



"The world is drying" -- Ramsar / IWMI side event at SBSTTA-13

21 February 2008

CBD STSTTA13 side event. FAO, Rome, 18 February 2008



"The World is Drying"
How do we feed the World?"

Organised by the CBD Secretariat, International Water Management Institute (IWMI) & the Ramsar Convention Secretariat

Chair: David Coates, SCBD

Background

We all depend upon water, and water management issues underpin (or under-flow) all CBD thematic ecosystem programmes of work, but the impacts of water and the increasing lack of it does not seem to be afforded significant attention in such programmes.

Yet it is clear that the world already faces a serious overdraft of its water resources. Much of it is for irrigated agriculture. This both threatens our capacity for future food production and destroys ecosystems and their services on which we depend for this water. Yet global food demand is predicted to continue to rise, so what can we do to close the gap?

Through three presentations and a panel discussion this event explored different aspects of the issues and implications for food production and the maintenance of wetland ecosystem services

Will there be enough water? What the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture (CA) says
David Molden, IWMI

The CA clearly recognised that if we continue with 'business as usual' in the world's food production, we will face increasingly serious trouble in relation to availability of water needed for irrigated agriculture. But there are responses, both technological and governance-based, which can help close this gap. Water is the priority key issue to address in future agricultural activities, since it is already the user of 70% of available freshwater, and water needs are projected to further increase. There are already clear ways we can reduce our "water footprint", both through national and individual action, including increasing efficiency of water use, changing crop choices and our diets and energy use in agriculture. But there is also a need to look at the water resource implications of emerging issues, notably biofuel production, which can have high water demands.

Wetlands for Water and Food: can we flow together for a sustainable future?
Nick Davidson, Ramsar Convention Secretariat

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) recognised that not only without water there are no wetlands, but without wetlands we jeopardise the functioning of the global hydrological cycle and the capacity of wetlands to deliver their

water-related and many other ecosystem services to people. Yet wetlands are continuing to be destroyed at a faster rate than other ecosystems, much being driven by agricultural activities and increasing and unsustainable water abstractions. A fundamental change is needed in governance in land and water use planning, from sectoral, needs-driven processes reactive to demands but not always to the reality of allocation of >100% of available water, to integrated ecosystem-based cross-sectoral approaches.

Agriculture, Wetlands and Water: Re-balancing ecosystem services

Hans Langeveld, Plant Research International & GAWI

The "Guidelines on Agriculture, Wetlands and Water Resources Interactions Project" (GAWI) has been developed as a partnership involving FAO, Dutch agriculture-related institutes, and the Ramsar STRP to respond to *inter alia* the call in Ramsar COP8 Resolution VIII.34 for the development of a framework for consideration of agriculture-wetland interactions and guidance on addressing good practice in sustainable agriculture for wetlands and water resources. So as to provide an on-the-ground basis for framework development, GAWI has compiled and analysed over 100 case studies on agriculture in different wetland types from all regions of the world. A DPSIR-based analysis of these case studies has identified a number of differences in regional approaches, including governance issues and the need to focus in some regions more on addressing drivers of change. The GAWI framework will be published in 2008 by FAO with GAWI and Ramsar, and follow-up work to develop guidelines to address the issues it raises is anticipated to start soon.

Key issues and future approaches

Discussion included that:

- there are a number of ways in which water governance and agricultural practice can and should change so as to minimize water wastage and maximize crop yields, including through maintaining the wetland systems which process and deliver the water needed for irrigated agriculture.
- Water, and the increasing challenge of over-abstractions and increasing variability of water supply in a changing climate, should be recognised much more clearly by CBD as a cross-cutting process affecting the delivery of all its ecosystem-based programmes of work, not just inland waters.
- To increasing governmental and public understanding of the huge impact that water issues will increasingly have on all our lives, and on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, the idea of a "Water Footprint", analogous with the Carbon Footprint approach, should be developed, so as to encourage governments and all of civil society to better assess the impacts of their decisions, and take actions corporately and individually to reduce their water footprints.
- For meeting energy demand, there are alternatives - but for our water needs there is no alternative. We have only one H₂O, and caring for it better is vital for all our lives.

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