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

Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues

for the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum

Beirut, 28-29 March 2018

## Outcome Document

The Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) and the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) was held on 28 and 29 March 2018 at the United Nations House in Beirut. The meeting was jointly organized by the League of Arab States, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the other members of the High-level Political Forum Working Group established at the ninth session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) on 6 July 2017. The Working Group is comprised of the League of Arab States, the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Water Council (AWC), the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), FAO, UN Environment and ESCWA.

The meeting was attended by member State representatives of the AMWC, in addition to senior representatives from national, regional and international institutions and civil society organizations engaged in water-related issues that affect Arab States. It consolidated regional views on water-related issues and priorities through the exchange of experiences on national efforts to achieve the water-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the dedicated water Goal 6; the discussion of a regional methodology for estimating the number of people facing water scarcity, as articulated in target 6.4, and conceptualizing water security; and dialogue among stakeholders on the water dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The meeting highlighted the importance of integrated water resources management (IWRM) for achieving SDG 6 and the other water-related and dependent SDGs. It also highlighted the importance of pursuing the 2030 Agenda in its entirety, as it advocates for a rights-based approach to water and sanitation and the pursuit of the SDGs in an indivisible, integrated and inclusive manner.

The meeting resulted in the following set of key messages to be conveyed to the AFSD (Beirut, 24-26 April 2017) and the tenth session of the AMWC (Kuwait, 2 May 2018), in view of informing Arab State preparations for the HLPF (New York, 9-18 July 2018).

### KEY MESSAGES

#### General messages

- Water security is necessary to ensure public health, food security, nutrition, education and rural livelihoods. Concerted efforts are needed to ensure sustainable water management and to reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity, especially among vulnerable groups. The provision of water and sanitation for all should not be politicised, must be protected during social unrest and violent conflict, and excluded from sanctions.

- Nexus approaches, complementing the application of IWRM, can enhance efforts to cope with water scarcity and move towards water security in the Arab region.
- Water security can be ensured by advancing action on regional priorities, namely efforts to cope with water scarcity; dependency on shared water resources; impact of climate change; and the need to ensure the provision of water services for all.
- There is a need to ensure water sustainability, availability, accessibility and affordability for all, based on the principle that access to water and sanitation is a human right. Furthermore, efforts are needed to ensure gender mainstreaming in water management strategies and policies.
- Advancing regional cooperation, national coherence and coordination across sectors, technology transfer, finance and investment, and capacity-building in the Arab region can support the achievement of the water-related SDGs.
- Policymakers can champion sustainable development by ensuring that strategic plans incorporate the water-related SDGs using appropriate water assessment tools, including water accounting.

## **Regional priorities**

Water security in the Arab region should be pursued at the household, community, subnational, national, regional and inter-State levels to ensure availability of and access to clean water and adequate sanitation for all through work on the following priorities.

### **1. Strengthening integrated water resources management to cope with water scarcity**

- Greater effort is needed to support demand management, efficiency, water resources monitoring, water conservation and the rationalization of water use and productivity. Increasing the use of non-conventional water resources, including the reuse of treated wastewater, and improving water quality, reducing water pollution and protecting ecosystems, can further support the achievement of sustainable and integrated water resources management.
- Improved water governance can support the management and protection of surface and groundwater resources, based on knowledge generated from water accounting, virtual water and water footprint assessments. Strengthening the implementation and adoption of legislation that regulate water resources and services contribute to this aim.

### **2. Enhancing cooperation on shared water resources**

- The historical water rights, access and existing uses of riparian countries sharing surface and/or groundwater resources should be protected and maintained based on the principles of international water law and rules, and in accordance with existing agreements which countries are party to.
- Achieving the SDGs requires ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, which deprives people from accessing and utilizing their water resources.
- Regional cooperation is needed to protect shared water resources and infrastructure during conflicts and sociopolitical unrests. Efforts are needed to ensure mutual benefits and collective measures to address challenges among riparian States sharing water resources, in accordance with international law and relevant bilateral, regional and international instruments which countries are party to.

- Cooperative frameworks in shared water basins can draw upon the principles of international water law and rules. Improving global and regional water conventions and agreements, as well as joint regulatory frameworks that govern shared water resources and water allocation, is key.
- Greater cooperation is needed in the generation and exchange of shared water-related information and data, including on shared surface and groundwater resources.

### **3. Water is a core component of climate change adaptation and natural disaster risk reduction**

- Climate change negatively affects water resource availability in the Arab region, exacerbates water scarcity and threatens water security. Financial resources and actions are needed to support climate change adaptation and mitigation through the lens of water scarcity.
- Increasing national and regional knowledge generation, management and exchange on climate change impacts, threats, vulnerability to extremes and slow-onset events is needed to pursue adaptive and innovative sustainable water resources management.
- Evidence-based national and regional adaptation plans support resilience-building, vulnerability reduction, disaster risk reduction and migration management, including efforts to overcome the impacts of droughts, floods and other extreme events and to develop early warning systems.
- Mainstreaming water resource issues in climate change negotiations, national climate change adaptation planning and development strategies is necessary.

### **4. Access to water services for all through improving water-related infrastructure**

- In the Arab region, it is estimated that 74 million people are without access to basic sanitation, 25 million practice open defecation, and 51 million are without drinking water services.
- Accelerated efforts should be undertaken to rebuild, upgrade and scale up water-related services and infrastructure to ensure that no one is left behind. Special efforts should be undertaken to reduce the equity gap at the national level, including disparities between urban and rural communities, the gender gap, and the ability of girls to access education.
- Rebuilding water installations damaged and destroyed due to conflict, occupation and aggressions should be given priority, as well as ensuring smooth entry of all parts and equipment needed for such.
- Expanding and upgrading safe water supply, safe sanitation and wastewater treatment services is necessary, as well as improving drinking water and sanitation safety management schemes. This includes ensuring that drinking water and sanitation services are sustainably managed in the light of financial and energy constraints.
- Improving national monitoring, reporting and data management systems contributes to achieving the SDGs.
- Funding initiatives targeting the quick repair of water and wastewater systems, including their operation and maintenance, is needed.

## **MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

Integrated water resources management can support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through the means and modalities outlined below.

## **1. Regional cooperation**

- Develop regional indicators, performance measures, standards and benchmarks, which take into consideration national specificities and harmonized methodologies, to foster regional dialogue on priority issues facing Arab States.
- Promote cooperative policy frameworks and platforms on shared water resources that respect the international water law and rules to foster a common understanding of shared water resources management and water scarcity; improve knowledge exchange, learning and partnerships; and enhance the capacity of Arab States to negotiate shared water treaties.
- Seek opportunities to benefit from knowledge exchange and cooperation with other regions in monitoring groundwater quantity and quality as part of the SDG indicator methodologies.
- Develop common mechanisms to enhance data monitoring and sharing.
- Foster the links between the transboundary water-energy-food security and climate change nexus and migration.
- Provide tools for mainstreaming SDG indicators and national monitoring systems.

## **2. National coherence and coordination across sectors through participatory approaches**

- Develop modalities for separation of duties between policymaking, service provision and regulatory functions.
- Adapt policies, regulations and strategies for service delivery models that ensure economies of scale.
- Promote high-level national coordination and dialogue among competing sectors and between water users of different sectors to prioritize water uses at the national level; this should be supported through the development of national databases.
- Strengthen the interlinkages that exist across the SDGs, and particularly those related to the water-energy-food nexus, climate change and employment.
- Mainstream water-related priorities in national development strategies and plans.
- Encourage participatory approaches to ensure relevant stakeholders' full engagement at all levels.
- Support scientific research and development and enhance links between the research programmes of linked sectors.
- Review policies and regulations related to water subsidies against sector sustainability, while ensuring safety nets for the rights of the poor.

## **3. Technology transfer**

- Develop appropriate technologies and innovative methods for water supply, desalination, and wastewater treatment that bring in social benefits for reuse, while developing other non-conventional water resources, such as water harvesting and artificial groundwater recharge.

- Develop and enhance use of new efficient agricultural and irrigation systems and techniques, including renewable energy applications, taking into consideration water availability and sustainability and minimizing water losses.
- Develop and strengthen national and regional knowledge hubs and exchange programmes for technology development, transfer and localization.
- Promote technology transfer on remote sensing and the use of smart information, communication and technology tools for water assessment and management, which should be pursued along with harnessing nanotechnologies and mathematical models that can support shared water resource assessments and the exchange of information.

#### **4. Financing and investment**

- Encourage funds, banks and potential donors to support the achievement of the water-related SDGs and targets in Arab countries, including investments in water supply and wastewater treatment.
- Develop cost recovery strategies for water supply and sanitation, taking into account affordability for the poor.
- Explore tools for estimating the cost dimensions of SDG implementation, while encouraging Arab States to advance water sector reforms to facilitate receipt of SDG-related financing.
- Promote the establishment of incentives programmes for implementing the ‘polluters pay’ principle.
- Promote financing for innovative regional initiatives to enhance shared basin cooperation.
- Develop and strengthen national legislation to support public-private investments.
- Use foreign direct investment to encourage the transfer of new technologies.

#### **5. Capacity development**

- Enhance institutional capacity to use and apply innovative instruments, such as water accounting, while building capacity to leverage funds.
- Develop the capacity of shared water basin commissions and governing bodies, while enhancing capacity in hydro-diplomacy, international water law, negotiations and conflict resolution.
- Encourage the adoption of standard international water balance structures and terminology.
- Raise awareness on water conservation, climate change and adaptation, sustainable water use and management, and sustainable consumption and production.
- Encourage capacity-building in the area of water integrity.
- Mainstream SDG indicators in national monitoring systems.
- Build capacity on surface and groundwater storage to support climate change adaptation.