

World Water Week in Stockholm
Opening ceremony, 27 August 2012
Statement by FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to address the opening session of the World Water Week. I want to congratulate the international water community for embracing the food security debate.

The relationship between water and food security is easy to explain: there is no food security without water security.

Clean water is necessary to produce safe food adequate for consumption. It is necessary for a healthy life.

The last Millennium Development Goals report brings the good news that the drinking water target has been met. This is a reason for celebration, but cannot make us forget that about 11 percent of the world population continues to be without access to an improved source of drinking water.

Improved sanitation also remains a challenge. There has been a significant increase in sanitation facilities, but 15 percent of the population remains without access to them, facing different kinds of health risks.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Water is also crucial for agriculture. “The State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture” report released last year by FAO warned that water scarcity and pollution are a risk to key food production systems around the world. And, more and more, there is a dispute between human consumption and other uses of water.

Agriculture, as we practice it today, is responsible for more than 70 percent of all freshwater use in the world.

It takes about 15000 liters of water to produce a kilogram of meat, 1500 liters to produce a kilogram of cereals and 140 liters to produce a cup of coffee.

These numbers show that agriculture is a thirsty activity. But it also means that agriculture holds the key to sustainable water use.

Better water efficiency, we can also call it *crop per drop*, requires new forms of water management in agriculture.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would also like to remind you of the human faces behind this abstract concept of agriculture.

Throughout the world, about 2.6 billion small-scale producers till the land, raise animals and fish. They are the main providers of food in the developing world.

If we want them to produce more sustainably, preserving natural resources, adapting to and contributing to the mitigation of climate change, we need to help them. We cannot expect them to do it alone.

At the same time, of course, we need to ensure that the agribusiness sector adopts better practices. The private sector must have the social and environmental responsibility to develop cleaner and more efficient production processes. Many of them are already moving in that direction.

Better land and water management in general, and greater support to small-scale production in particular, require action at the local, national and international levels.

It is important to note that water issues are not issues of individual countries. Factors related to access to food, land or shared water resources such as rivers, lakes and aquifers are becoming more frequent source of tension around the world.

This is a situation that is bound to increase in the future and brings important implications for regional and global stability that can only be tackled by improving water governance. By 2025, two-thirds of the world's population could be living in water stressed areas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fifty years ago, we had the challenge of increasing production to feed the world. The Green Revolution helped us overcome that challenge, but at a huge environmental cost.

The collateral damage of the intensive use of natural resources and chemical inputs was land and water degradation. It clearly shows the limits of our current dominant agricultural paradigm.

Today we have different challenges, challenges related to access to food and natural resources and sustainability.

The question we need to ask ourselves is not whether we can feed the world. We know the answer: we can do it. We already produce enough food for all despite the nearly 900 million undernourished people that live today and are capable of increasing production by 60% until 2050 to feed a world population expected to reach nine billion people.

At the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development the international community gave a clear message: we need to ensure that tomorrow's agriculture delivers its services in a more sustainable, efficient and equitable way.

We need to produce more with less impact, more sustainably, mitigating and adapting to climate change. And we need to make innovation and better practices available to poor farmers.

We already have technologies that allow us to save resources and raise yields which are more efficient in the use of water and which help to preserve soils and biodiversity. The challenge is to adopt them on a much larger scale.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let's not forget that, while we have enough food, around 900 million people still suffer from hunger and an even larger number is overweight or obese. Every year around 30 percent of total food production does not reach consumers.

It is either lost because of inadequate storage and transportation facilities, more frequently in poor and developing countries, or is thrown away at the consumer end.

Industrialized countries waste per year almost the same as the entire net food production in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a study commissioned by FAO to the Swedish Institute for Food and Biotechnology.

This is important because, when we speak of sustainability, we need to address both production and consumption sides.

So, to meet the world's growing demand for food we need to produce in a way that conserves water, uses it more sustainably and intelligently and helps agriculture adapt to climate change. But we also need to change the way we eat, reducing food waste and promoting healthier diets.

So, my message here today is a plea for a more inclusive way of addressing the world's challenges. A way to look for solutions that acknowledge the complexity of the world in which we live and the interrelation between today's major concerns related to food, water, climate change and energy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainable, efficient and equitable management of water resources is more than just a nice idea. It is a fundamental pillar of any food security strategy. There will be no solution to the problem of food security without addressing water issues, and there will be no solution to today's water problems without addressing those of food production.

I trust that the discussions that will take place this week will contribute to this objective, and I encourage all of us to think boldly and bravely.

This way, we will take another important step towards sustainability, as we all committed to in Rio+20 Conference.

Thank you.