

Statement of Farmers
21 April 2005
CSD 13 - New York City

Madam Chair, Honorable Ministers:

IFAP appreciates the special attention given to the agricultural sector in the draft negotiating text (dated 19 April 2005) where mention is made on the need for more effective water demand management. There is obviously here recognition of the importance of the role of the agricultural sector when dealing with water related issues.

However, IFAP is quite surprised with the fact that no mention is made of the “human face” of agriculture. Farming is not just agricultural practices and technology; it is human labor and human imagination. In other words one cannot talk about agriculture without referring to farmers and their role in participating in decision making processes right from the onset (formulation stage to the implementing and follow up stage). Farmers are the custodians of natural resources and their involvement is indeed crucial in this regard, and we feel this should be reflected in the final text.

IFAP is pleased that reference is made on the need to provide technical, management as well training support for local authorities and community based organizations. IFAP agrees with this but feel that the root of the problem is not tackled.

No mention is made on the need to support farmers and their organizations when dealing with access to and management issues. Management and technical support is important but this is not enough. Building the capacities of farmers and their organizations at all levels (institutional, organizational, leadership, marketing, financial, technical...) should form the basis of this support. Without this capacity building process, farmers and their organizations will not be able to manage the water resources in a more rational way and therefore the Millennium development goals will not be reached.

Farmers need capacity building but in their turn, they reaffirm their willingness to participate and their readiness to “co-manage” the implementation of policy options identified throughout this exercise. Farmers are not just spectators; they are protagonists of their own fate and ask to be considered as such. Therefore, they are willing to share the responsibility of managing the water resources under the condition to be involved and to be considered on equal footing with other stakeholders such as government and intergovernmental institutions’ representatives.

Governments have to play their role to play in providing the necessary support to encourage farmers’ organizations willingness to use water efficiently. This support could materialize in the form of tax incentives and stewardship programs. These programs will help farmers get out of the poverty circle and will help develop their feeling of ownership with regard to the protection and rational use of the water resources.

Emphasis is put on the need for the use of appropriate technologies when dealing with water issues. However, the issue of involving community based organizations including farmers in the identification of their needs to be able to come up with appropriate techniques is often overlooked. The research and technology community needs to work in collaboration with these grassroots organizations to take the right direction in this regard.

All in all, there is a need to enhance the active role of stakeholders including at the beginning, farmers and their organizations in formulating and implementing decisions related to water issues. Both bottom up and top down approaches should be adopted to tackle this issue of better management of water resources, with civil society actors being considered on equal footing with other stakeholders including national government and intergovernmental organizations.