

NEWS & VIEWS

UPDATE **3**



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A new partnership to strengthen policies for water and food

Action points to improve livelihoods for small farmers in dry areas

Day 3 of the International Conference on Policies for Water and Food Security in Dry Areas featured lively debate, a third round of country case studies (see page 2) and the presentation of the synthesis of the four conference sessions - into key messages, recommendations and action points, and a proposal for taking the conference work forward over the coming years.



The meeting conclusions stress key messages that will guide the partnership's future work. Among these are the need to recognize that agriculture is the backbone for national economic growth making a significant direct contribution to a country's Gross Domestic Product, contributing to employment and triggering many services including agro-industries and transport.

To address this global problem, the conference has agreed to establish a Strategic Partnership Framework for Enhancing Water and Food Security in Dry Areas. It aims to improve coordination and complement the efforts of national, regional and international organizations. The partnership will promote knowledge transfer, technical solutions and policy options for sustainable productivity growth – for the increased efficiency of on-farm water use, and improved access to knowledge for small farmers.

This partnership framework is established by ICARDA, FAO, IFAD and IDRC and open to countries and other organizations. It is suggested that ICARDA coordinates the framework and activates it through its lead of the CGIAR Research Program on Dryland Systems which targets enhancing food security and improving livelihoods in five targeted drylands regions.

A number of key themes emerged from the meeting and its recommendations, these include: there can be no food security without water security; information and communication tools are needed by small farmers to reduce risk and improve household food security; investment alone will not solve the problem, this needs to be coupled with policy support and capacity building. Finally, there was much discussion on the merits of adopting a value chain approach to improving smallholders' situations – where the farmer becomes a customer and a supplier to the private sector.

The topic is especially critical given that, in many developing countries, smallholder farmers produce 80% of the food, and that millions of these farmers living in the world's dry lands are increasingly at risk from a lack of water, degraded land and unpredictable climate patterns.



As the conference draws to a close, what are the next steps? How successful will the impact of these discussions be on policy makers? These are questions for Dr Mahmoud Solh Director General of ICARDA, one of the meeting's core partners.

He is optimistic that the conference has hit a very timely spot as the world faces a food and financial crisis. To have a number of ministers and other key figures around the table shows that countries realize that action is needed to improve the food-water nexus. Many meeting discussions focused on opportunities to reduce food imports, save money and invest in domestic production.

One area where support of policy makers is essential is in getting existing technologies off the shelf, out of pilot projects and into the field on a large scale. He comments the wherever there has been an enabling policy environment, the impact of agricultural technologies has been tremendous. Alongside this he hopes that the conference will trigger improved efforts in technology transfer and field extension services. Here political support is critical and Dr Solh says a continued lack of investment in such areas is not tolerable or sensible.

Dr Solh endorses a strong partnership to emerge from this conference, to take forward the conference recommendations and action points.

Next must be a better understanding of crossovers between water management, food security and employment and general economic activity. New coping strategies for water scarcity are also a political imperative alongside what seems to be a new desire to put policies for enhancing food security at the top of the political agenda.



Session analysis: Policies for Enhancing Food Security

Water and food policy linkages across a chain of countries



Country profiles at the conference did so much to tell the story of the umbilical link between water and food security. This third round of country experiences was presented under the theme of Policies for Enhancing Food Security.

From India, Dr. Alok Sikka of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research spoke of the great strides being made in his country to build water security and food supply using methods like rainfed crops which has increased yields by as much as 50%. They are now looking to map the areas with maximum rainwater harvesting potential to help take strain off irrigated systems. Sikka also spoke of the promotion of conservation farming systems to improve efficient use of water and energy.



The Iranian experience was delivered by Dr Abdol Ali Ghaffari of the Dryland Agricultural Research Institute. Iran has achieved self-sufficiency in its major crop, wheat starting in 2003-2004. The success has partly been from the high level of engagement between farmers, researchers and extension workers responsible for getting technology into the field. With food security in place, Iran is now directing its efforts toward job creation and conservation of natural resources.



As in many other countries, the focus in Syria is now to convert rain-fed areas to irrigated areas and to ensure that irrigation is efficient and modern. Other emphases are on improved seeds and fertilizers as well as natural resource conservation. Self-sufficiency in wheat is a major objective,

said Dr Awadis Arslan of the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research. Big investments have flowed from the government in recent years to aid water security and food security, as agriculture forms 22% of the country's GDP.

For Uzbekistan, evolving from the centralized Soviet era system of irrigation and agriculture are at the top of the national agenda. Dr. S. Mukhamedjanov from the Scientific Information Centre told the conference that a fund of \$500 million was being used to reclaim land and to improve irrigation on 1.2m ha of irrigated land. Desalination is also being addressed as a priority. A big policy move is the diversification away from cotton to other crops such as wheat and improving water infrastructure such as canals. One of the key recommendations of policy makers in Uzbekistan is to leverage IT to speed the improvement of food

and water security.

These case studies followed prior presentations from Ethiopia, China, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey. A total of 11 countries shared their experiences and lessons learned at the conference.

Rounding up the discussions on this theme last day of the conference, Dr. H Lamraani from Canada-based IDRC looked at the bigger picture. He suggested behavioural changes as an important approach in securing our food and water future, e.g., shifting from meat-based diet to eating more greens can save substantial amounts of water. Education strategies may be needed to raise awareness on the water-saving potential of dietary habits, both at macro-economic and household levels. He also proposed policy advisory board as a good mechanism to allow various stakeholders from multiple sectors to come together on policymaking. Another approach may be to make water a for-profit commodity and developing policies around it.



Using evidence and tools to link science and policy



How and to what extent can water efficiency be harnessed to alleviate the water crisis, improve food productivity and reduce poverty? The UN University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health initiative is testing their concepts in Ghana and Burkina Faso, both countries that rank low on the development index. Dr. Zafar Adeel from the UN University explained that while we talk about water security in several contexts – agriculture, ecosystems, livelihoods etc. – what we really need is the “ability to cope with uncertainties and risks.”

Dr. Adeel threw light on some approaches for food resilience that are often underestimated, such as the use of storage systems. He pointed reducing waste in the food chain from fork to farm and use of wastewater as “real game changers” if effective technologies are deployed and a sound legal framework is in place to ensure public health.

The Ghana and Burkina Faso projects aim to establish a bridge from scientific analysis to policy – a tool that can guide evidence-based policy making.