

# WATER SCARCITY IS A DANGER SIGN – TIME TO INNOVATE, AND FAST

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The experts from the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW), Global Water Partnership and CARICOM also called for water managers to build on their local innovations for climate resilience – and to get savvier about communicating solutions to policy-makers.

The event was an opportunity to learn about common problems and possible solutions across Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, based on a South-South learning project supported by CDKN.

## **Water resources under stress**

“Currently, 340 million Africans are without access to water so the challenge of freshwater access is already enormous, even without climate change,” said Sam Bickersteth, CDKN’s Chief Executive.

The IPCC finds that by the end of this century, it is “very likely” that northern Africa will receive less rainfall than it does now. The southwest section of southern Africa is also projected to become much drier by the century’s end. In west and east Africa, the future trends are more variable and are somewhat low in scientific confidence due to the lack of data for use in climate models (see CDKN’s *The IPCC Fifth Assessment Report: What’s in it for Africa?*)

In Central America, drought is now recurrent, threatening the wellbeing of the region’s 46 million people, said Patricia Ramirez, Secretary of the Comité Regional de Recursos *Hidráulicos* del Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana. And in the Caribbean’s 15 small island states, water scarcity already has consequences for agriculture. The Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre has developed a customised risk screening tool (CCORAL) to help water managers to reduce the climate-related risks of their decisions.

### **Marketing success**

“We must make the case to policy-makers for climate-resilient investments in the water sector,” said Mailka Mueller of Global Water Partnership, who led the learning project.

Khatim Kherraz of the Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel (SASS) described how he is working to conserve the fossil groundwater reserves of the Northwestern

Sahara Aquifer system which stretches across Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. SASS will come up with recommendations to manage the reserves more sustainably: as the groundwater is currently under assault from over-drilling and abstraction, and seawater intrusion as a result of climate change.

One of Dr Kherraz' strategies is to demonstrate wise water use at the local level, and turn these small successes into examples of development gains that politicians can grasp.

In Algeria, SASS has been working with local farmers to rehabilitate the *foggaras* – a system for capturing and distributing groundwater and channeling it towards oases. With the use of solar-powered irrigation pumps, the pilot project has restored the traditional oasis system, increasing crop yields and reducing water use.

To bring successes like these to the attention of key ministries, beyond the water ministries, “we need to be good marketeers,” said Dr Kherraz.

“Politicians react to [messages] like: water is going to cost more so people will leave their territories and go to the cities.”

What's more, added Dr Kherraz, the more detailed and precise the data, the better.

Boosting climate resilience in the water sector has a particularly good chance of success, concluded the expert speakers, because we already have suitable technologies. Not to mention, many of the stresses introduced by climate change are just compounding mismanagement of natural resources – which already have clear solutions. All it takes is political attention and adequate funding to deliver the right results.

Dr Uric Trotz, a senior advisor at the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, concluded: “We have enough knowledge about what we have to do in the water sector to deal with present day climate vulnerability.”

### **Attracting finance**

As well as using more compelling language for policy-makers, Dr Trotz said, water managers should also frame their climate resilience proposals in such a way as to qualify for climate finance. “We have leakage of 50-60% in water in the Caribbean region, and leakage could be identified as an adaptation action and we could attract climate finance to help us deal with the problem,” he said.

As the Caribbean example and the story of the Algerian *foggaras* shows, water managers are full of innovation. They just need to look outwards and broadcast the acute problems and imaginative solutions in the water sector more effectively to

policy-makers. That way, policy, funding and innovation could come together in a winning combination to help tackle the climate crisis.

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