



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
WORLD WETLANDS DAY
2 February 2014**

“Wetlands and Agriculture: Partners for Growth”.

The significant challenges facing agriculture are well known. Simply put, the world will need to produce more food and reduce the external impacts of food production systems on the environment.

Family farming is a priority area in this regard. In developing countries, these farms already produce most of the food, represent a major way out of poverty for rural populations, and are well placed for significant gains in productivity with relatively little investment.

Wetlands are already an important source of food. For example, well managed rice paddy systems produce not only rice but also co-benefits from rice-associated biodiversity, such as highly nutritious food in the form of fish, molluscs and crustaceans. Wetlands also support the multitude of biota that helps sustain rice productivity through supporting nutrient cycling and pest and disease regulation. The entire production of inland capture fisheries and most coastal fisheries is derived from wetlands, as is most aquaculture production.

Ecosystems and the services they deliver offer the solution to simultaneously achieving food and nutrition security, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. The history of wetlands and agriculture provide us with good insight into both the mistakes of the past and solutions for the future. Worldwide, over 50% of wetlands have been lost. Many of those that remain are highly degraded. Conversion to farming, over-extraction of water for irrigation and the impacts of farming systems on soil erosion and water quality are the leading causes. Yet we know that the value of wetlands on a per unit area basis, far outstrips the economic benefits of farming. It is well established, for example, that the conversion of mangrove areas to shrimp farming has drastically reduced their overall value through the loss of the often invisible benefits of nature such as fisheries nurseries, water regulation and storm protection. Similar examples can be found in most farming systems. Much of the loss in overall economic benefits is driven by agricultural and perverse subsidies.

The trade-offs between agriculture and wetlands are not the only way of assessing the needs. A simple and positive viewpoint is that wetlands contribute to supporting agriculture beyond the food they produce directly. Throughout the world, and especially in water scarce areas, wetlands provide essential water sources for livestock and small-scale farmers. Wetlands play a crucial role in recharging groundwater supplies and maintaining regional aquifers, for example through the seasonal inundation of floodplains and wetlands in the Sahel. This contributes to the security of the water supply throughout the year,



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int



including for farming. Wetlands already receive most of the water pollution from agriculture, and their capacity to process pollutants without becoming degraded can be exceeded.

Man-made wetlands are becoming increasingly integrated into farming systems as intelligent solutions to the problem of nutrient run-off from farms. Restoring riparian vegetation along water-courses is a well-proven method of buffering communities downstream from the impacts of soil erosion and improving water quality. In addition to these benefits for agriculture, conserving or restoring wetlands provides a multitude of other benefits including habitat for wildlife and cultural, tourism and recreational benefits. These examples serve to highlight that we need to shift away from thinking of conflicts between wetlands and agriculture, to recognising that both are inter-dependent and can, and must, be managed together in a landscape setting.

These and other important linkages between agriculture and wetlands are well reflected in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and demonstrate that the Aichi Biodiversity Targets are inter-dependent and need to be achieved collectively. For example, the topic is central to Targets 3 (regarding subsidies), 5 (on rate of loss of habitats), 6 (on fisheries), 7 (that agriculture/aquaculture areas are managed sustainably), 8 (that impacts of pollution are reduced), 11 (on protected areas, notably Ramsar Sites), 13 (that genetic diversity is maintained, for example in rice systems) and 14 and 15 (that ecosystem services are safeguarded and restored). The importance of integrating traditional knowledge, innovations and practices at all relevant levels (Target 18) is particularly relevant considering the depth of knowledge held among indigenous and local community farmers, including regarding the value and role of wetlands in farming.

This years' World Wetlands Day theme contributes to the United Nations International Year of Family Farming 2014, coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which offers an opportunity to highlight the critical role of wetlands as natural infrastructure to support family farming and aquaculture. On this day I am pleased to recognise the important role of the Ramsar Convention and the FAO as the lead implementing partners for the CBD for wetlands and agriculture respectively. Partnerships between wetlands and agriculture, supported by partnerships between all relevant stakeholders involved in both, will be a significant contribution to a better and more sustainable world for us all.
