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<a href="#">HOME</a>
<a href="#">EDITORIALS</a>
<a href="#">NEWS</a>
<a href="#">FEATURES</a>
<a href="#">OPINIONS</a>
<a href="#">REGIONAL GATEWAYS</a>
<a href="#">DOSSIERS</a>
<a href="#">LETTERS TO THE EDITOR</a>
<a href="#">BOOK REVIEWS</a>
<a href="#">ANNOUNCEMENTS</a>
<a href="#">EVENTS</a>
<a href="#">JOBS</a>
<a href="#">GRANTS</a>
<a href="#">LINKS</a>

<a href="#">E-GUIDE TO SCIENCE COMMUNICATION</a>
<a href="#">ENGLISH</a>
<a href="#">ESPAÑOL</a>
<a href="#">PORTUGUÊS</a>

<a href="#">WHAT'S NEW?</a>
<a href="#">ENGLISH</a>
<a href="#">ESPAÑOL</a>
<a href="#">FRANÇAIS</a>

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**Think small for water management, say scientists**

M Sreelata  
 22 March 2007  
 Source: SciDev.Net

[NEW DELHI] Improving water management technologies for small-scale farmers could help solve the problems of water scarcity and food shortages in developing countries, scientists say.

A report published today (22 March) by the International Water Management Institute calls for big changes in water management policy for agriculture.

Highlighting the large irrigation infrastructure in Asia, it says policymakers need to change the way they think about water and agriculture, moving away from big dam projects.

Based on an assessment of water management strategies by 700 experts, the report says that three quarters of the additional food needed globally in the coming decades can be met by supporting the world's low-yield farmers.

Since smallholder farmers make up the majority of the world's rural poor, initiatives should focus on small-scale, individually managed water technologies — such as small pumps, water storage tanks and low-cost drip irrigation — especially in the semi-arid and arid tropics.

These are affordable even for the poorest members of the community and can be implemented almost immediately, without the long delays of large projects.

"We see agriculture, and better water management, as key stepping stones for poverty reduction and economic growth," David Molden, director of the institute, told SciDev.Net.

The report recommends enhancing agricultural systems that rely on rain, by improving moisture conservation and providing supplemental irrigation.

Over half of the gross value of food is produced under rainfed conditions on 72 per cent of the world's harvested cropland — where many of the world's poorest people live.



Water pump in Gimbichu, Ethiopia

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These areas are expected to be the hardest hit by climate change. Better water systems will be essential if people are to cope with dry spells.

"Upgrading these rainfed lands through better water management holds the greatest potential to increase productivity, and decrease poverty," says Johan Rockstrom of Stockholm Environment Institute, one of the report's authors.

Limiting agricultural water use is also key to environmental sustainability.

The report illustrates how waterflows in the Yellow River in China and the Indus in India and Pakistan — important food producing areas — dry up because of water extraction for irrigation.

The report was co-sponsored by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

[Link to more information on the report A Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture](#)

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