

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## Report

### **Third Consultation in the Arab Region to Prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade Beirut, 14 September 2021**

#### Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Third Consultation in the Arab Region to prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade virtually on 14 September 2021. The meeting discussed the collaborative workplan for Arab regional preparations leading to the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023.

Discussions identified upcoming events to showcase and gather inputs in support of the Water Action Decade in the region and build momentum. Participants agreed to summarize key insights emerging from sessions and events held in the context of the Arab Water Action Decade preparatory process in a 2-3 page brief based on template to be set, and consider outputs stemming from relevant publications to facilitate consolidation and harmonization of key regional messages to inform the Water Action Decade regional report.

It was also agreed to continue engaging in landmark global and regional events and consider existing regional instruments and mechanisms to identify and showcase progress made on water-related actions in the region and raise awareness for the Water Action Decade. Consensus was reached on a tentative date for the regional preparatory meeting to be held in May 2022.

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## **Introduction**

1. The “Third Consultation in the Arab Region to prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade” was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The meeting was convened virtually on 14 September 2021 from 16:00 to 17:00 pm Beirut time (GMT+2) using the Microsoft Teams platform.
2. This meeting followed up on the initial consultations convened in February and April 2021, with the purpose to coordinate on regional preparations leading to the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023 by discussing a collaborative roadmap for the Arab Region.
3. The meeting consisted of three sessions: Session 1 was the opening, Session II tackled global preparations and Arab regional roadmap, and Session III highlighted next steps. Section I of this meeting report highlights the main topics of discussion, while section II reviews the organization of work. The meeting documentation and background information is available at the following website: <https://www.unescwa.org/water-action-decade>.

## **I. Topics of discussions**

### **A. Opening**

4. ESCWA provided opening remarks highlighting that regional consultations are aimed to ensure that Arab priorities are reflected in the regional process that will culminate in the global review at the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade (WAD) in March 2023. Arab States and various regional organizations are demonstrating increasing interest in engaging more actively in the preparatory process, and are using the Water Action Decade platform to highlight regional, national, and basin-level concerns regarding water resources. Opening remarks were followed by an overview of the agenda and a tour de table.

### **B. Global Preparations and Arab Regional Roadmap**

5. UN-Water provided a briefing on global preparations for the Water Action Decade Midterm Comprehensive Review. In December 2020, the UNGA adopted Resolution [A/RES/75/212](#) which details the modalities of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review for the Implementation of the Water Action Decade to be convened in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023, coinciding with World Water Day. The Governments of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands will be co-hosts of the conference, whose three main objectives are a (1) greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives, (2) the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects, as well as (3) the cooperation and partnerships at all levels, in order to help achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets. The UN Secretary-General appointed Mr. Liu Zhenmin Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) as the Secretary-General of the Conference to serve as focal point within the Secretariat to support the organization of the conference. The latter shall include five interactive dialogues whose themes will be crucial to structure the Midterm Conference discussions outcomes. Proposals for themes will be prepared in a background note by the Secretary-General of the Conference, in consultation with Member States, with the support of UN-Water and relevant United Nations entities. UNDESA will coordinate inputs to the UN Secretary-General report to assess progress in the implementation of the first half of the Decade (with an envisioned format of 8,000 words). Moreover, the conference proceedings summary, to be prepared by the Conference SG, will serve as an outcome document that will feed into the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2023 during which the review of SDG6 is expected. As part of the preparatory process, the President of the General Assembly will host a one-day preparatory meeting in November 2022 at the UN Headquarters in New York to finalize the themes of the interactive dialogues and other outstanding organizational matters, ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders. The co-hosts have asked

UNDESA and UN-Water to prepare a set of proposed options for the themes of the interactive dialogues, to reach consensus by November 2022. The period from January-August 2022 will thus be dedicated to collecting inputs from outcomes of the various Water Action Decade preparatory process consultations, meetings and events to feed into the Midterm Review Conference, including the choice of options for the interactive dialogues' themes through a specified mechanism. A formal process will be put in place by UNDESA to collect inputs on proposed themes. In terms of the Arab region's contributions to the Midterm Conference, this period will thus be crucial as the region is encouraged to be actively involved and voice its priorities and concerns. On the other hand, the UN World Water Development Report 2023 coordinated by UNESCO will be launched at the Midterm Review Conference on World Water Day with a focus on partnerships. The inception meeting for the preparation of this report is currently ongoing.

6. This intervention was followed with an overview and update presentation on the regional roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade. ESCWA provided a brief background on the various global and regional mandates underlying the Decade. The WAD has been endorsed in the Arab region and demonstrated by resolutions and recommendations adopted by Arab States in intergovernmental and regional forums, including by the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources and regional consultations on water. United Nations System processes aimed at furthering regional-level collaboration in the five regions framing the work of the United Nations Secretariat also reference the Water Action Decade namely through the work of the UN System Regional Collaboration Platforms (RCPs) and the UN-Water Expert Group on Regional Level Coordination. The updated Arab Regional roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade was also presented. It is based on the global roadmap prepared by UN-Water that compiles global water-related events with relevance to the WAD up until March 2023, complemented by a regional set of activities and events stemming from collective inputs during Arab consultations. Upcoming regional events were highlighted. Lastly, a proposed preliminary outline for the Arab regional report to the WAD was presented for further discussion.

7. During the discussion, and in light of the different reporting mechanisms specific to the various events, participants raised the issue of setting a framework for collecting inputs from the different regional events to inform the regional preparatory process and report, as well as further feeding into the global report. It was suggested to agree on a standard structure for collecting all inputs. As discussed during the previous consultation meetings, short policy briefs (1-3 pages) would be prepared on key outcomes of each event. It was agreed to set up a template for such policy briefs to facilitate collecting inputs for the WAD, and examining all outcomes through a comparative matrix in order to facilitate producing a consolidated version of regional key messages. Finalization of the key messages from the regional would be conducted during the Arab regional preparatory meeting. Participants were then invited to share updates on planned activities and events as part of the regional preparatory process.

8. The Arab Water Council (AWC) provided details on the upcoming 5th Arab Water Forum (Dubai, 21-23 September 2021) whose themes fall in line with the issues related to the Water Action Decade and are the following: Arab water security, transboundary water cooperation and water for sustainable development. ESCWA will hold a session on "Accelerating Action on IWRM for Sustainable Development through the Water Action Decade" which will discuss progress in achieving IWRM in support of the Water Action Decade objectives and solicit inputs from participants to support the Arab regional preparatory process for the Midterm Review. Key findings and messages from the session will be used to inform regional contributions to the Midterm review conference. The forum will also comprise a variety of panel, scientific and cross-cutting sessions which will tackle all aspects of the above-mentioned themes, including one on Arab contributions to the World Water Forum. AWC also highlighted the rigorous reporting process of the forum with a set template for reporting on all sessions, to be presented on the last day of the meeting and conveyed to the World Water Forum.

9. The second event mentioned was Cairo Water Week 2021 in its fourth edition (Cairo, 24-28 October). In collaboration with ESCWA, FAO and UN-Water counterparts, the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation in Egypt are looking to conduct a full day session on the first day focused on the Water Action

Decade and water scarcity. This meeting is planned to host the Chair of UN-Water as an opening speaker to explicitly highlight this event as meeting within the WAD Arab preparatory process, and whose key outcomes would inform the Arab WAD preparatory meeting and regional report. Full details will be shared soon by Cairo Water Week organisers. As outlined by FAO, Cairo Water Week will also host the intergovernmental High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee, organised by the League of Arab States and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), in collaboration with FAO and ESCWA; as well as the Joint Water-Agriculture Ministerial Council which will be held virtually on the margin of Cairo Water Week and organized by the League of Arab States and FAO.

10. FAO also outlined the High-Level Meeting on Water Scarcity (17 November 2021) that will be organized along the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (14-18 November 2021) and will contribute to the WAD midterm review process. The event is a collaborative partnership with the Water Scarcity Initiative, UNICEF, ESCWA, ICRC, IWMI, and Oxfam and will include a high-level panel discussion with the presence of Arab ministers. The four themes to be discussed are the following: economic impacts of water scarcity, challenges and opportunities of non-conventional water resources, management of scarce water resources in chronic emergency contexts, and water scarcity and WASH community services.

11. The next event mentioned was the Water Sciences & Technology Association (WSTA) 14th Gulf Water Conference (Riyadh, 13-15 February 2022) hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in collaboration with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretariat General. The conference will be advocating for a paradigm shift in the management of water resources in the GCC countries to move from the current emphasis on supply sustainability approach to a consumption sustainability approach, with its core objectives of economic efficiency of water uses and financial sustainability of water services. The scientific nature of the conference was emphasized, with currently 65 submitted scientific papers under evaluation. Special sessions will be held on a variety of topics such as water sector financing, desalination, managed aquifer recharge, the impact of Covid-19 on water security, etc. and including specialized sessions related to climate change impacts on water resources in the GCC. The conference follows a set reporting process under which session conclusions are presented to the GCC Secretariat General and further official forwarded to ministers. It was agreed that outcomes from the conference will be summarized in a 1-3 pager key messages for the WAD preparatory process.

12. ESCWA then outlined the planned MENA Climate Week (Dubai, 2-3 March 2022) organized by UNFCCC and still in early stages of preparations. It will tentatively include the themes of climate mainstreaming, climate negotiations and climate investments. ESCWA provided information on the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) which is the primary regional mechanism for the follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The dates for the 2022 edition are still unclear yet, and regional commissions are seeking to decide whether to link this regional process to the WAD review process. AFSD's outcome formally delivers key messages of the region to the global High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held annually in July in New York. Preparatory meetings precede the AFSD, and the themes of environment and agriculture are likely to be addressed, which provides an avenue to highlight the Water Action Decade under those themes' water-related components.

13. The Groundwater Summit organized by International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC) and planned on 7-8 Dec 2022 in Paris was then mentioned. UNESCO has approached regional commissions to conduct regional preparations on groundwater to inform a joint regional session at the Summit. Given the importance of groundwater for the Arab region and the WAD, ESCWA called for interested organizations to support in informing this regional groundwater session. In this context, International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) MENA expressed its readiness to discuss it further, noting the regional IAH MENA meeting to be held soon, with a date to be confirmed. International Water Resources Association (IWRA) also expressed its interest in a regional contribution for the Summit, and also pointed out at its groundwater task force which could support the WAD process.

14. During the discussion, additional major events were mentioned for consideration that could fit WAD related side-events namely the Abu Dhabi Water Week to be held in January 2022 and the Arab Water Week organized by the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) to potentially take place in March 2022. In terms of youth-related events, International Water Management Institute (IWMI) pointed out at the upcoming IWMI-UNDP Egypt Accelerator Hackathon that will tackle water and food security as well as heatwaves impacts (21-26 November 2021). Two other events mentioned are the Regional dialogue on tackling bottleneck and challenges for WE4F Innovators in the MENA Region (March 2022) organized with various institutions and the Second Regional Policy Dialogue on Treated Wastewater safe reuse in the MENA Region (April 2022) in collaboration with AWC, LAS and FAO.

15. In addition, beyond focusing on regional events, it was emphasized to also target relevant publications during the regional WAD process. In this context, several pertinent reports are being issued and tackle important water-related components eventhough they do not solely focus on water resources. Examples to consider include the regional report on the [Attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) in Conflict-Affected Countries in the Arab Region](#) (2021), human development national reports, regional migration reports, etc. These publications comprise inputs with high relevance to the midterm comprehensive review, and thus need to be considered and streamlined into the regional WAD process.

### **C. Next Steps**

16. All participant institutions reiterated their commitment to the WAD preparatory process. In summary, the following was agreed, namely to:

- Continue engaging in regional landmark events and organizing sessions to raise awareness or present progress made on water during the WAD in the Arab region, which would lead and contribute to the regional preparatory meeting and report.
- ESCWA to prepare a 2-3 page template in the form of event summary briefs to capture key insights emerging from sessions and events held in the context of the Arab WAD preparatory process to facilitate consolidation and harmonization of key messages to inform the WAD regional report.
- In addition to events, consider outputs stemming from relevant publications that tackle water resources or water-related components at the regional level to inform the WAD regional report and regional preparatory meeting.
- Continue exchanging suggestions about other themes, milestones, stakeholders to engage, events, regional instruments and mechanisms that can showcase progress made on water-related actions in the region and raise awareness for the Water Action Decade, which would in turn inform the preparation of the regional report.
- In view of the upcoming regional events and feasts, schedule the Arab regional preparatory meeting on 18-19 May 2022 as tentative dates.
- Regularly update the Arab Roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade based on inputs from partners and encourage its use as a resource to inform on the Arab WAD preparatory process.

## **II. Organization of the meeting**

### **A. Date and venue**

17. The meeting was held virtually on 14 September 2021 from 16:00 to 17:00 pm Beirut time (GMT+2).

## **B. Documentation**

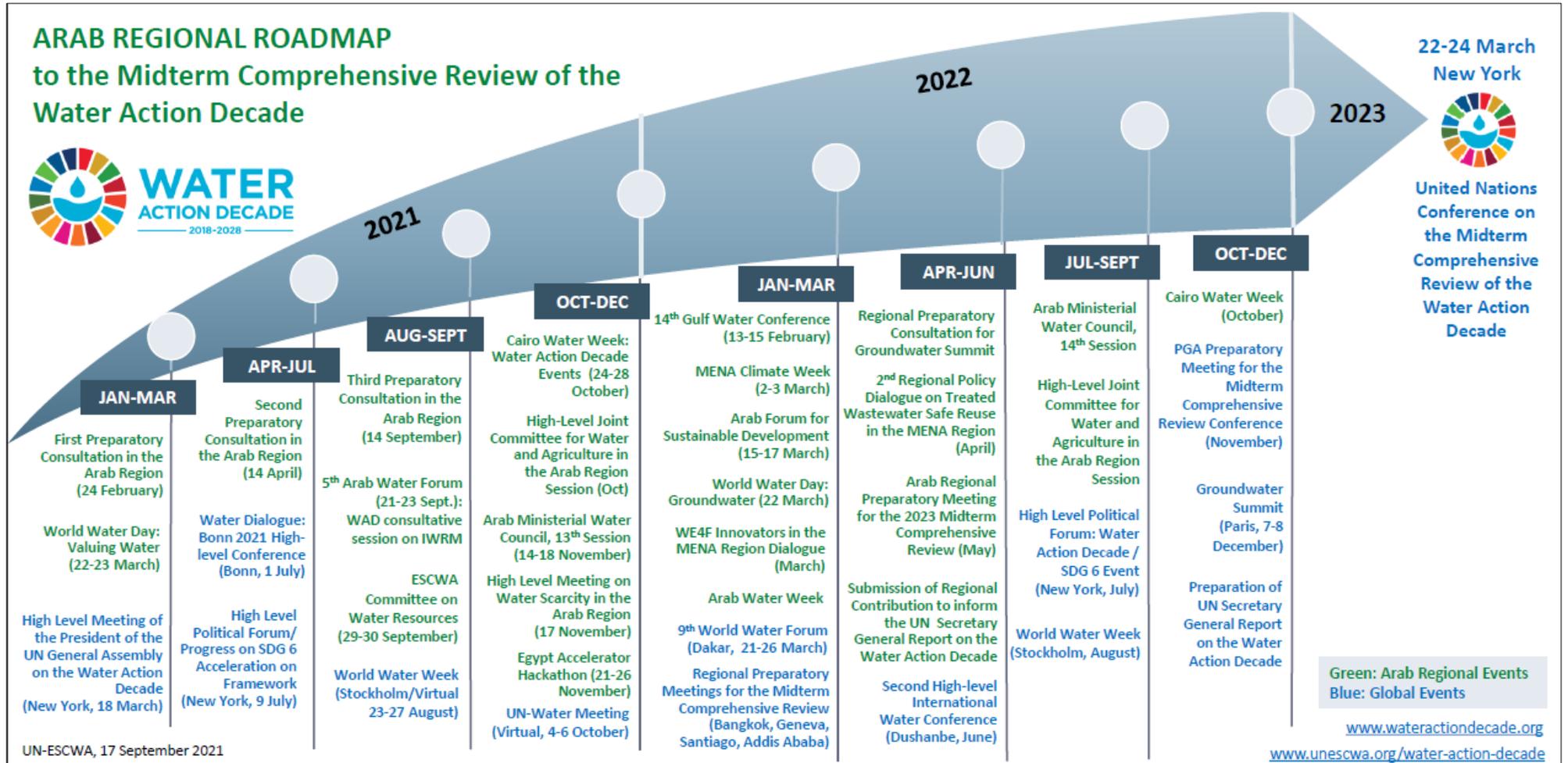
18. The meeting documentation is available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/water-action-decade>.

## **C. Participants**

19. This third consultative meeting gathered 14 participants and comprised the designated representatives of regional and international organizations, and United Nations organizations that serve in the Technical Scientific and Advisory Committee of the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the Regional Collaborative Platform/Issues-based Coalition (RCP-IBC) work pillar on Water, Food Security and Nutrition, and/or the UN-Water Regional Discussion Group for Arab States. The list of participants is provided in annex II.

## Annex I

### Arab regional Roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade (17 September 2021)



## Annex II

### List of Participants

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