

IWF Summary

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The UEA Water Security/The Irrigation and Water Forum conference "Water and the Green Economy" came to a successful close on Friday 8th November with an array of delegates taking part. Eleven talks covered projects from all over the world, presented by representatives from many different organisations. The day began with two keynote presentations from Jean-Paul Penrose (DFID) and Mohamed Ait Kadi (Chair, GWP Technical Committee).

A number of themes appeared throughout the conference. The necessity of economic activity for development coupled with acknowledgement that water security is a fluid and debatable issue formed an undercurrent throughout. Another theme was that change is happening now and we need to decide how to adapt whilst realising that there will be trade-offs. It was also evident that governance and political institutions are an important component of change. Finally, in most cases more evidence in the form of reliable data is required to make informed decisions on water-related development issues.

Jean-Paul Penrose of DFID laid the framework for the day, covering various issues DFID is debating surrounding the implementation and incorporation of the 'green economy' concept. He emphasised that for DFID, poverty reduction is vital. Consequently, the green economy must be proven as the best way to achieve this in order for it to become a primary approach to development, something which Jean-Paul advocated. Ensuing discussion focussed on the need for fundamental change in economic approaches to development with the incorporation of natural capital into assessments being vital for a green economy.

The second key-note address was delivered by Mohamed Ait Kadi. He covered the importance of governance and continually evolving institutions to meet the changing demands of the economy and environment, as well as the importance of science and technology in enabling increased efficiency and decreased demand. Dr Ait Kadi highlighted that water security and the green economy are inextricably linked and mutually enforcing, arguing that due to water's interlinked challenges with other resources, the water community has an opportunity to shape how other resources are managed in the future.

Jochen Frobrich of Alterra Wageningen gave a talk centred on incorporating green growth into the economy. He focused on the importance of looking at green growth as an opportunity for increasing net economic growth, looking at a farming situation in South Africa. Discussion considered the need to develop methods which are suitable for scaling-up.

Michael Gilmont (KCL) looked at the importance of discerning between green and blue water in considering agriculture's water use. Michael argued that the role of green water is often ignored in policy. His message focused on increasing efficiency, particularly in the use of green water and non-irrigated crops as well as seeking a 'politically sustainable' solution to food security challenges.

Phil Woodhouse (Manchester University) delved deeper into discussions over the value and price of water, highlighting that water's value is not always reflected in its price. He demonstrated that considering water from a river-basin perspective is limiting and concluded that we should move away from striving to manage water within its natural systems, arguing that it should be viewed as an economic commodity. Phil concluded that we should move away from striving to manage water within its natural systems, arguing that it should be viewed as an economic commodity.

Roger Calow (ODI) illustrated many of the themes discussed above through a case study of green economy implementation in Ethiopia. He noted the fast growth and success of Addis Ababa in incorporating these principles but highlighted challenges in the approach which have resulted in more rural populations missing out.

Following a lunch break where networking discussions continued, Mike Young (Adelaide and Harvard Universities) presented on water as an economic resource and noted the high potential of the market to resolve water security issues. Mike drew on the successful experience of Australia in developing a water permit system, where permits can be traded and managed through water accounts.

Aileen Anderson provided insight into South Africa's Water Allocation Reform Programme. She touched on the fact that social and environmental sustainability may not always be achievable together and looked at the importance of considering land and water transfer as interconnected.

A change of context followed with Jodie Whitehead from Severn Trent Water delivering a presentation on catchment management in the UK. She discussed the challenges of successful management, including the vital need to reduce metaldehyde (a slug pesticide) in agricultural run-off. The company has experienced success working with farmers on a voluntary basis to come up with solutions acceptable to farmers that helped meet water quality targets.

Jamie Skinner (IIED) considered the controversial role of large dams in the green economy. He suggested that we have come a long way in our knowledge and implementation strategies regarding this infrastructure, arguing that dams can play a positive role in future economic initiatives, but that their social and economic impacts must not be ignored. The limitations of dams being 'green' is also limited by their proportionally small contribution to global power-generation.

The final talk of the day was delivered by Bruce Lankford of UEA. He introduced the audience to his new book, "Resource Efficiency Complexity and the Commons: The Paracommons and Paradoxes of Natural Resource Losses, Wastes and Wastages." During his presentation Bruce discussed the need to consider who gains from improvements in efficiency. This led to a lively discussion on some of the finer points argued by Bruce and we will anxiously await the public response to his book.

Proceedings concluded with closing remarks from several speakers and discussions continued at an evening reception.