



*Joint Statement by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the  
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)  
16<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16)  
Review of CSD-13 Water and Sanitation Decisions*

**Water and the rural poor:  
Interventions to improve livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa**

*12 May 2008*

---

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today on behalf of FAO and IFAD as the Commission takes up the review of CSD-13 decisions on water and sanitation. We would like to share with you relevant findings of a recent joint study on water interventions in support to rural livelihood in sub-Saharan Africa.

As we all know, sub-Saharan Africa is lagging behind in its bid to attain the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating hunger and reducing poverty. The lack of sufficient and safe access to water represents a major constraint to rural poverty reduction in the region, both in terms of domestic water and in terms of water for productive use.

The vulnerability of rural people remains considerable owing to a combination of highly variable and erratic precipitation; unsatisfactory progress in terms of water supply and

sanitation; poor development of hydraulic infrastructure, management and markets; non-conducive land and water governance; and a lack of access to water for domestic and productive uses.

The joint study entitled “Water and the Rural Poor” highlights the need for a better understanding of the linkages between poverty and water, the potential for investments in water in sub-Saharan Africa, and the mechanisms for successful investments. It carries two important messages.

The first message is that there is a large range of opportunities for interventions in water in support of the rural poor in the region. The potential for such interventions in terms of people reached, water mobilized and land productivity enhancement is extremely large. Water will remain a major factor affecting the livelihoods of rural people in the region, both in terms of basic services, and in terms of resilience building and vulnerability reduction. However, these water interventions are unlikely to generate poverty reduction effects if they are conducted in isolation, without also acting on the political, institutional, market, knowledge, and financial dimensions of the problem.

The second message is that the variety of livelihood situations in which rural people operate in the region calls for context-specific and targeted interventions, where rural people’s constraints and opportunities, in particular those of women in a growingly feminized agriculture, are understood and addressed, and where they can take part in the decision-making processes in a way that is effective and ensures the greatest impact on their livelihoods. While all categories of rural people are expected to benefit directly or indirectly from such interventions, the traditional smallholders, farmers, fishers and herders offer the greatest potential for poverty reduction.

Rural communities are in transition, and the dynamics of this transition need to be understood and internalized in order to design effective rural poverty reduction programmes. As a basic human need, and as a major production factor in rural areas, water has a central role to play in helping rural communities to meet new challenges and to benefit from the associated opportunities.

Thank you.