

Private Sector Mechanism Position Paper

October 2015

WATER FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The Private Sector Mechanism is very concerned about the improvement of water management that will be required to make the necessary increase of food production possible. We believe that the international community should pay more attention to the essential contribution of water to food production throughout its value chain.

The OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050 concluded that the growth of population, urban and industrial demands will be such that it will be impossible to satisfy agricultural demand for more water at the global level. The report points that groundwater depletion may become the greatest threat to agriculture and urban water supplies in several regions. If the OECD is right, there is great urgency for governments to address this issue and to take action preventively. Even if all researchers are not yet convinced, the examples of Australia and California are real; they show that numerous farmers are likely to have less water in the future than today.

We believe that the main challenge for water in the context of food security and nutrition is the increasing difficulty of producing enough food to feed a growing population at a time when getting additional water resources to agriculture is becoming more and more difficult and even impossible in many regions.

To this end and in the context of the publication of the report of the High-Level Panel of Experts on Water for Food Security and Nutrition, we would like to highlight key areas where policy recommendations could greatly improve water stewardship:

- **Improving water productivity and efficiency:** In a context of potential stability of water resources available to agriculture, the only option to feed a growing global population sustainably is to increase the 'water productivity' of agricultural production. This challenge has been clearly recognized as imperative in the formulation of the global SDG Targets. This concept of 'more crop per drop' needs to be translated into effective action to meet the needs with concrete recommendations on means to stimulate water productivity in agriculture.
- **The opportunities provided by water re-use:** In view of achieving the agricultural component of the SDG Target 6.4 on water-efficiency, we believe that recommendations need to be made to increase wastewater reuse in agriculture to contribute to the achievement of the SDG Target 6.3 that aims at 'increasing recycling and safe reuse globally'.

- **The role of the private sector:** The private sector is important in providing solutions to improve water management and to invest in research and development.
- **Research, innovation and technology:** The role of technology, best practices, innovation, and alternative methods of agriculture are fundamental in improving water management. Existing solutions such as irrigation including drip irrigation, drought-tolerant crops, hydroponics, aquaponics, recycling and reuse, vertical farming, desalination of seawater, and grey water use all provide effective options for water stewardship. It is important that proper policies encourage investment into agricultural technologies that are more efficient and sustainable.
- **“Right to water” or “human right to water”:** the human right that was recognised in international law in 2010 is not a generic "*human right to water*" but a very specific "*human right to safe drinking water and sanitation*" (HRSDWS) that has no direct linkage with water for agriculture. Water resources should not be confused with safe drinking water. Water only becomes safe when it has been purified for human consumption or its natural quality has been controlled to be exempt from any contamination. This is not the water that is needed and used in far larger volumes by farmers and ecosystems. Globally, the volume of ‘drinking water’ that is used by human beings is 20 times smaller than the volume of ‘water’ used for agriculture. This means that a generic "*human right to water*" would be very different from the "*human right to safe drinking water and sanitation*" (HRSDWS).