

No food without water

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The FINANCIAL -- Agriculture consumes the most water worldwide: the theme of this year's World Water Week in Stockholm was "Water and Food Security".

Discussions centered on the question of how agricultural production can be increased by 40 to 50 per cent over the next 30 years in order to provide food security for a growing global population - even though there is not more water available. As KfW reported, at the conference some 1,500 experts from development policy organisations and from the policy, scientific and civic communities sat together to work on this issue.

The laureate of the Stockholm Water Prize, the **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**, put it succinctly by saying "agriculture is thirsty". Colin Chartres from IWMI underscored that the water requirements in agriculture will double if developments continue at their current pace. Therefore use of the scarce resource water must be optimised and generating additional need should be avoided as far as possible.

KfW Entwicklungsbank offered some practical examples to illustrate that this is indeed possible at a much acclaimed event organised jointly with the German agency in charge of technical cooperation Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Swedish development organisation SIDA. In Bolivia and Ecuador, for instance, it was possible to reduce water consumption in agriculture by applying modern technology. Yields could be increased by a factor of 0.4 with the same amount of water.

Using water effectively -- In Bolivia, for example, water is so scarce that a local smallholder often has to wait two weeks before he can water his field for half an hour. He irrigates his parcel of land and hopes that it will suffice for the next two weeks. Thanks to modern technology, development cooperation is helping to make effective use of water: small service reservoirs are set up to generate the necessary water pressure. Then simple pipes for sprinklers and drip irrigation ensure that less water seeps away or evaporates unproductively. In this way the plants can be sprinkled every other day and receive water when they really need it. As a result, the available water is put to optimal use and at the same time the people can earn more. Experts taking part in the discussions emphasised that in practice, many smallholders are willing to invest in modern irrigation technology as long as the results are satisfactory.

Preventing erosion -- In other parts of the world, too, innovative techniques are applied to increase agricultural yields in times of climate change and growing population pressure. For over 20 years German Development Cooperation has been helping countries in the Sahel Zone to make terraces and to collect and retain water in

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order to contain losses. Efforts involve building stone walls ranging in height between 20 and 40 centimeters. They help rainwater to percolate into the ground, causing the groundwater table to rise. Soil becomes more fertile. Often minimal investments of only EUR 80 - 150 per hectare are needed to increase yields by 40 per cent. In Stockholm the experts agreed on the positive effects of so-called 'water harvesting'. This method helps to minimise the risk of erosion and flooding, two problems affecting the region that are becoming increasingly serious due to climate change.

Yet the main challenge of feeding the world's steadily growing population while at the same time conserving the vital resource water cannot be solved in agriculture alone. In the interest of integrated management the water requirements for environmental protection, energy, water supply and sanitation and water for agriculture need to be based on integrated planning. In this connection the Stockholm Water Week brought the Nexus process for water, energy and food security back into discussion. This nexus, which was initiated in Bonn, Germany, explains how innovative technology and integrated planning can make a vital contribution to food security. Modern irrigation methods help ensure that the precious resource water is used sparingly.

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