

Water for agricultural development



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Water equity for forgotten people

Water lies at the heart of sustainable development and is essential for economic growth, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. It is the basis of human and environmental health, energy security, sustainable urbanization and the ability of rural women and men in developing countries to pursue productive activities.

But one billion people still lack access to safe water and even more lack access to basic sanitation. Around three quarters of the world's poorest and hungriest people live in rural areas, often forgotten and bypassed by economic growth and development programmes. The majority of rural people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, but face numerous barriers in accessing services and securing vital resources, including water.

The agricultural dimension of water use is often overlooked – even though, globally, agriculture is the biggest water user, and without water, food production is impossible. The world's 500 million small farms produce much of the food in developing countries, yet poor smallholders often themselves are among the hungry. Achieving the new sustainable development goals (SDGs) and achieving global food security for a growing population must entail enabling small farmers to produce more food, more efficiently, including through sustainable water use.

Water and sustainable smallholder agriculture

As both a specialized United Nations agency and an international financial institution, IFAD is a unique organization. It also has a unique mandate, being exclusively focused on rural and agricultural development.

IFAD has a distinct strategic position because it works in remote rural areas where others do not go, yet is able to bring projects to scale to create significant impact. It has a people-centred, inclusive and integrated approach, driven by knowledge and



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the conviction that people can be the drivers of development.

For more than three decades, IFAD has been bringing its extensive experience with participatory, community-driven development to bear on the water sector. This has involved building partnerships with key knowledge providers, and funding institutions in the water domain to bring development to people locally, scaling up solutions that work.

Making sure that more secure access to water leads to higher productivity and incomes is a multidisciplinary effort. It requires better coordination between the ministries of

water, of irrigation and of agriculture, better integration of smallholders into value chains to take advantage of market opportunities and link to the private sector, and increased access to credit and technical assistance. IFAD's strategy for engaging with the private sector focuses on the interests and needs of poor rural people, particularly small farmers. In any collaborative endeavour, they should benefit as producers, suppliers, customers, distributors and employees. IFAD acts as an intermediary to build trust and equitable relationships between larger companies and small producers.

INTEGRATED APPROACHES, MULTIPLE BENEFITS

The project on Scaling Up Micro-Irrigation Systems (SCAMPIS) in Madagascar started in 2009 with the support of a grant from Coopernic, a consortium of five European-based private food retailers. Its initial objective was to improve water availability and water management for 10,000 households in Madagascar through the implementation of micro-irrigation systems, and thus lead to better agricultural productivity. That was not the only benefit, however. The SCAMPIS project supported the local production of micro-irrigation kits, which were better adapted to community needs, and helped develop a local industry and distribution network. With this multi-pronged strategy, the project generated a leap forward in micro-irrigation systems in Madagascar. The project was also extended to outside partners. For poor farmers, especially women, the introduction of micro-irrigation kits created a new source of income and livelihood, while farmers in water-scarce areas became better equipped to optimize their use of water.



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Water management, climate and the environment

Water is essential not only for economic and social development, but for the continuation of healthy ecosystems. But rural areas are changing rapidly, also as a result of climate change, and poor rural people often lack the capacity to adapt quickly. Given that smallholder farmers are the primary domestic private-sector investors in

rural areas, it is essential that action be taken to improve their access to agricultural resources and climate-smart tools. Food production in the developing world will need to increase by 60 per cent by 2050, and sustainable smallholder agriculture – including in presently rainfed areas – will be key to meeting that demand.

Existing good practices of water management could have significant impact on environmental

PEOPLE, PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRESS

A staggering 80 per cent of Haitian farmers are unable to produce enough to feed their households. Severely deforested and eroded hillsides have become arid and increasingly difficult to farm. Farmers contend with drought, cyclones and other extreme weather conditions that are becoming more frequent with climate change. But a new partnership in the north-west region – one of the most remote and disadvantaged parts of the country – is tackling the rehabilitation of two farming systems, that up to now have been addressed separately and with poor results. The project addresses both irrigated valleys and upstream rainfed hillsides at the same time, working broadly and quickly over three watersheds and bringing rapid relief to struggling farmers, while carrying out the near-total rehabilitation of hillsides and valleys. IFAD lent its technical expertise to designing the irrigation infrastructure and the overall watershed rehabilitation scheme; the World Food Programme provided cash and food to local farmers who built the terraces on the upper watersheds as part of its cash and food-for-work programme; and the German NGO Welthungerhilfe (Agro Action Allemande) gave technical guidance to the farmers to boost productivity and create lucrative market gardens. The project also helped farmers organize themselves into watershed associations and subcommittees for the maintenance of the irrigation systems and terraces. In the irrigated areas, elected committees supervise the agricultural campaign and the calendar for water distribution.



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health, while at the same time enabling farmers to increase production and their incomes – as long as there is an integrated approach in place that brings together climate-smart techniques with natural resources management and greater market opportunities. In this way, “green growth” can be promoted and smallholder farmers can improve their livelihood, play a role in increasing global food security, as well as protect the environment.

Using a people-centred approach, IFAD-supported projects aim to increase the voice of the marginalized rural poor in water governance, and to enable underprivileged producers and agroprocessors to manage water along the whole value chain. With support, both in terms of technology and knowledge, small farmers can increase their ability to cope with unreliable and variable water supplies and to take advantage of market opportunities.


A holistic approach that takes in the whole value chain is necessary because smallholders cannot afford to invest in raising irrigated, high-value perishable crops unless there is an available market. Through small-scale schemes, a group of farmers can organize themselves to finance all irrigation infrastructures from the water source to downstream development to the farmgate, and increase their access to finance and markets. IFAD has know-how to offer to build on this kind of pro-poor capacity development.



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