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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Mashreq Waters Knowledge Series
Workshop on Economic Implications of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Mashreq Region
1-3 December 2020

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

The Mashreq is a water stressed region. More than half of current freshwater withdrawals exceed what is naturally available in some countries and total water productivity in the region is only about half the world's average. A significant share of available surface water in the region is transboundary in nature, with a majority used to support agricultural production.

Climate change is expected to impact water availability and water available for water-dependent sectors due to changing temperature and precipitation patterns, as well as extreme and unpredictable weather events. The region is expected to suffer economic losses from climate-related water scarcity, with flood and droughts increasing in frequency and likely to harm the poor and vulnerable groups. Climate change will also affect the agriculture productivity to varying degrees based on the projected regional climate scenarios. The freshwater scarcity situation in some countries of the region is also aggravated by other factors, such as high dependency on transboundary water resources and conflicts that affect the ability of people to access water and sanitation services.

The Mashreq Waters Knowledge Series was launched by the World Bank and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to foster discussion on opportunities and challenges for utilizing disruptive technologies and innovative tools for improved water resources management in the Mashreq region. The first workshop on Building Capacity for Accessing Disruptive Technologies for Improved Water Resources Management under Climate Change (January 2020)¹ focused on how regional knowledge platforms, joint scientific assessments and regional climate projections can provide a common knowledge base for strengthening water resources management in the Mashreq region. This second workshop in the series focuses on the Economic Implications of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Mashreq Region (December 2020) and expands the discussion to include consideration of economic and productivity assessment tools related to the agricultural sector.

Overcoming these regional challenges requires a clear understanding of the implications of climate change and water scarcity on socio-economic development in the Mashreq region. More specifically, it is important to quantify and qualify the implications of climate change on the agriculture sector, which is the largest consumer of fresh water in the region and suffers from low water use efficiency and productivity. Climate-sensitive economic models and agricultural analysis can provide useful insights on new ways to strengthen water resources management for improved water and food security in the region.

¹ ESCWA and World Bank, Meeting Report: Workshop on Accessing Disruptive Technologies for Improved Water Resources Management under Climate Change (Beirut, 14-15 January 2020), available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/disruptive-technologies-water-management-climate-change>

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The meeting aims to examine the implications of climate change and water scarcity on agricultural productivity and potential impacts on Mashreq region economies. The discussions will benefit from the findings of a World Bank report² that examines the extent to which water scarcity and losses in crop yields due to climate change could affect economies in the region.

Participants will also gain insights from work ESCWA has been supporting on regional climate modeling and agricultural productivity^{3,4}. Participants will be also informed of international financial flows for climate change adaptation in the region and will review different sources of funding, opportunities and challenges with regards to financing in transboundary water basins.

The meeting will allow professionals to also exchange experiences and best practices to support peer-to-peer learning and improve capacity in a range of areas, including water resources management under climate change, water efficiency and agriculture productivity, economic analysis on impacts of climate change on agriculture productivity, and financing climate change adaptation.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will gather senior officials and technical experts from government institutions responsible for water resources management in the Mashreq region from Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. This includes representatives from ministries and agencies responsible for water, agriculture and planning. Experts from the World Bank and United Nations organizations will support the meeting as well as resource persons from expert institutions.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting is organized by ESCWA with the support of the World Bank and will be held from 1 to 3 December 2020. The meeting will be conducted online. A dedicated web link will be provided to nominated participants and speakers prior to the meeting. The meeting is expected to begin at 14:00 and conclude by 18:00 Beirut time (GMT+2) each day. The online link will be open as of 13:30 each day to test audio and video connections. Arabic-English, Farsi-English and Turkish-English interpretation will be available during the meeting.

Nominated representatives will receive the final meeting agenda and draft list of participants prior to the meeting. All meeting documentation and presentations will be provided in the English language. Interpretation will be available during the meeting.

² “Taheripour, Farzad; Tyner, Wallace E.; Sajedinia, Ehsanreza; Aguiar, Angel; Chepeliev, Maksym; Corong, Erwin; de Lima, Cicero Z.; Haqiqi, Iman. 2020. Water in the Balance: The Economic Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Middle East. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34498>

³ Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR) Regional Knowledge Hub. <https://www.riccar.org/>.

⁴ ESCWA, Assessing the Impacts of Changing Water Availability on Agricultural Production in Selected Arab Countries. <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/national-assessment-reports>.

V. CORRESPONDENCE

Inquiries and completed registration forms should be submitted to the following meeting focal points:

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