

From IIMI to IWMI — via two ‘irrigation revolutions’

This 1999–2000 Annual Report marks the transition between the Institute’s outgoing Director General, David Seckler and the incoming DG, Frank Rijsberman.



Under David Seckler’s leadership the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) was transformed to the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). Our research focus has been widened to a comprehensive view of water used for food production and the generation of rural livelihoods. Irrigated agriculture remains our core business, but we look at it in the context of other uses and the environment.

In addition, we are looking at the changing face of irrigation. Since IIMI was originally established to improve the performance of large, public-sector irrigation systems—there have been two revolutions in the world of irrigation.

First, the development of groundwater irrigation using tubewells with diesel or electric pumps has had a tremendous impact. These investments were largely made by private farmers. In India we estimate that, today, more than 50 percent of irrigated agriculture depends on groundwater. But also, where tail-end farmers were inadequately served by the canal irrigation systems in the past, many now use groundwater for supplemental irrigation to achieve substantially higher production levels.

Second, we are witnessing an emerging revolution based on micro-irrigation. A range of affordable small-scale technologies, from micro-lifting devices such as treadle pumps to affordable drip irrigation systems, allows poor farmers to grow high-value, labor-intensive crops on small plots.

Irrigated agriculture is changing more rapidly than its public perception. IWMI fosters and documents the changes, and analyzes their impact at the basin scale—on agriculture, poverty, health and the environment. This is the new IWMI that has developed under David Seckler’s leadership. His leadership received the highest praise from our five-yearly External Program Management Review (the 1999–2000 EPMR).

We are proud that our external review concluded: *"...over the past six years IWMI has transformed itself from an institution focusing on irrigation management and involved in a combination of research and technical assistance activities into a much more research-oriented institution..."*—and that it has created a niche for itself in specific research areas related to water resources management and poverty. The review concluded *"...IWMI, led by David Seckler, and ably supported by his senior management team and by IWMI staff, and with the general support of the Board, deserves much credit for this achievement..."*.

Our transformation from IIMI to IWMI—that was in progress for several years—was formally capped by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on 18 August 2000, when it voted into Law the revised Act approving the change in name.

We are looking forward to a new era for IWMI—which will no doubt be marked by continued rapid change—under the leadership of Professor Frank Rijsberman. He comes to us as one of the leaders of the World Water Vision and World Water Forum process. IWMI was a key contributor to the scenarios developed for the Vision and leader of the Groundwater session at the Forum. We were invigorated by this process. It brought together the largest-ever number of people concerned about water—both from inside and outside the traditional water world. This initiative put 'water' on the global radar screen. Yes, water resources management is one of the critical issues for the coming decades. And this is illustrated by increasing recognition of this fact in the international agricultural research community. One after the other of our sister CGIAR institutes are ranking water issues among their top priorities.

We in IWMI are looking forward with confidence to a future in which many things—including the CGIAR itself—will change. But the importance and urgency of our mandate are clearly reaffirmed. In partnership with many others, we expect to have a major impact toward productive, equitable and sustainable use of water resources.



Klaas Jan Beek
Chairman of the Board of Governors