



GROUP OF FIFTEEN

The Summit Level Group of Developing Countries

G-15/07/WRM

Date issued: 4 September 2007

Distribution: GENERAL

Report of the High Level Meeting on Water Resources Management and Rural and Agricultural Development, Tehran, 2 - 4 September 2007

1. The High Level Meeting on Water Resources Management and Rural and Agricultural Development was organized by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on 2-4 September 2007 in Tehran as a consequence of the mandate given by the 13th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Group of Fifteen to organize a High Level follow-up meeting to the G-15 Seminar/Workshop on “Rural and Agricultural Development and the Management of Water Resources” held in Geneva in July 2006. The main purpose of the Meeting was to explore the possibility of establishing a G-15 mechanism or clearinghouse for the exchange of experiences on rural and agricultural development and the management of water resources aimed at enhancing good practices and information sharing among member countries.
2. In acknowledgement of the importance of the subject in G-15 countries, 39 high-level officials, experts and diplomats participated in the Meeting from the majority of the member countries of the Group. The proceedings of the Meeting were enriched by the contribution of Prof. Noboyuki Tamai, President of the International Association of Hydraulic Engineering and Research. (The List of Participants is attached as an Annex).
3. In his Opening Speech, the Chairman of the inaugural session, H. E. Mr. A. Sheikh Attar, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressed his appreciation to all participants attending the Meeting and expressed the hope that with a constructive exchange of views on this important subject, the Meeting will produce new ideas for the attainment of common G-15 goals. As the first meeting outside of Geneva under the Chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he hoped that it would infuse new dynamism into the Group. He emphasized the importance of good water management strategies and its efficient utilization with a view to improving the quality of life and social well being of the present and future generations. Noting the importance of rural and agricultural development, he called for concrete efforts on the part of member countries to eradicate poverty and develop sustainable agriculture as well as to ensure the active participation of all stakeholders in this regard. He expressed optimism that the outcome of the Meeting will lead to the adoption of recommendations that would strengthen South-South cooperation among member countries.

4. In his address, the Minister of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H. E. Mr. S. P. Fattah, remarked that water resources management has become one of the most important challenges of the present century due to population pressure, excessive demand on natural resources and decrease in environmental quality, among others. He therefore observed that complex water resources development problems should be considered in an integrated manner. In this regard, he called for a comprehensive plan based on resource availability and its efficient use in the areas of water allocation in different sectors such as agriculture, domestic use, industry, hydropower generation and environmental protection. In light of the vast experience and knowledge within member countries, he urged the Meeting to consider the establishment of a platform to promote capacity building and networking in the area of water resources among G-15 member countries. To this end, he stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran was prepared to provide the initial platform that would serve as a clearing house. In view of the critical importance of water financing, he said that the Islamic Republic of Iran proposes the establishment of a G-15 Water Fund. He similarly proposed the formation of a G-15 Water Council to facilitate joint or collective participation in international activities in the water sector to ensure outcomes that are favourable to G-15 member countries. He concluded on the note that a productive outcome of this meeting would contribute significantly to the achievement of the goals of the G-15.

5. In his remarks, Dr. F. Yazdandoost, President of the Water Research Institute of the Islamic Republic of Iran and focal point for the organization of the meeting, observed that the meeting was designed in a manner that practical issues would be addressed to create more momentum in the activities of the Group of Fifteen. He observed further that progress would be made by focusing on the challenges in the field, namely, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), Capacity Building and Networking, Water Financing, Rural and Agricultural Development, as well as the cross-cutting theme of a Water Council. He expressed the hope that upon presentation of country reports by the esteemed delegates, deliberations on the thematic issues would provide the basis for further cooperation between the member countries.

6. On behalf of Algeria, the preceding Chairman of the G-15 under whose stewardship the theme was introduced, Mr. Larbi Baghdali, Director in the Algerian Ministry of Water Resources recalled that a Seminar/Workshop on Rural and Agricultural Development and Management of Water Resources was held in Geneva in July 2006 as part of the preparations for the 13th Summit. He remarked that experts exchanged views and came out with conclusions and recommendations, which the Summit directed, should be further considered in this meeting. He therefore expressed the hope that this meeting would succeed in coming out with joint strategies towards improving the economic and social conditions in the regions of G-15 countries.

7. The inaugural session was followed by presentation of Country Reports on water resources management and agricultural and rural development as implemented by each country, a brief background of respective country positions on water resources management and views and visions on the thematic issues as a means of facilitating IWRM approaches through collaboration between member countries. It was obvious from the presentations that member countries shared a number of similarities in addition to specific national peculiarities in these sectors and in particular in the implementation of IWRM. A verbatim copy of the Country Reports was provided in CD format to all participants.

8. Five Thematic Sessions followed the presentation of Country Reports. The proceedings of the Thematic Sessions are summarized below:

Capacity Building and Networking

9. Participants underlined the importance of water as a critical natural resource and a basic human need and that, given the ever-growing challenges facing the G-15 countries and the global community in the water sector, it was imperative to liaise, integrate and exchange knowledge, information and experiences on the pressing issues of water management between the G-15 countries. It was observed that this was an opportune time to hold discussions on water issues given that 2005 – 2015 had been declared as the International Decade for Water and Life by the United Nations.

10. It was acknowledged that water resources management must be adaptive to changing conditions and goals over time. To this end, participants agreed that this will require continued education and capacity building, community sensitization, research, monitoring and relevant measures to be taken to result in sustainable development and sound management plans and policies. They also recognized the need to plan and investigate measures to minimize threats from water related risk elements such as floods and droughts within the G-15 countries. They therefore stressed the need for collaboration and exchange of information, knowledge and experience between member countries, particularly between related institutions.

11. Participants reiterated that capacity development, research and education are recognized as the bases for sustainable development and their decisive role in water management should not be ignored. They recommended the development of mechanisms for sharing of best practices in water resources development and management issues, improved communication and outreach between G-15 countries.

12. With a view to creating a dynamic platform for dissemination of knowledge and experiences within the G-15 countries in line with the mandate given by the 13th Summit, the meeting discussed and recommended the creation of a mechanism with the following possible features:

- To serve as a forum for the exchange of technical knowledge and experiences among member countries with a view to identifying best practices which could add value to the efforts of member countries;
- The forum could take the form of technical meetings, workshops, seminars and web-based interaction amongst technical experts in the field of rural and agricultural development and the management of water resources;
- To consider establishing a G-15 database, as deemed appropriate, on activities of member countries in the areas of water resources, agriculture and rural development. To this end, to seek the active support and collaboration of all member countries;
- Following the pattern established by the G-15 Human Resources Training Programme, the proposed mechanism could provide a collective avenue through which each member country could offer or avail itself of training opportunities aimed at enhancing national capacity building as well as networking;
- The facilitation of networking amongst training institutions, research centres and relevant agencies of member countries;

- To explore the possibility of facilitating cooperation and support between sub-regional and regional institutions with mandates in the area of capacity building for water resource management as well as rural and agricultural development to complement similar efforts in G-15 countries;
- To explore avenues for mobilizing support and technical cooperation for its activities from the international donor community;
- To assign to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the task of hosting the proposed website as a starting-point for the take-off of the envisaged activities.

13. The meeting agreed to recommend the establishment of a “Working Group on Water”, under the coordination of the Chairman of the Group to further explore the subject and modalities for the operationalization of the mechanism.

Water Fund

14. Participants stressed the need for adequate financing of water related activities because of the increasing challenges of water resource management today. In order to increase investment and attract financial resources for activities in the water sector, as well as cooperation programmes among G-15 member countries, it was generally felt that the existence of some kind of facility or vehicle for the mobilization of resources in support of efforts of member countries was necessary. Therefore, it was emphasized that further discussions among member countries was required. To this end, it was agreed to recommend that the proposed Working Group on Water, under the coordination of the Chairman of the Group should explore the modalities for achieving this goal.

Agriculture and Rural Development

15. In their interventions, participants emphasized that human development is one of the important aspects in agricultural and rural development. It was recommended in this regard that collaboration among the G-15 countries could be done through training programmes to upgrade the knowledge and skills of the farmers and agricultural workers. Exchange of information among G-15 countries on effective extension services was considered imperative in order to transfer their research findings and new technologies to farmers. In research and development, it was stated that collaboration could be implemented through exchange of research findings, networking as well as participation in research programmes. It was acknowledged that many G-15 countries had a vast pool of best practices that others could draw upon for the benefit of their rural populations. Some member countries pledged their readiness to extend to other member countries their training facilities, despatch of technical experts and scientists as well as to implement joint research projects in rural and agricultural development.

16. The Meeting agreed to recommend the establishment of a G-15 Working Group on Rural and Agricultural Development and endorsed the offer made by the Islamic Republic of Iran to serve as the focal point for both Working Groups.

Water Council

17. Given the attention that water has received globally in recent years and the pivotal role it can play in future collaborations between member countries, it was agreed that the proposed Working Group on Water would meet, under the coordination of the Chairman of the Group,

on possible coordination in international fora such as the forthcoming 5th World Water Forum to be held in 2009 in Turkey.

Integrated Water Resources Management

18. There was general agreement that water resources should be managed in a holistic and integrated manner as laid out under the Dublin Principles and Rio Declaration. The Meeting reaffirmed the commitment of member countries to achieve the internationally agreed goals on Integrated Water Resources Management which were instrumental to attaining sustainable development goals as reiterated in several international fora such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the World Water Forum and in the World Water Assessment Report. In this regard, there were suggestions that the concept should be broadened to link the idea of development or sustainable development to IWRM. It was noted that there were no universal blueprints for IWRM because its implementation would of necessity take into account various national circumstances. Most of the member countries reported that they were in various stages of implementing IWRM and while the situation was different in the various countries, and there was no “one-size-fits-all” solution, there was general recognition that success stories and good experiences in some countries could provide examples of Best Management Practices for others. Many member countries expressed a willingness to share their experiences on IWRM, and a desire to learn from the experience of other member countries. In view of the fact that IWRM was a crosscutting and overarching concept, it was agreed that it could be discussed by the Working Groups already recommended.

19. The Meeting agreed that the present report should be submitted through the Personal Representatives of Heads of State and Government of the Group of Fifteen to the next Meeting of the Foreign Ministers for consideration and approval.

20. The participants expressed their gratitude to H. E. Mr. Fattah, Honourable Minister of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as President and staff of the Water Research Institute for the organization of the meeting and the warm hospitality extended during the period of their stay in Tehran. The participants also expressed their appreciation for the support and cooperation of other related organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
