

Speech of Mr Klaus Rudischhauser

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Event 13: Water, Energy, Food (The Nexus approach)

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome the opportunity to offer some opening remarks on such a timely and important topic and on one where I am delighted to say EU Member States and the European Commission are actively pursuing.

Before setting out those details I would first like to take this opportunity to complement the points made by Mr Cantini on the cutting edge nature of this concept and why the management of three major policies must increasingly be addressed together.

It is clear that we cannot speak of livelihoods and sustainable development if we do not address the most fundamental needs of human beings – water, food and energy. Access to all of these is essential before we can even start to think about more sophisticated concepts of sustainability and human development. Without them, we are not going to get very far in achieving any additional objectives that come afterwards.

The approach to international development cooperation therefore has to ensure that all of these elements are addressed in a more strategic and targeted manner. In the European Union, we already adopted such an approach with our 'Agenda for Change' in 2011. This reform allows us to concentrate on the poorest communities and to improve their access to land, food, water and energy without damaging effects on the environment and respond to the 2011/2012 EU Development Reportⁱ recommendation that the "EU ensures that a nexus-wide approach is consistently followed to avoid perverse outcomes and maximise opportunities."

Our approach to managing the growing demand for access to these resources has to take into account the need to avoid transgressing environmental limits or going beyond tipping points. Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that the impacts of land, energy and water scarcity are growing in scale and size. These problems must be tackled effectively in order to support the development of low income countries in more sustainable and long-term ways.

What is the nexus? Water uses energy, energy uses water, agriculture needs both. Modern society and our increasingly urban societies need all three. They all rely on infrastructure to manage water.

A nexus approach is therefore highly relevant in the development of multi-purpose hydraulic infrastructure, including dams, irrigation systems, water supplies and hydro-electric power. This is needed to reduce vulnerability to droughts, to manage floods better, and to improve access to water, food and electricity in a way that takes account of the needs of the river system itself.

The Nexus dialogue is therefore future-focused and requires water, energy and food sectors to engage in a deliberate dialogue and analysis of river basins, looking for solutions to optimise the inter-dependencies and support the equitable and sustainable allocation of natural resources while balancing environmental, social and economic issues.

The 'Water Energy and Food Security Nexus – Solutions for the Green Economy international conference' held in Bonn in 2011 organised by the German Federal Government as a specific German contribution to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development “Rio2012” along with Berlin 2013 international nexus conference were defining moments. The Bonn 2011 conference and its acclaimed research paper presented initial evidence on how a nexus approach could enhance water, energy and food security while Berlin 2013 discussed new ways of anchoring the water, energy and food security nexus in global, regional and national policies and the relevance of regional cross-sectorial dialogue processes led by regional organisations.

In the European Union, the foreign affairs ministers of the 28 Member States have subscribed to a common approach on water diplomacy, which stresses the need to have a comprehensive response to reconcile different uses of water resources. This covers drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, food production, industry and energy. The issues in each of these interconnected policy areas can only be addressed fully through a comprehensive approach.

It is encouraging that the nexus approach has become an important topic for discussion, not only in specialised circles dealing with water, energy and food, but also at the level of foreign policy and international development policies.

It is the view of EU Member States, the UN family and other donors and international organisations working on nexus dialogue who have begun to mentor regional organisations, stakeholders and country processes towards operationalisation of the Nexus perspective that regional organisations should be further supported and coordinated in their Nexus discussions to help strengthen policy-making and action plan outcomes.

As a result of these important achievements, Commissioner Mimica recently announced at the 7th World Water Forum held in the Republic of Korea from 12-17th April, that the European Commission, with the support of Germany and other EU Member States, is developing an EU-led Nexus Dialogue Programme to commence in 2016. The programme is designed to strengthen five regional policy dialogues to advance towards concrete outcomes. The five regions include: Africa, Latin America, Asia (Mekong Area), Central Asia and the Neighbourhood. As deliverables, we want to produce endorsed nexus action plans that will influence the design of strategic investments and reduce trade-offs.

This Nexus Programme will be integrated into the initiative on 'Sustainable Energy for All', which will provide the framework for coordinated action to promote the nexus perspective, with a focus on energy actors.

The programme will support regional policy recommendations and action plans, feasibility studies to prepare for future investments, pilot projects and the building up of teams of nexus experts from the participating countries and regions.

We look forward to working closely with Italy in this Nexus project and to reinforce the EU-Central Asia Platform for Water and Environment which receives particular Italian support and to which a Nexus element could be integrated.

At the international level, we need to ensure that the focus given by the Rio+20 Conference to water security and sustainable water management is followed up. We need a comprehensive concept of water, energy and food security as part of the post-2015 sustainable development goals. This is also the way to ensure that issues relating to agriculture, irrigation, climate change, flooding and droughts are handled in a comprehensive and coherent way.

I would like to make one final remark on the gender aspect of the water, energy and food security nexus, which is an important cross-cutting issue.

There is strong global awareness about the disproportionate impact on women and girls of the lack of sanitation and safe water. This is underlined by the fact that women and girls represent between 60% and 80% of the workforce in food production in most developing countries. This imbalance keeps girls out of school and limits the economic productivity of women. President Jean-Claude Juncker has made gender equality a priority for the European Commission and I am delighted that our initiative on the Nexus Programme will contribute towards this goal.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are committed to making progress on cross-sectoral collaboration on the water-energy-food nexus. I look forward to receiving the report of this event and channelling ideas and views back to colleagues.

Thank you

¹ http://www.erd-report.eu/erd/report_2011/