African Pre-conference
Held November 4-6 in Addis Ababa**

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- **Your Excellency Prince Willem Alexander, Prince of Orange of The Netherlands,**
- **Your Excellency Dr Cees Veerman, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of The Netherlands**
- **Your Excellency Dr Jaques Diouf, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN,**
- **Distinguished guests,**
- **Conference Participants,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me a great pleasure to give some remarks about the role of water for food production and ecosystems development and the outcomes of the African pre-conference held in Addis Ababa last November at this August assembly.

Water is the most fundamental and important commodity for human beings. This is because water, food and ecosystems are closely linked. In the African context, agriculture dominates the economy and hence the bigger role of water in food and ecosystems development is evident. Although Africa has ample water resources, population growth, improper use of the water, uncontrolled degradation and lack of sound policies and strategies often make it a scarce commodity. As a result, in addition to water scarcity, wastage of water (through pollution or uncontrolled floods) often takes place. Due to the combined factors, Africa's per capita water consumption is the lowest compared to international standards, and only about 60% of the population has got access to safe drinking water.

As it has been said time and again, the poor are the first to suffer. The need to properly manage water for food production and ecosystems development is therefore a primary concern in developing countries, particularly in Africa region. Nations have realized that they have to develop their water resources and efficiently use them for the benefit of their people. Nations have also realized

that they have to learn from their mistakes, and try to adapt successful approaches from elsewhere to their local conditions. But from implementation side, a lot still remains. Therefore, the water issue, although appreciated by all, is a problem at hand that needs close and immediate attention by all concerned. The purposes of the recently held regional pre-conferences and this global conference are therefore to tackle this problem and reach at a commonly agreed concrete plan.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to prepare well for this global conference on '**Water for Food and Ecosystems: Make it Happen**', the Government of Ethiopia, the African Union, the FAO and the government of the Netherlands jointly organised the African pre-conference under the same title during 4-6 November last year in Addis Ababa. More than 130 participants, coming from 34 countries, gathered to discuss African initiatives and experiences often assisted by international organizations or projects the fields of water, food and ecosystems.

Interesting lessons could be drawn from these African experiences and I will try to summarize these lessons more specifically. First I want to highlight two issues: the context of these two conferences and the relevance for Africa. The conference in Addis made it already clear that in fact we are discussing how the concept of sustainable development is being put into practice. Successful experiences showed that the important concept of sustainable development is showing its faces, triggered by enormous efforts of people on the ground. It is becoming clear that the concept is working in practice, but needs to scale up. This is what we want to share with the world community in the context of the

sustainable development. This is also what we want to share with you in the conference this week.

The lessons learnt will help us all to intensify our efforts, which are very much needed. Despite the interesting examples, some of which may be discussed this week, it is also clear that pressure on water resources and ongoing degradation of ecosystems is leading to increasing threats to the well being of so many of us, and to all of us in the end. Therefore, efforts to reverse this situation in the near future should be the concern of all of us.

Relevance for Africa

Food security is one of the first priorities for Africa. For the poorest in the world, many of them living in Africa, agriculture in the broad sense is the key in all livelihood strategies. At the same time, agriculture is a major consumer of water resources. Agriculture as such is depending a lot on ecological processes and ecosystems are crucial for water quantity as well as quality. Therefore we see natural resources and ecosystems as two major assets for our development. Based on the input from Addis and the discussion of more cases this week, we should be able to identify concrete steps and programmes for further action.

This ambition can only be realized by working together. Nowadays we are discussing 'partnerships', which indicate that solid doses of entrepreneurship are needed to make it happen. The role of governments is primarily in the field of putting the right policies in place. Overall political commitment (and according practices) has been highlighted by the report of the Millennium Development Goals as a major constraining factor to achieve the MDG's. The stakeholders involved will work it out, including the necessary international co-operation which is essential to overcome the formidable challenges we all face.

Lessons

A first and important general lesson of the African Pre-Conference is the realisation that there are a lot of activities implemented in the area of Integrated Water Resource Management, at either national level or interregional level. In many cases, the concept of Integrated Water Resource Management has been incorporated in already existing projects or programmes, to deal with the challenges generated by those. Other, more recent initiatives also took the IWRM concept as the starting point.

I would like to lead you to the more specific lessons theme by theme. Many of the lessons may be relevant to other regions of the world as well. It is my intention, however, to focus on the ones that are most important for Africa.

Theme 1:

For the first theme, **“Fostering implementation, know-how for action”**, the lessons learnt concerned capacity and institution building; knowledge development; exchange of experiences; data collection and sharing; multiple stakeholder involvement; and awareness raising.

Capacity building has been and is still being built, but continuous improvements are needed. It has also been concluded that initiatives, geared towards the improvement of institutional and legal frameworks, should be adapted to local circumstances.

In Africa, although it is a heavy consumer, agriculture puts relatively low pressure on water resources from the standpoint of overall water resource availability. However, it definitively can contribute to a build up of the pressure.

Use of new technologies and alternative approaches are minimal. Another potential challenge could also be pollutant practices.

Still another challenge is to fruitfully link and exchange formal knowledge and local, traditional and indigenous knowledge. We can learn from each other through forums for networking, data collection and/or information exchange, not only at local or national level but also at international level.

These forums could help to overcome specific gaps in data availability. On the other hand, lack of data should not be a reason to refrain from starting integrated water resource management, as it is a continuous learning by doing process.

To conclude with the results under this theme, participants stated that multiple stakeholder involvement is a long term and a step-by-step process. It is also a two-way process: participation and demand of services implies also duties and responsibilities for communities and other stakeholders. The challenge is how to define the stakeholders.

Theme 2:

The discussions in theme 2 on the **Economic aspects of water for food and ecosystems** touched upon four issues: valuing multiple services; more values per crop; resource mobilisation and benefit sharing; and protection and conservation.

Attributing values to the different and multiple uses of water has proven a very complex and difficult issue to resolve. At the Pre-Conference various approaches have been forwarded, ranging from careful study of multiple values and impacts on water, food and ecosystems to establishment of financial mechanisms such as transfer payments, 'polluter pays' and taxes as well as

valuing benefits in economic and social terms. Public-private partnerships could assist local level development.

Participants called for development of African experiences with agreements arranging payment for ecological services linking economic values to financial transactions. The concept of more values per drop could be helpful in prioritising those water uses that generate per drop more benefits and values at the lowest economic, social and environmental costs.

In addition to the values of ecosystem services, protection and conservation of the resource base is of major importance. Non-conventional water use, like using salt water, will become increasingly important in future. Therefore, protection of marine environment should be high on the agenda.

Theme 3:

Last but not least I would like to say a few things on the theme on **Enabling environment**. An important conclusion is the need for a common vision, harmonisation of policies and political commitment to make integrated and often transboundary water arrangements work. This enabling environment is needed for the establishment and functioning of adequate water management institutions at the basin level. Differences in institutional settings may occur, but need to be made explicit.

These three elements, common vision, harmonisation of policies and political commitment call for coherence. Not only between involved ministries, but also in donor policy and international organisations and institutions. And we shouldn't forget to focus on a coherent legal framework.

Institutional reform is often needed. It should start from basin level institutions and answer to the aspirations of the different stakeholders. Poverty reduction should be targeted in water resources management and be part of equitable sharing of benefits of water use.

When designing programmes one should try to link local actions to a basin wide context and national actions to the global context. An example was given by linking industrial water recycling to peri-urban agriculture.

An enabling environment not only implies looking at the supply side, but also at the demand side. Demand is ever increasing, calling for a significant scientific breakthrough in concerned sectors, including health.

A growing problem is financing and mobilisation of resources. Innovative public-private partnerships could play a key role in overcoming this problem

Final remarks

Integrated Water Resource Management is well accepted as a concept, but we are still struggling with its implementation. We have good examples on the ground. Techniques and capacities are available, although they need continuous improvement. One of the main dilemmas is the integration of various levels and sectors.

In conclusion, our goal is to come to solutions this week. In Africa we've made a first step in discussing and learning from the positive developments on the ground as well as the remaining challenges. The Addis conference has clearly deliberated upon how we need to effectively balance water for livelihoods and for ecosystem functions in order to arrive at equity, environmental sustainability and economic efficiency. This week we hope to learn from experiences all over

the world. This week we also aim to go a step further and put firm and targeted plans in order to translate ideas, past resolutions and recommendations into reality. Or in short, TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Thank you