

Summary: High-level Segment Roundtable 3
Integrated Land and Water Management for Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development

Dear Honorable Ministers, representatives of Government, Major Groups, UN agencies and programmes, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to summarize for you the main points we discussed in Roundtable 2 on “Integrated Land and Water Management for Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development”. We had a number of excellent presentations by resource persons in plenary as well as a rich discussion in the two sub-roundtables. I have tried to capture the highlights.

The integrated management of land and water resources is crucial for sustainable rural development and for ensuring food security for a growing population. It was mentioned that successful integrated land and water management (ILWM) depends on secure land tenure arrangements, broad participation and improved the dissemination of knowledge and good practices. The specific challenges of SIDS in translating ILWM into action were highlighted.

Integrated water resources management is a widely used framework, but water efficiency in agriculture does not figure prominently in many IWRM plans. Ministers emphasized the need for an institutional framework coordinating across key ministries for effective water management, given water’s importance for human consumption as well as agriculture, energy, transportation and preserving biodiversity.

It was highlighted that, in response to the decreasing availability of water in many regions, there is a need for better water management, protecting ground and surface waters from pollution, enhancing availability of scarce water resources including through conservation and efficiency gains, and considering the ecological impacts of water use and pollution. Achieving water productivity gains in rain-fed agriculture is especially urgent.

Speakers addressed a number of technology needs and applications to implement ILWM and IWRM, including improved hydro-meteorological systems, improved access to waste-water treatment, including for safe re-use in agriculture, and technologies to address water scarcity, including rainwater harvesting and desalination.

Effective water management is essential for sustainable agriculture, both to produce food crops and also for the sustainable production of biofuels and energy. There was an exchange of views on biofuels and water use, with a panelist noting the water intensity of first-generation biofuel production and a delegate arguing that sustainable biofuel production is not only possible but several countries are producing biofuels with sustainable water use, for example, from rain-fed sugar cane.

It was observed that, to have an impact, concepts like “more crop per drop” need to be wedded to tools like information technologies for controlling irrigation water flow.

Soil conservation measures are important for land conservation and rehabilitation. It was noted that rural employment schemes can be an effective way of providing livelihoods to poor people while investing in restoration of vegetation and land restoration.

Ministers noted a need for sharing knowledge, experience and technologies and for promoting capacity building for integrated land and water management.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation services in rural areas, where coverage remains low, is crucial for preventing disease, promoting rural development and ensuring the attainment of the MDGs.

Several participants emphasized that the participation of women in decision-making processes, as the managers of water and land resources, is crucial to ensure the sustainable use of land and water resources.

One panelist noted that local authorities are promoting human and social capital as one of the most powerful tools in the fight against rural poverty and the promotion of sustainable rural development.

Flexibility is important when designing rural development programmes to tailor them to specific needs and local contexts and adapt them over time. Local communities should participate in the design of such programmes in order to ensure ownership and sustainability.

Panelists and delegates noted that climate change is affecting water and land resources, and there is need to implement policies to strengthen resilience and adaptation. A number of adaptation measures were mentioned, including catchment of flood water for groundwater recharge.

The potential for sound land use practices to store carbon in soils was highlighted, as was the possibility that in future poor farmers might receive financial benefits from such practices as part of global efforts to tackle climate change. If so, this would bring together poverty eradication, economic development and climate change objectives.