

**Address by Mr. Jacques Diouf,
Director-General of FAO**

**Towards the implementation of an integrated approach
for the management of water for food and ecosystems**

***CSD-13 Side Event: Towards more sustainable management
of water for food and ecosystems /Experiences in developing IWRM
and water efficiency plans***

New York City, 21 April 2005

It is both an honour and a privilege for me to address this gathering and I wish to thank the Global Water Partnership and the Government of The Netherlands for organizing this side-event and for inviting FAO. I welcome this opportunity to underline the very positive outcome of the FAO/Netherlands Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems and to exchange views with leading policy-makers on the implementation of an integrated approach to water for food and ecosystems.

Water, food and ecosystems are three critical aspects for human well-being and they are inevitably linked. Food production and ecosystems are based on the same biological processes and both depend on water as a primary resource. Together, forest, rangeland and agriculture account for 75 % of total use of precipitation on Earth. A challenge facing many countries is how to harmonize a simultaneous need for economic development with balanced and productive ecosystems. This challenge is even more acute in developing countries that are

facing poverty and food insecurity, while being highly dependent on the use of natural resources in their predominantly rural economies.

The 2004 FAO report on the *State of Food Insecurity in the World* shows that more efforts must be made to reduce hunger and food insecurity, as 852 million people worldwide are undernourished and progress in reducing this number is lagging.

The competition for water by agriculture and ecosystems is often stressed. We need however to underline the importance of their proper interaction for achieving the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Millennium Development Goals of the General Assembly. Water plays a key role in addressing the Millennium Development Goals, particularly objective number 1 ("eradicate extreme poverty and hunger") and number 7 ("ensure environmental sustainability"). There is a need to reconcile agricultural water use and ecosystem requirement. This is necessary not only to maintain the integrity and productivity of ecosystems, but also to sustain the conditions under which agriculture can contribute to food security, poverty alleviation and economic growth. A dual strategy is required to this effect: adopting an ecosystems approach to agricultural production and a productive services approach to ecosystems.

To promote the implementation of such an integrated approach towards water for food and ecosystems, a Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems was organized jointly by the Government of The Netherlands and FAO and was held in The Hague from 31 January to 4 February 2005. It focused on the identification of appropriate management strategies and practical lessons learned for an integrated approach to water for food and ecosystems. The Conference was attended by 26 ministers and more than 600 participants from 140 countries, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and representatives of civil society. The Conference was supported by an African pre-conference, held in November 2004 in Addis Ababa, an open electronic forum in December 2004 and regional workshops and side-events hosted by external partners. The Conference resulted in the identification of challenges, good practices and specific actions. The Conference recognizing the need of adequate access to water for the poor, has also called upon countries to harmonize legislation and policies in water for food and ecosystems.

Countries should bring together interest groups from different sectors and develop a strategic water plan to place value on national water resources and their uses before defining water allocations. These planning and policy processes should be supported by reliable and trustworthy information. An increase in sharing of knowledge and information on the interrelations of water, food and ecosystems is therefore necessary. This requires harmonized data collection and a

strong effort in development of local and international knowledge. Exchanging information on good practices for use in policy-making will be crucial. FAO is committed to use its international capacity to contribute to the development and dissemination of knowledge and experience, with a view to supporting countries to develop and implement policies in these areas.

Water is a very valuable resource, and yet its true value is often invisible. We need to solve this paradox. First, water is vital to human life, crop growing, livestock production and fish culture. The value of water should be analyzed not only in term of economic efficiency but also in relation to social equity and environmental values. Involving stakeholders in this process will be a key factor for success. Each country should decide on the policies, programmes and projects for improving the efficient and productive use of water resources.

The European Union will be investing in water projects and programmes in ACP countries through the one billion euro "Water Facility". The Governments of ACP countries on their part made the commitment at the Maputo Summit in June 2004 to accord highest priority to agricultural productivity and effective water use.

FAO's Special Programme for Food Security operational in 102 countries uses water control and management as an entry point. In the pilot phase, small-scale water harvesting, irrigation and drainage

systems at the village and rural community level, constitute an essential component.

During the Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems, participants also signalled that it is imperative to raise public awareness on the value and scarcity of water to generate support for any new approach towards more efficient water use. Farmers' awareness of the scarcity of water in some regions of the world should be matched by economic incentives to improve the income they derive from food production. It is, however, important to note that the use of water for agricultural purposes differs greatly from one region to the other. Africa only uses 4 percent of the available water reserves for irrigation, compared with Asia's 17 percent. For domestic and industrial usage, Africa uses 5 percent of its total resources compared to 20 percent in Asia.

Moreover, only 7 percent of all arable land is irrigated in Africa, compared with around 38 percent in Asia and 12% in Latin America, home to 30 % of the world's freshwater resources.

National and international partnerships among and between public and private sector partners will be important for capacity building and stimulating research and development for both high-tech and low-cost technologies to improve overall agricultural water use efficiency.

With an overall agriculture share of 70% of all withdrawals, improving water productivity in this sector holds the key to successful implementation of the conclusions of the FAO/Netherlands Conference. A key challenge is therefore to unlock the water potential of agriculture and reduce stresses on environment.

The past shows reason for optimism, if we consider the significant water productivity gain recorded in agriculture since the early 1960s. One can estimate that the water needs for food per capita halved between 1961 and 2001 from about 6 m³/d to less than 3 m³/d. This development has enabled the world to accommodate the food demands of an almost doubled world population. The large potential of the agricultural sector to contribute to sustainable management of water for food and ecosystems, challenges the policies of declining trend in investment in agricultural water use. The successful implementation of the outcomes of the Conference largely depends on the ability to generate high-quality, coherent investment programmes at local, national and regional scales.

I hope that at this Side Event of CSD13, we can share ideas on how to establish plans for water, food and ecosystem development and to secure the financial resources for the implementation of the resulting recommendations.

Thank you for your attention.

WHO Statement at CSD 13 by Dr. Kerstin Leitner, Assistant Director-General for Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments, WHO, Geneva

Having listened to the ministerial debate so far, I would like to make the following four points on the relevance of turning commitments with regard to improving the water and sanitation situation into action from the perspective of human health (a longer statement is available and will be distributed separately):

1. Improving water and sanitation facilities, in particular in poor urban and in rural areas, has proven time and again as one of the best investments into public health and the avoidance of epidemics of water borne diseases. As Minister Brende said yesterday, the return on such investments into water and sanitation facilities can be as high as 200 percent.
2. Today we have *collectively* to address a dual challenge, namely to extend the reach of improved facilities to those billions who are still excluded, and to do so in a way that we do not exhaust and/or pollute eco-system services which sustain us. The recently published Millennium Eco-system Assessment has shown that over the last 50 years human intervention has succeeded in extracting ever more resources from the world's natural resource base in order to feed, clothe and house an ever growing population, but at the current rate of exploitation we are threatening the sustainability of these resources, and implicitly not only the health of eco-systems but ultimately human health as well.
3. Sustainable development of water and sanitation facilities is more than extending existing facilities, controlling pollution and protecting scarce natural resources. It is a matter of finding innovative solution through multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder engagement. We in WHO, as the current chair of UN Water, welcome the renewed demands for this group to be the pivotal point within the UN system to give concrete meaning to the policy decisions of CSD 13.
4. As we accept this challenge, we also hope and trust that similar multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder alliances will be formed at the national level. As we all know, the water and sanitation goals and targets do not aim at having full global coverage by the year 2015. WHO's best estimate at this point is that such coverage will only be achieved by 2025 at the earliest. Hence we have no room not to meet the established targets. We shall need strong community, national, regional and global leadership, which will bring public and private parties together which at this point are not always working in partnership. We were pleased to participate in a WSSCC event which mobilized women leaders and encourages them to take on a more prominent role.

If we pull together and pool resources, the goals will be achieved and possibly exceeded. In the interest of human health we should not aim for less! Thank you.