

**An Opening Address at the  
Water Demand Management Forum**

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Minister, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I hope you will allow me first to thank Dr. Mahmoud Abu Zeid—and through him, the people and Government of Egypt—for their generous hospitality. Let me also salute some of IDRC's most valued partners in this Water Demand Management Forum: UNDP and its Resident representative in Egypt, Antonio Vigilante, who serves with distinction as President of the Forum Donors Group; the Government of Japan, and Ambassador Kazuyoshi Urabe; the International Fund for Agricultural Development and its Director for this region, Dr. Abdelmajid Slama; and the Government of Canada, represented in Cairo by Ambassador Michel de Salaberry.

Simply to cite these distinguished names is to make an important point about the Water Demand Management Forum. This is very much an enterprise of collaboration. It brings together policy-makers, researchers, and analysts in a new community of common purpose: improving the ways we use and conserve our scarce and precious reserves of fresh water. At its heart, this is an endeavour of cooperation, supported and encouraged in the North—but conceived, developed and conducted by people in the South.

In my own organization, the International Development Research Centre, we believe the Forum has proven itself as a productive and promising undertaking for at least two reasons.

First, substantively, the Forum addresses a shared and urgent problem critical to human survival—the sustainable use of scarce water.

Second, procedurally, the Forum has explored and tested innovative methods to make closer connections between knowledge, policy, and practical action. My colleagues at IDRC are especially impressed by the Forum's achievements in generating new and faster interactions between research knowledge and practical policy decisions.

The promise of informing better policy, and stronger implementation, looks particularly compelling in the areas we are examining this week: decentralisation, and participatory irrigation management. IDRC has supported research in these areas for 30 years and more. Much of that research has been done in this region, some of it only a few kilometres from here. And the results are convincing.

The results show that water demand management at the local level can be more cost-efficient, and more effective, than large-scale and centrally controlled alternatives. Local-level management can open decision-making to people and groups who are sometimes excluded from the resource decisions that affect their lives. And local-level management can inform decisions with local and traditional knowledge, in ways that improve efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.

It is important to highlight the fact that decentralization does not mean the de-responsibilization of governments. We must clarify the conditions and responsibilities of actors at all levels. We must also consider the cultural, political and socioeconomic contexts which influence the process greatly. Flexibility and responsiveness are essential and this is why we are talking about participatory irrigation management.

I emphasize that this is not merely wishful thinking. These are findings reported and replicated in many settings, in many parts of the world. We will be hearing presentations of new case studies today—cases that are instructive both in their successes and their setbacks. These experiences demonstrate that some of the most powerful and practical responses to water scarcity have emerged at the scale of households, farmers' fields, and city neighbourhoods.

The challenges of managing water demand efficiently, effectively and fairly are nowhere more difficult than here in the Middle East and North Africa. We all understand moreover, that many of the predicted effects of climate change are likely to intensify the region's difficulties. That is why the successes of your Forums are so significant, and so promising. As collaborators from different disciplines and different countries, you have already created a model for the world—a model of how to inform good governance with the best knowledge. In this context, I am especially happy to welcome the new contribution and participation of Turkey in the Forum's activities.

We have assembled in Cairo for the fourth and last scheduled Forum in this series of sessions that began last March. I know that you are together deliberating on the design for a new phase of your work. And I am pleased to say that IDRC stands ready to support the renewal and extension of your early successes. As always, this is your Forum—productive primarily because it directly addresses the particular problems of policy and operations that you face every day, in your own countries and communities.

At the same time, it must be said that your excellent results can reach far beyond your region. A great example of such partnership engagement, and I must underline their first participation to this Forum, is the Crimea Integration and Development Program, a partnership project of CIDA and UNDP-Ukraine. To mention another example: At IDRC, we are eager to promote the application of your approaches in water-scarce areas of sub-Saharan Africa. And on a global scale, your work will surely inform the Third World Water Forum next month in Kyoto. As our hosts in Kyoto, and as essential donor-partners in this Water Demand Management Forum, the people and Government of Japan deserve our enduring respect and gratitude.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have much to accomplish in these two days. As Forum participants, you have already established your leadership in exploring and applying the best practices of water demand management. It has been an honour for me to take some small part in your work,

and it is a pleasure to share your company.

Thank you.