

Scaling Up Agricultural Water Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ouagadougou Call For Action

(March 28, 2007)

Over 130 experts and managers from 32¹ African countries and their development partners met in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 26-28 March 2007 to promote Agricultural Water Development (AWD), strategic planning and investment preparation in order to revitalize interest in AW investment in Sub-Saharan Africa. The meeting was convened by five development partners – AfDB, FAO, IFAD, IWMI and World Bank – at the occasion of the completion of a report “Investment in Agricultural Water for Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa” as part of the Collaborative Program on AWD. The meeting was hosted by ARID².

A Daunting Poverty Reduction Challenge

Although the world as a whole is roughly on track to do so, Sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely on present trends to reach Target 1 of the MDGs – i.e. to halve, by 2015, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day. Indeed, if nothing changes, the absolute numbers of poor in the region will continue to increase and by 2015 close to half the world’s poor will live in this region.

Eighty-five percent of Sub-Saharan Africa’s poor live in the rural areas and depend largely on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agricultural growth is therefore clearly key to alleviating poverty and to driving economic growth. Yet Agriculture in the region remains a largely subsistence activity, production has not kept pace with population growth, food security has declined, the household income required to afford more bought-in food has not been generated and the numbers of malnourished people are consequently rising. Rainfall variability adversely affects rainfed production, and this is likely to become aggravated by climate change.

Investment in agricultural water can contribute to agricultural growth and reduce poverty directly by: (a) permitting intensification and diversification and hence increased farm outputs and incomes; (b) increasing agricultural wages; and (c) reducing local food prices and hence improving real net incomes. It can also reduce poverty indirectly via increased rural and urban employment as a result of multiplier effects on growth in rural and urban non-farm economies.

Untapped Potential

Sub-Saharan Africa’s agricultural water remains underdeveloped: there are only 9 million ha of land under water management in the region today, representing just 5% of the total cultivated area– by far the lowest proportion of any region in the world. Water withdrawals for agriculture are less than 3% of total renewable resources, and although a number of basins are currently experiencing, or are approaching, water scarcity this is mainly because of a lack of adequate water storage, institutional management capacity and transboundary organizations following integrated water resources management (IWRM) approaches, rather than absolute scarcity.

One of the reasons for underdevelopment of the sector is that there has in the past been a lack of strategic vision linking agricultural water development to poverty reduction and growth. Even though most poverty reduction strategies are predicated on agricultural growth, agricultural water development

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroun, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Sudan, Zambia.

² Association Régionale de l’Irrigation et du Drainage

has generally not been seen as a vehicle for achieving this; consequently it has had a low profile in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

The Meeting:

- (i) Aware that agricultural water development in sub-Saharan Africa can only make an important contribution to poverty reduction and growth when investments are profitable at the farm level, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sustainable;
- (ii) Realizing that, while there is a potential for a five-fold expansion of the irrigated area, the constraints to this development are mainly economic and institutional;
- (iii) Noting also that a range of low-cost rainwater management technologies (rainwater harvesting, soil moisture conservation, etc.) and potential is available for stabilizing and increasing the crop yields and farmer incomes in rainfed agriculture;
- (iv) Acknowledging that investment in agricultural water is not on its own sufficient to ensure optimal yields, productivity and incomes but needs to be part of a market-driven comprehensive package (research, technical, economic, trade, institutional) that enables farmers to maximize productivity and profitability;
- (v) Recognizing that organizational arrangements for project design, implementation and management are more efficient when they reflect the comparative advantages of the public sector, farmers, NGOs and the private sector;
- (vi) Realizing that agricultural water development investments should be designed in such a way that they address all stakeholders (including the poor and women), ensuring that all parties benefit to their mutual advantage, and that socio-economic benefits are maximized whilst negative environmental and health impacts are minimized;
- (vii) Appreciating that appropriate institutional reforms that give priority to farmer empowerment enhance the performance of agricultural water development and its contribution to sustainable agricultural growth and poverty reduction, but that they need to be accompanied by effective capacity building;
- (viii) Regretting the absence of an action oriented strategy for agricultural water development in some countries, their incoherent implementation in others, as well as the existence of trade and non-trade barriers;
- (ix) Taking note of past experience from agricultural water development and cognizant of the lessons learned;

Recommends that:

1. The Governments of Sub-Saharan African countries and their development partners should promote *national agricultural water development strategies* that recognize (a) the potential contribution of agricultural water to poverty reduction and growth, (b) the imperatives of farm level profitability and economic viability, and, (c) the need for a conducive institutional environment;

2. The Governments of Sub-Saharan African countries and their development partners should increase *investment in agricultural water development and institutional reforms* in accordance with the Maputo Declaration of the African Ministers of Agriculture, including reforms to macro-economic policies, legal frameworks and organizations for agricultural water. This may involve integrating or better coordinating the responsibilities of government organizations for infrastructure development with those for irrigated farming and enhanced aid harmonization; developing the instruments needed for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs); making transparent the role of farmers in cost sharing and in

operation and maintenance whilst building capacities for farmer organizations, public agencies and professional regional and national organizations (such as ARID), the establishment of which should be promoted in other Africa sub-regions.

3. The Governments of Sub-Saharan African countries and their development partners should invest only in *viable and sustainable projects and should design for maximum profitability, poverty reduction and growth* by avoiding long-term and unsustainable subsidies, by providing agricultural water as part of a comprehensive development package that is linked to markets, by promoting effective intra-regional trade, by ensuring that the proposed management arrangements are sustainable, and by inclusively targeting the poor and women, whilst minimizing negative environmental and health impacts.