



## Message from the Chair and Director Announcements

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## Water Enough to Eat?

The recently concluded Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture is a critical evaluation of the benefits, costs and impacts of the past 50 years of water development. It pulls together the work of more than 700 scientists and practitioners from around the world who look at the water management challenges that communities face today, and at the solutions people have developed in different parts of the world to meet these challenges. The Comprehensive Assessment findings will enable better investment and management decisions for the future.

*Water for Food, Water for Life* provides in-depth analyses of water and food issues for practitioners, academics, researchers and policymakers engaged in water management, agriculture, conservation and development. The Assessment:



- describes key water-food-environment trends that influence our lives today and uses scenarios to explore the consequences of a range of potential investments;
- informs investors and policymakers about water and food choices in the light of critical influences such as poverty, ecosystems, governance and productivity; and
- covers rainfed agriculture, irrigation, groundwater, water of marginal quality, fisheries, livestock, rice, land and river basins.



Smallholder farmers make up the majority of the world's rural poor and also possess the greatest unexploited potential to directly influence land and water management. Photo: Sharni Jayawardena.

In 2003, some 850 million people in the world were food insecure, with 70% of the world's poor living in rural areas. Meanwhile, the past 50 years have witnessed unprecedented ecosystem changes with negative impacts. The spread and intensification of agriculture have been responsible for much of this change. Problems will intensify unless they are addressed. Only if water use in agriculture improves will we be able to meet the acute freshwater challenges facing the world over the next 50 years. According to the Comprehensive Assessment, targeting smallholder farmers in both rainfed and irrigated areas offers the best chance for reducing poverty quickly in developing countries.

Some of the key action messages emerging from the Comprehensive Assessment for policymakers, water managers and other decision makers are the following:

**Change the way we think about water and agriculture.** Instead of a narrow focus on rivers and groundwater, view rain as the ultimate source of water that can be managed. View agriculture as a multiple-use system and an agro-ecosystem providing services and interacting with other ecosystems.

**Fight poverty by improving access to agricultural water and its use.** Target the livelihood gains of smallholder farmers by securing water access through water rights and investments in water storage and delivery infrastructure, improving value obtained by water through pro-poor technologies and operating multiple water-use systems.

**Manage agriculture to enhance ecosystem services.** In agro-ecosystems there is scope to promote services beyond the production of food, fiber and animal protein. Because of increased water and land use, however, some ecosystem change is unavoidable, and difficult choices are necessary.

**Increase the productivity of water.** Gaining more yield and value from less water can reduce future demand for water, thereby limiting environmental degradation and

easing competition for water. More food can be produced per unit of water in all types of farming systems. The poor can benefit from water productivity gains in crop, fishery, livestock and mixed systems.

**Upgrade rainfed systems, as a little water can go a long way.** Rainfed agriculture is upgraded by improving soil moisture conservation and providing supplemental irrigation. These techniques hold great potential for quickly lifting large numbers of people out of poverty and for improving water productivity in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

**Adapt yesterday's irrigation to tomorrow's needs.** Modernization, defined as a mix of technological and managerial upgrading to improve responsiveness to stakeholder needs, will enable more productive and sustainable irrigation.

**Reform the reform process, targeting state institutions.** A major policy shift is needed for water management investments important to irrigated and rainfed agriculture. The divide between rainfed and irrigated agriculture must be broken down, and fishery and livestock practices must be linked to water management. Civil society and the private sector are important actors, but the state is the critical driver.

**Deal with tradeoffs and make difficult choices.** Bold steps are needed to engage with stakeholders because people do not adapt easily to changing environments. Informed multi-stakeholder negotiations are needed to make decisions on water use and allocation. Other users such as fishers and smallholders must develop a strong collective voice.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands are co-sponsors of the Comprehensive Assessment. Copies of *Water for Food*, *Water for Life* can be purchased online at Earthscan. [Please click here.](#)

For other materials, visit the [Comprehensive Assessment website.](#)

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