

## *The Vientiane Statement*

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WE, the scientists, development workers, and representatives of civil society gathered together in Vientiane, at the CPWF “International Forum on Water and Food”, agree to and state the following:

**The challenge** – We recognize the huge global problems posed by hunger, poverty, and disease. These same problems inspired the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by the United Nations. We recognize the many obstacles to overcoming these problems, among them climate change, resource degradation, and impaired ecosystems. We perceive, however, the presence of a further issue of paramount importance, one that must be addressed if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved: the rapidly unfolding and unprecedented crisis of global water scarcity. .

Growing and urbanizing populations will need more water for household consumption, power generation, and industrial production – and for increased food production and the provision of important ecological services. Over the next 20 years, food production must increase by over 30%, much of it in poor, water-scarce developing countries. This must be achieved without excessive damage to ecosystems.

**The vision** – We seek a more water and food secure world, one where wise water management , innovative technologies and effective institutional arrangements work together towards eliminating hunger, poverty and disease, and where ecological services and resource quality are preserved. Such a world is within our reach.

**The strategy** – The best place to start is with food production as agriculture is by far the largest single water user. By using less water to produce more food, more water can be made available for non-agricultural purposes. Poverty can be reduced and food security improved when smallholder farmers and subsistence fishers achieve higher levels of sustainable productivity. A suitable strategy must also embrace more holistic and equitable water allocation and use in communities, catchments and river basins. Concrete actions are needed at multiple scales by multiple actors . . .

On farms and agro ecosystems – Develop farming practices that sustainably improve land and water productivity. In rainfed areas these include water harvesting, small-scale irrigation, conservation agriculture, and stress-tolerant crop varieties. In grazing areas, better rangeland management can improve livestock productivity while reducing soil loss. In irrigated areas, new technologies can sustainably increase crop yields while reducing water withdrawals. Risk and disaster management strategies are needed, especially in drought or flood-prone areas. In all areas, diversification can increase the value of output per unit of water depleted, while improving resilience. Diversification may feature integration of livestock, fishing, crops and trees.

Widespread adoption of sustainable, productive, water-wise farming practices emerges from dynamic innovation systems. These must be encouraged. Experience shows that innovation can be accelerated during crises. These opportunities must be seized – in ways that help the poor and vulnerable.

In local communities – Involve local stakeholders in water management decision-making. Participatory technology development that makes use of traditional knowledge and the capacity of farmers and fishers to find solutions to their problems is indispensable. Educational initiatives are needed to build this capacity.

Introduce multiple-use water systems. Most people use water for a multiplicity of domestic and productive purposes. Unfortunately, water supply systems are usually designed for a single use, e.g., irrigation. Such systems are often unable to cope with additional demands. Where appropriate, water systems that are multiple-use by design should be introduced. Diverse water sources should also be explored—such as waste water. Attention must be paid at all times to the ways that water affects human health.

Improve gender equity and introduce gendered research agendas. Women play a central role in food production, natural resource management, and communities and the livelihoods of rural families. Improved gender equity is a means of achieving food security and poverty-reduction goals, as well as a goal in itself.

Reduce groundwater depletion. In several major regions, e.g. the western Ganges, and Yellow River, groundwater depletion threatens the food security and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. A combination of new water management practices and policies for common property management are needed.

In watersheds and river basins – Improve communication and collaboration among water users. Water is often a source of conflict, e.g., between upstream and downstream users or across national borders.

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Raw power often determines who has access to water resources. Dialogue among stakeholders can, however, foster awareness of each others' interconnected needs, leading to more efficient, equitable water allocations and, where appropriate, a shift from sharing water to sharing benefits derived from water use.

Encourage payments for environmental services. Inappropriate upstream land and water use can damage downstream ecologies and people's health. Downstream stakeholders may need to provide incentives to upstream people to allow greater flows of higher quality water. This can be done in ways that build on existing policies and institutions, foster social cohesion and create awareness among stakeholders.

Recognize the value of ecological services and environmental flows. Within a basin, aquatic and land management systems produce ecological services such as clean water, fresh air and the preservation of biodiversity. The services are difficult to value, whereby their importance is often not fully appreciated. The same is true for environmental water flows – the water required to maintain downstream ecologies.

For national and global policies and institutions – Improve water use governance at all scales. Questions of governance are most challenging at higher scales of analysis, e.g., entire river basins. Here, 'command and control' governance systems are less suitable than those based on stakeholder participation. For the latter to work, however, innovative legislative frameworks are needed. Transboundary water policies are most likely to be acceptable, effective, and equitable when they focus on benefit sharing, not water sharing. Transboundary cooperation in water use is a question for governments, the private sector and civil organizations.

Introduce policies and develop institutions that encourage equitable and efficient water use in ways that reduce poverty and improve food security. Water management is often influenced by national- and global-level policies that are outside the water sector, e.g., trade or energy policy, crop price support or input subsidies. Policies also play a pro-active role, e.g., by fostering the use of conservation agriculture or by giving priority to rehabilitating degraded lands. Harmonizing national and international water policies helps, as does the integration of sectoral policies, e.g., energy, hydrology, transport and agriculture.

### **A call for action –**

*We call for more research on:*

- Sustainable, productivity-enhancing, water-saving farming practices adapted to local conditions.
- Risk management for vulnerable communities (e.g. rain-fed farmers and subsistence fishers).
- Ways to sustainably increase water productivity in aquaculture and livestock production.
- Ways to manage conflicts among alternative water uses and users; along with decision-support systems and scenario analysis to backstop dialogue among stakeholders.
- Links between gender and resource management and land and water productivity issues.
- Methods for valuing ecological services and for estimating environmental flows.
- The consequences of climate change on land and water productivity, food security, and poverty.

*We call for greater investment in:*

- Capacity-building in multidisciplinary and integrative approaches for researchers, development workers, and water management stakeholders.
- Programs for participatory technology development; aquaculture development in large and small reservoirs; and programs of payments for environmental services.
- Programs for fostering widespread adoption of successful farm level interventions

*We call for policies that:*

- Encourage the use of farm-level practices that sustainably improve land and water productivity; encourage wise use of groundwater; and foster land use congruent with ecological reality.
- Establish regulatory frameworks that recognize multiple uses and users and empower local and indigenous water management systems.
- Foster a greater and more systematic sensitivity to gender issues.
- Establish legislative frameworks for river basin governance systems based on stakeholder participation and supported by adequate information and decision-support.