

Concept Note
Roundtable: Water Infrastructure
At the 43rd Session of FAO Conference

Date & timing: 09:30-12:00, 5 July
Venue: The Plenary Hall, FAO Headquarters
Format: in-person and live stream

Background

Water is a critical and irreplaceable natural resource for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) defined in the 2030 Agenda. Along with human civilization of thousands of years, diverse types of water infrastructures have been developed for different purposes such as for water supply, rainwater harvesting and storage, aquifer storage and recovery, greywater systems to collect and treat wastewater, irrigation systems, fish passages, multi-purpose dams (for storage, hydropower) and barrages, flood control embankments and levees, coastal defense, etc. These infrastructures are greatly important to deliver water resources and water services to all users in different sectors from agriculture, household, health, education, energy, fisheries, recreation, disaster management, inland water transport, mining, and many others, both in rural and urban areas. Thus, water infrastructure development is fundamental in ensuring water availability, accessibility and quality in any given time.

The international cooperation on water infrastructure development involves a combination of policy dialogue, financing and investment, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing. This approach helps countries build sustainable water systems that are resilient to natural disasters, climate change, and ecological challenges, while meeting the socioeconomic needs. Within countries, the priorities for water infrastructure often include health, sanitation, potable water, disaster risk reduction (including floods), hydropower, and irrigation.

Triggered by the discussion of sustainability of dams launched by the World Commission on Dams in 1997, the awareness and understanding of impacts and sustainability of big dams and other water infrastructures has significantly increased, which contributed to the shift of international donors towards the environmental sustainability of water infrastructure projects. Consequently, international investment in major water infrastructures has been stagnating since 2010. In addition, another major challenge in securing investment for water infrastructure is the general perception that water is a public good, which makes it difficult to generate revenue streams to fund infrastructure projects, and to attract private sector investment. New and innovative financing and investment approaches are needed to optimize social, economic and environmental benefits and sustainability.

Meanwhile, green infrastructure, ecosystem-based approaches have gained increasing attention and been demonstrated in many places as sustainable and resilience solutions to both scarcity and flood challenges, as well as contributing improved water quality. Sustainable water management in the future requires a greater combination of such solutions together with built infrastructure.

Recognizing the need to secure and increase agriculture production and to supply water to additional over 2 billion people in a more urbanized world under uncertain climate change, it is urgently needed to revisit the needs for water infrastructures through systematic assessments, develop new infrastructures in the right places, and manage all of them to deliver water and water services in a sustainable and equitable manner.

The 43rd Session of the FAO Conference in July 2023 provides an excellent opportunity to discuss “water infrastructure” for resilient agrifood systems and rural development.

Objectives

This event will provide FAO Members an opportunity for:

- (i) Building a shared understanding of the importance of water infrastructure in achieving no poverty (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), sanitation and water (SDG6), and other SDGs;
- (ii) Sharing experience, needs and challenges in developing and managing water infrastructures in countries;
- (iii) Discussing strategies, financing, investment and governance of water infrastructure for meeting current and future needs and adapting to climate change.

Programme

A 2.5-hour roundtable is proposed with a high-level opening followed by a technical presentation and panel discussions by Members.

Moderator: Ms Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO

Time	Intervention
5 mins	Welcome and Introduction by Ms Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO
10 mins	Opening Remarks by Director-General, FAO
10 mins	Technical Presentation: Water infrastructures for the 4 Betters
75 mins	<p>National experience, strategies and planning for the future of water infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His Excellency Víctor Manuel Villalobos Arámbula, The Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mexico • His Excellency Mathieu Eric Rokosse-Kamot, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Central African Republic • His Excellency Avi Dicter, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Israel • Mr Martin Kováč, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Slovakia • Ms Su McKluskey, Special Representative for Australian Agriculture Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Australia • Director General Ms Swantje Nilsson, Head of Department for EU Affairs, International Cooperation and Fisheries at the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany • Her Excellency Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, African Union Commission
15 mins	<p>Perspectives of farmers, youth, women and Indigenous Peoples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Pramisha Thapaliya, Head of Youth Policy Action, World Food Forum, FAO • Ms Josiane Irakarama, Member of Rwandan Farmers Syndicate INGABO • Ms Tania Eulalia Martinez-Cruz, Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Water Indicators Expert, Indigenous Peoples Unit, FAO • Ms Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, President of Women for Water Partnership
30 mins	Discussion
5 mins	Wrap up & Closing by Ms Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO