

Joint Message from the Board Chair and Director General

In March 2000 one of the candidates for the position of Director General of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) proposed in his interview presentation that the institute ought to play a major role in answering the question: "How much water does irrigated agriculture really need?" Shortly after the IWMI Board appointed that candidate, Frank Rijsberman, to the DG position, he started a discussion on how IWMI could take up that question in a major way. This led to the creation of the CGIAR systemwide program called the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture (CA). The final report of the CA has now been published. The CA provides answers to that key question as well as many other critical questions.



Improving agricultural productivity in rainfed areas of Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia has the greatest potential to reduce hunger and poverty.

Photo Credit: Peter McCornick

The CA has managed to bridge two worlds. It started out as a research program to try and find answers to some of the key knowledge gaps related to water, food and the environment. David Molden, the CA Leader, and his colleagues in the CA Steering Committee, then gradually transformed it into a true assessment of the state of water management in agriculture, over the last 50 years and for another 50 years into the future.

Much has changed in the world of water, food and environment, IWMI's chosen niche, over the last seven years. Many useful bridges have been built between the agriculturalists and the environmentalists involved in water. Agriculture and wetlands is now a topic discussed among the ecologists in the Ramsar Convention while biodiversity in agro-ecosystems is on the agenda for agriculturalists. There is improved dialogue on many fronts between the two sectors.

The CA focuses on agriculture but with a firm input from the environmental perspective. The CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) addresses many of the key issues identified as priorities in the CA in the field. IWMI has played a key role in the development and implementation of both the CA and CPWF and is pleased – and proud – to be associated with the emerging results and recommendations from both programs.

So what does this assessment conclude? Is there enough water or are we running out? The CA's answer is that we are running out of water to satisfy all demands in many locations - the closed and closing river basins - and that this will worsen if present policies continue. That is the bad news. But the CA also presents key opportunities to alleviate or prevent such water crisis situations. One of the most surprising conclusions presented with authority by the CA is its optimistic view on rainfed agriculture, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The CA concludes that one of the key opportunities to address poverty and improve water productivity lies in Africa's savannahs.

While many may be skeptical that major progress can be made in such a difficult environment, where real success has escaped us despite decades of trying, the evidence shows that this is indeed possible. In Brazil, the savannahs – called 'cerrados' there – have been developed successfully and crop and water productivity has increased dramatically.



Prof. Frank Rijsberman
Director General

The assessment puts forward key recommendations for improving water management in agriculture to address the world water crisis, backed by the authority of over 700 scientists and careful analysis in this report and a series of companion volumes. We are confident that the CA – with proper translation to regional, national and basin level realities – will prove to be a crucial guide for water policy in agriculture. It has already been important for sharing knowledge among researchers and research organizations and for setting research agendas. We hope and expect that the investments made by so many in this assessment will turn out to be a stepping stone out of poverty for many of the millions of poor rural people that struggle with water scarcity today.

The Board is convinced that IWMI is well positioned to face its challenges in the years to come and make an impact on the health and well-being of poor people through improved management of their natural resources - first and foremost their water and land resources.

May 2007



Prof. Nobumasa Hatcho
Board Chair



Prof. Frank Rijsberman
Director General



Prof. Nobumasa Hatcho
Board Chair



It is important to empower women and marginalized groups who have a stake but currently no voice in water management.

Photo Credit: Nadia Manning

By coincidence, Frank Rijsberman, who initiated the Comprehensive Assessment when he joined IWMI in the year 2000, is leaving the institute as the CA is completed. The Board is in the process of recruiting a successor and has appointed David Molden to the position of Acting Director General from June 1st, 2007.

The Board would like to commend Frank for his successful leadership of the Institute during the past seven years. As is well documented elsewhere, IWMI has grown and blossomed over the period under his leadership. The overall conclusion of the 3rd External Program and Management Review of IWMI was that the institute has emerged from its period of rapid growth as a larger, more diverse, more proactive and generally stronger research organization, with enhanced human resources management. IWMI has benefited greatly from the leadership of a strong and dynamic Director General since 2000. The IWMI Board fully agrees with this endorsement of the external review panel and wishes Frank well as he goes on to new challenges in helping to build Google's new philanthropic arm, google.org.