



RIO+20 POLICY

TOP MESSAGES ON FRESHWATER

20 May 2012

Summary:

- ▶ **In the late 20th Century, the Yellow River, the Murray-Darling and countless others have run dry. The Aral Sea has all but disappeared, and Lake Chad could come next. As we exceed the limits of aquatic ecosystems, freshwater biodiversity is declining and, with it, vital ecological functions and services. The resulting socioeconomic and environmental impacts have been profound.**
- ▶ **Securing food, water and energy is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Better management of rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers – the sources of our water – provides the necessary foundation to meeting this challenge.**
- ▶ **The litmus test of well-managed, climate-resilient freshwater ecosystems is the continued flow of clean and sufficient water to downstream users. Water management and allocation frameworks must prioritise securing sustainable flow regimes towards ensuring the long-term availability of water for all.**
- ▶ **It is critical to strengthen institutions and empower them to inform, implement, enforce and monitor climate-resilient water management and allocation decisions.**
- ▶ **Investment in water storage and hydropower should include a blend of properly valued natural infrastructure and wiser engineering based on international standards of good practice.**
- ▶ **For water, food, and energy security in transboundary basins, long-term and good-faith cooperation between states is essential, including towards bringing into force and implementing the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention (UNWC).**
- ▶ **The water-food-energy nexus calls for increased consistency and coherence in decision- and policy-making for water, energy and food security, development and climate change.**

1. The availability of freshwater lies at the core of food and energy security:

Over the next decade, the world will become home to billions of new middle-class families. Demand for “thirsty” food and energy will increase massively: 70% by 2050, for agricultural water demand; 40% by 2030, for energy needs, which will largely be met through alternatives that directly depend on freshwater, such as hydropower, thermal power, and bioenergy. At the same time, we have yet to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and improve sanitation conditions worldwide. Moreover, water is the primary medium through which climate change impacts are being and will be felt. Solving the food-water-energy equation is thus an urgent global priority.

2. We urge countries to establish and implement water management and allocation frameworks that incorporate climate change considerations and prioritise allocation for the maintenance of river flows, along with water for basic human needs:

National laws and policies, including in South Africa and Mexico, increasingly require sustainable flows in rivers, and through lakes, wetlands and aquifers, to be maintained. These progressive legal instruments form the basis for environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically efficient outcomes. Investment is also needed in stronger water management institutions that gather data, provide robust technical advice, implement decisions effectively and enforce water laws and policies at various levels.

3. As we approach the end of the *International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ 2005-2015*, and start preparing for 2013 as the *International Year of Water Cooperation*, we call on countries to ratify and implement the UNWC:

In the world’s 276 transboundary watersheds, the water management challenge is compounded. Without stronger cooperation, tensions fuelled by competing water demands are likely to increase, undermining water, food, and energy security. It is vital that states work together to achieve the equitable and sustainable sharing of these resources, and the benefits and risks associated therewith, within the framework of appropriate institutions and agreements at various levels, including the UNWC. The Convention counts today 25 contracting states – 10 short of the required for entry into force.

4. Properly valuing natural infrastructure is central to sound water management:

Freshwater ecosystems provide infrastructure for free; they store, transport and clean water. Rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers are a key source of fish protein for people in Africa, Asia and Latin America; and transport sediment that replenishes the deltas and coasts on which many of our great cities are built. To complement this, we now have the information, technology and knowledge to build the right types of dams at the right places, and to manage them to meet social, economic and ecological objectives. Tools such as the *Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol* should be employed to guide investments in infrastructure so as to optimise returns while minimising adverse impacts.

5. Development and poverty alleviation strategies, and relevant government and business decisions must consider coherent information and coordinated policy options across the agricultural, trade, energy, climate, and water sectors:

Tradeoffs between water use for food, energy, the environment and domestic needs may be inevitable. Yet, energy solutions/climate change mitigation strategies should, at the least, not jeopardise or undermine efforts towards water and food security. Climate adaptation funds provide an opportunity for strengthening institutions and making them better fit to address tradeoffs between short-term energy and agricultural water demands, and the longer-term need to maintain river flows and other ecosystem services in a changing climate.

For implementing these solutions, **we welcome partnerships with the private sector** in initiatives to improve performance and reduce the impacts of production systems on freshwater resources. Companies are well-positioned to offer valuable technical input to the development of sustainable water management laws, regulations and policies, in coordination and consultation with all stakeholders.

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