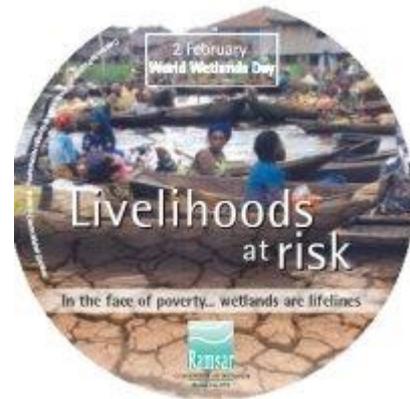


World Wetlands Day celebrations: Secretary Generals message.

No water, no wetlands; No wetlands, poorer quality of life.

This is the perfect phrase to sum up that we have to manage our wetlands in a better, more sustainable way.

This includes all our wetlands from arctic lakes to coral reefs, from karst wetlands to mangroves. World Wetlands Day 2006 deals with the issues of people's well being and wetland conservation at the heart of wise use. Livelihoods of wetland dependant people depend fully on water production and protection agriculture, livestock grazing, fisheries and handicraft industry - and inappropriate wetland management, unwise use, and of course droughts, can cause complete breakdown of the rural sustainable livelihoods, with poverty as a result. With change in the ecological character of the wetlands and drought now affecting livelihoods it is clear that sustaining livelihood and well-being is also dependent on the condition of the wetlands; and that wetland maintenance is dependant on wise use, including basin scale management. This applies even to far away urban dwellers, often dependant on a range of wetland services, from water to food, as well as flood regulation.



World Wetlands Day should help us therefore explore the many ways that wetlands can and should play a role in improving human well-being, including through poverty reduction. And while poverty alleviation is a key target for some parts of the world, the principles that conservation and wise use of wetlands will help reduce poverty and promote better human well-being is real EVERYWHERE. For if we do not achieve sustainable use of wetlands, even where there is currently no poverty, there is the potential for it to develop.

No matter where you are, degradation and loss of wetland ecosystems and consequently the services, benefits and products they provide are all too visible. Properly managed, wetlands can be a vital lifeline not just for the poor, but for all of us. And this, in the end, means better governance and management frameworks for our wetland resources; something the Convention strengthened at its recent Conference of the Parties.

Ramsar COP9 outcomes provide additional guidance, & an organising framework for involvement in the broader water agenda at river basin level. The guidance promotes increased communication between the water & wetland sectors, and provide cooperative water and wetland governance and synchronized planning & implementation at river basin level.

In conclusion, let me wish everyone a wonderful World Wetlands Day!

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General