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

**REPORT**

**“PROMOTING FOOD AND WATER SECURITY THROUGH COOPERATION AND  
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION” - SECOND COORDINATION  
MEETING**

**21-22 May 2015**

**F-500, UN ESCWA, Beirut, Lebanon**

**Summary**

The Second Coordination meeting of the project “Promoting Food and Water Security Through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region” was held in Beirut, Lebanon on 21-22 May 2015. Representatives of regional and international organizations and institutions as well as academia with expertise in the field of water, agriculture and climate change attended the meeting.

Participants built on the First Coordination meeting by discussing the modalities of the project and partnership and the four main expected accomplishments of the project in more detail.

The first project output focuses on capacity building to assess the impacts of climate change on water availability and its effect on agriculture in the region. The second output stresses the importance of enhanced capacity for intra-regional coordinated policy development on agriculture and water, while the third output aims at improving the quality of food production through the development of an Arab Good Agricultural Practices framework. The fourth component consists of capacity building for better monitoring and assessment to enhance clarity on the state of food security in the Arab countries, taking into account the transition into a new global development agenda with a specific goal on food security.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Second Coordination Meeting of the Project “Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region” on 21-22 May 2015 at UN ESCWA in Beirut. The Second Coordination Meeting allowed the project partners to deepen their understanding of the project, discuss details of cooperation and discuss their involvement in each of the outputs of this four-year project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
2. The main objectives of the Second Coordination meeting are set forth below:
  - a) Discussing the partnership modalities of the project with prospective partners;
  - b) Discussing the detailed activities and characteristics of the project;

The agenda and participant list of the First Coordination Meeting are provided below in the Annexes.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. The Second Coordination Meeting discussed the details of substantive contributions of the project partners and fine-tuned the activities.
4. Adjustments to the detailed activities of the outputs of the project were also made, with an aim to maximize the added value to the stakeholders and beneficiaries of the project, represented by regional and national water and agricultural institutions,
5. The meeting discussed the modalities of cooperation for implementing the project activities, especially formalizing agreements that allow for the transfer of project funds to the implementing partners. The meeting concluded with the need to limit the number of agreements and/or MoUs to a minimum. It was tentatively agreed to have two agreements:
  - The first with FAO on implementing activities of the first output, which due to the nature and structure of the activities, would need to include financial allocations to both FAO and ACSAD, where a subsequent letter of agreement between them will allow the transfer of funds from FAO to ACSAD.
  - The second agreement is with AOAD and will include some activities on outputs 2, 3, and 4. Consultations with FAO and AOAD are ongoing to finalize the costing of the different activities and is expected to finalize the agreements within the coming few weeks.
6. The outcomes of the two coordination meetings were presented in the 12th meeting of the Technical Scientific Advisory Committee of the AMWC held on 24-26 May 2015.

## **II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. Introduction and presentation of project**

7. Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of the Food and Environment Policies Section at the Sustainable Development Policies Division, ESCWA, opened and moderated the meeting. Ms Nejdawi started by providing a short overview of the recent Arab Sustainable Development Forum Summit that took place during 4-7 May 2015 in Manama, Bahrain. She presented the main aspects contained in the Bahrain Document, the outcome document of the Forum.

8. Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi, FEPS-SDPD, ESCWA thanked the participants for attending the meeting and highlighted that all major players on water and food at the Arab regional level with direct relevance for the project objectives were present at the meeting. He further presented the detailed activities and tasks under the first component, focusing on enhanced capacity to assess the impacts of water variability on agriculture production.

9. LAS proposed that other partners like AOAD could contribute to the selection of countries and crops to be assessed. AOAD holds the mandate for the food security program and has already identified a list of priority crops for the region. AOAD, although not directly included in this component have selected 13 strategic crops and have identified the countries that are included in the Emergency Arab Food Security Program.

10. Participants discussed the content and timing of the handbooks and manual under component 1, activity 5. The data requirement handbook and manuals will provide national authorities with information on what data is needed, rather than data itself. The national authorities then decide whether the data is available. It was recommended to involve the statistical departments of governments at an early stage, to enable them to plan ahead. In addition, the training manuals should be tested and validated, and the work on the manuals could start early on in the project, to allow countries more time for collecting the data.

11. The time available for training for the national teams and the follow-up and backstopping period should be increased. The main activities are contained in the modeling efforts; therefore the national teams should be given 1 year (2017) for the national teams to apply the modeling tool with national data. Therefore, the training of national teams could start in August 2016. Different geographical foci may be needed.

12. Each participating country will have 2 national training sessions, as follows: a 5-day training to provide participants with the scientific background, and another 5-day training session during the backstopping period. FAO and ACSAD, who are in charge of these activities, will restructure the tasks accordingly.

13. Official recognition from Ministerial Councils for the project - while not an absolute necessity - provides the project with more credibility, and will require countries to nominate a focal point within their Ministries. Participants noted that the Arab Ministerial Water Council and the General Assembly of Arab Ministers for Agriculture are meeting in April. To speed up the process, AOAD could also include the project in its resolution and request that the project is validated by ECOSOC, which has power over the Ministerial Councils. During their meeting in September, the chair of ECOSOC can request the Arab Ministerial Councils to establish the national teams.

#### **B. Component (II) of the project: Enhanced capacity for intra-regional coordinated policy-development on agricultural and water in the Arab region**

14. The discussions on component two of the project focused around the need for enhanced coordination mechanism between the food/agriculture and water sectors at the broader regional level.. Several activities in this component will be developed with the support of a consultant, who will produce a mapping of existing water and agricultural institutional set up at the Arab regional level, an assessment of the current coordination mechanism and a proposal for how to enhance this mechanism.

15. Participants recognized the progress made on introducing the concept of the Water-Energy-Food Nexus in the region. Although application of the concept has not started as of yet, it is increasingly mentioned in publications. This project can be a manifestation of how the nexus could be implemented and will demonstrate the interdependency of different sectors, such as environmental and health. The Nexus idea encompasses that experts and policy-makers from different sectors work jointly for

sustainable development. The consultant should propose an institutional mechanism based on this understanding.

16. The role of the countries in providing information about the functioning of their institution is crucial in this component. However, the purpose of the consultancy is to look at who is mandated for which tasks at the regional level rather than assessing the situation of each member country. The mapping should result in a comprehensive picture of all regional bodies working on the issue of water and food.

17. The project will establish a coordination mechanism at regional level, which should trickle down to the national level. Participants proposed that once a proposal for a coordination mechanism has been presented by the consultant (activity 3 and 4 under component 2) the proposal should be discussed at a meeting with the project partners and then discussed with expert groups nominated by each member country. The involvement of country representatives is important, since the countries will be involved in the implementation of the coordination mechanism.

18. The role of regional organizations is to participate with the project partners/mandated organizations to develop/enhance the current coordination mechanisms and approaches. Best practice examples of coordination efforts at the national level will inform the development of the regional level coordination mechanism.

### **C. Component (III) of the project: Enhanced capacity for efficient food production in the Arab region**

19. Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) aim at safe and sustainable agricultural production at a global and local level, improving food safety, management improvements on farms, opening new markets and increasing transparency. GAPs are voluntary standards that certify products to improve the quality of food, and regional and international trade.

20. Countries in the Arab region are aware of GAP and some have adopted GAP principles. AOAD has drafted a proposal for an ArabGAP, which needs to be discussed in more detail. In addition, AOAD has provided trainings and training of trainers, as well as commissioned a study that will be published in October on GAP. GAPs initiatives in the Arab region include the development of GAPs for aquaculture in Saudi Arabia, a certification entity (Blue Moon) in Egypt, and the provision of advisory services in Lebanon.

21. Given that AOAD has already developed initial guidelines for an ArabGAP, the planned activities 1 (consultation with focal points to determine overall scope for the GAPs) and 3 (Draft an ArabGAP framework based on consultations and taking into account existing GAP frameworks) will be joined and a review of the ArabGAP proposal by AOAD will be carried out. Once an agreed upon approach is found for the ArabGAP, it should be presented during a high-level meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Agriculture for adoption. Following adoption, the ArabGAP would be disseminated and applied at country level, accompanied by awareness raising and training materials.

22. Existing GAPs in other countries / regions provide can be differentiated between private and public systems. For instance the ASEAN Gap went through a public system, with national Ministries providing overall management and monitoring while GlobalGAP is fully a private/civil society entity. Even if a private GAP is envisaged, the project will work with the public sector and governments to establish policies that will support the farmers while improving food safety. The voluntary nature of GAPs brings certain risks with it, as it might be costly and may ultimately benefit larger producers, while hindering access to markets for poor farmers that cannot afford the GAP. Therefore bundlers should also be targeted, to ensure that the GAP does not only cater to the largest farmers only.

23. The existing GAP guidelines need to be adapted to the local context, since replicating GAPs from other contexts would not be suitable. To start with, a less ambitious GAP is an option.

24. Further research is needed in order to pursue policies responding to the needs of farmers and consumers. In order to be aware of the needs of the target group of the project, the task force should include farmers, retailers, consumers and government officials.

25. Concerns were raised that working with the government would politicize the work and that an independent body is needed for certification. The certifiers should be trained by an international entity. Another concern related to the disparities of food quality standards between countries in the region. For instance Saudi Arabia may not be willing to accept products from countries that adopt a lower standard GAP.

26. The main partners that can support with the further definition of the work on the GAP and the task force should be FAO (with long standing experience on GAP), AOAD (working on a programme of food safety measures) and potentially UNIDO.

#### **D. Component (IV) of the project: Enhanced assessment and monitoring capacity for food security**

27. The question of indicators to assess and monitor the status of food security was discussed. The Arab Sustainable Development Report used 51 indicators, merging the MDG indicators and additional indicators. With the advent of the SDGs the number of indicators is going to increase many of which are new and data collected for them does not yet exist. It was agreed that there is a need to define food security more clearly and focus and prioritize the indicators that are relevant to the specificities of the Arab region.

28. Following the recognition of the need to enhance/update the current monitoring system, a consultant would work to develop a monitoring system for food security in the Arab region. The monitoring system will need to be approved by AOAD. The approval of the template with the indicators for the monitoring system will constitute a requirement for countries to report on all selected indicators, which will be reflected on subsequent regional progress reports on food security in the region.

29. AOAD, according to a resolution by ECOSOC, is mandated to submit an annual report on the status of food security in the Arab region. A monitoring system for food security is therefore not new and this should be reflected in the activities of the component to specify the enhancement / improvement of the existing monitoring system. The additional aspect about this enhanced monitoring system is the fact that it will account for the global development of the SDGs, where food security has been recognized as one of the main development challenges, in which the progress in achieving food security will be monitored through specific targets and indicators.

30. The statistics on food security were often questioned by countries. Therefore the LAS summit certified that the LAS statistical division will act as the certified source of data for the region.

#### **E. Modalities of cooperation**

31. The cooperation modalities will be specified in inter-agency or funding agreements.

32. Modalities for budgeting include basing the budget on the time needed from the partners, according to their estimates of work requirements. The contracting of consultants and advisors can be done through UN ESCWA. Also, ESCWA will be responsible for organizing most meetings envisaged in the project work plan. Therefore UN ESCWA will cover the travel of the participants and representatives of partner organizations in the project related meetings. As per the internal administrative rules, ESCWA is not able to include a separate overhead item in the funding or inter-agency agreements..

33. Agreements with the different partners are dependent on the nature of the component. The number of agreements will be kept to a minimum. They will likely have the following characteristics:

- A UN agency to UN agency contribution agreement with FAO will detail the implementation of a set of activities of the first output, which due to the nature and structure of the activities, would need to include financial allocations to both FAO and ACSAD, where a subsequent letter of agreement between them will allow the transfer of funds from FAO to ACSAD.
- The second is a funding agreement with AOAD and will include some activities on outputs 2, 3, and 4. Consultations with FAO and AOAD are ongoing to finalize the costing of the different activities and is expected to finalize the agreements within the coming few weeks.

34. Partners will be required to report regularly on the use of project funds as per the provisions of the agreements.

35. The next steps will consist of finalizing the agreements with partners and the initiation of transfer of funds and start of implementation. This will be discussed with each lead partner of the project outputs separately, including with the management, finance and administrative sections. The funding agreements are expected to be signed between ESCWA and FAO and between ESCWA and AOAD within the third quarter of 2015.

### **III. ORGANISATION OF WORK**

#### **A. VENUE AND DATE**

F. The Second Coordination Meeting was held at the UN House, Beirut, Lebanon on 21-22 May 2015.

#### **B. AGENDA**

G. The agenda of the meeting is included as Annex II below.

#### **C. PARTICIPANTS**

H. The meeting was attended by 13 invited experts from the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (FAO), the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the American University of Beirut (AUB) together with 7 ESCWA staff members. The list of participants is included as Annex I.

## Annex I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### Invited Project Partners

Wadid Erian  
Senior Advisor Climate Change  
Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction  
The League of Arab States (LAS)  
Egypt  
[wadiderian@gmail.com](mailto:wadiderian@gmail.com)  
[wadiderian@yahoo.com](mailto:wadiderian@yahoo.com)

Elhag Attia Elhabib  
Director of Arab Centre for Studies and Consultancies  
Arab Organization for Agricultural Development  
(AOAD)  
Sudan  
[alhajattia1960@gmail.com](mailto:alhajattia1960@gmail.com)

Faycel Chenini  
Chief Technical Adviser  
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)  
Egypt  
[Faycel.Chenini@fao.org](mailto:Faycel.Chenini@fao.org)

Khalil Abu Afifeh  
Arab Organization for Agricultural Development  
(AOAD)  
Sudan  
[khalilabuafifa@gmail.com](mailto:khalilabuafifa@gmail.com)

Fawzi Fakhri Ratib Karajeh  
Senior Water Resources and Irrigation  
Officer  
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)  
Egypt  
[Fawzi.Karajeh@fao.org](mailto:Fawzi.Karajeh@fao.org)

Wael Seif  
Director of Water Resources Department, The Arab  
Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands,  
Syria (ACSAD)  
Syria  
[wael.seif@gmail.com](mailto:wael.seif@gmail.com)

Shahira Wahbi  
Chief, Sustainable Development and  
International Cooperation  
The League of Arab States (LAS)  
Egypt  
[shuhryar@yahoo.com](mailto:shuhryar@yahoo.com)

Ihab Jnad  
Head of Water Development Program, The Arab Center  
for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, Syria  
(ACSAD)  
Syria  
[ihjnad@yahoo.com](mailto:ihjnad@yahoo.com)

Hammou Laamrani  
Advisor  
The League of Arab States (LAS)  
Egypt  
[hammou.laamrani@giz.de](mailto:hammou.laamrani@giz.de)

Abdullah Al Droubi  
Regional Advisor, Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)  
Syria  
[abdulah.droubi@gmail.com](mailto:abdulah.droubi@gmail.com)

Atef Swelam  
The International Center for Agriculture  
Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)  
Egypt  
[A.Swelam@cgiar.org](mailto:A.Swelam@cgiar.org)

Rachel Anne Bahn  
Instructor of Agribusiness, Director, Food Security  
Program, American University of Beirut (AUB)  
Lebanon  
[rb89@aub.edu.lb](mailto:rb89@aub.edu.lb)  
[rachel.bahn@aub.edu.lb](mailto:rachel.bahn@aub.edu.lb)

Charles Kleinermann  
Head – Capacity Development Unit  
International Center for Agricultural  
Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)  
Jordan  
[C.kleinermann@cgiar.org](mailto:C.kleinermann@cgiar.org)  
ass: [L.El-Fattal@cgiar.org](mailto:L.El-Fattal@cgiar.org)

## ESCWA

PO BOX 11-8575 Riad El Solh, Beirut  
Lebanon  
Tel: +9611981301  
Fax: +9611981510-2

Reem Nejdawi  
Chief, Food and Environmental Policies  
Section FEPS, SDPD  
[nejdawi@un.org](mailto:nejdawi@un.org)

Fidele Byiringiro  
First Economic Affairs Officer, FEPS, SDPD  
[byiringiro@un.org](mailto:byiringiro@un.org)

Mohammad Al-Hamdi  
Economic Affairs Officer, FEPS, SDPD  
[al-hamdi@un.org](mailto:al-hamdi@un.org)

Johanna von Toggenburg  
Associate Expert, FEPS, SDPD  
[vontoggenburg@un.org](mailto:vontoggenburg@un.org)

Jana El Baba  
Research Assistant, FEPS, SDPD  
[baba@un.org](mailto:baba@un.org)

### Annex II: AGENDA OF THE MEETING

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**  
*Second Coordination Meeting of the Project*  
**“Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity  
Development in the Arab Region”**  
UN House, Room f-500, Riad El-Solh Square, Beirut, 21–22 May 2015

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*Day 1: Thursday, 21 May 2015*

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8:30 – 9:00	<b>Registration</b>
9:00 –9:15	<b>Opening</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ms. Roula Madjalani, Director, Sustainable Development Policies Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Lebanon</li></ul> Tour de Table <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Organization of work and review of the Agenda <i>Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Food and Environment Policies Section, Sustainable Development Policies Division, ESCWA</i></li></ul> Discussion
9:15 – 11:00	<b>Session 1: Component (I) of the project: Strengthened capacity to assess impacts of changing water availability on agricultural production in the Arab countries</b>

- Proposed activities of component (I) of the project  
*Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi, FEPS-SDPD, ESCWA*  
Discussion
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:15 – 13:00 **Session 2: Component (II) of the project:  
Enhanced capacity for intra-regional coordinated policy development  
on agriculture and water in the Arab region**
- Existing institutional structures of water and agriculture sectors at the regional level and the prospects for integrated policy development.  
*Mr. Hammou Laamrani, LAS*
  - Proposed activities of component (II) of the project  
*Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi, FEPS-SDPD, ESCWA*  
Discussion
- 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch Break
- 14:00 – 15:45 **Session 4: Component (III) of the project:  
Enhanced capacity for efficient food production in the Arab region**
- GAP related initiatives in the Arab region  
AOAD (tbc)
  - Proposed activities of component (III) of the project  
*Mr. Fidele Byiringiro, FEPS-SDPD, ESCWA*  
Discussion
- 15:45–17:30 **Session 4: Component (IV) of the project:  
Enhanced assessment capacity of the status of food security in the  
Arab countries**
- Proposed activities of component (IV) of the project  
*Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi, FEPS-SDPD, ESCWA*  
Discussion

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***Day (2) Friday, 22 May 2015***

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- 9:00 – 12:00 Modalities of partnerships for project implementation  
*Discussion moderated by Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief FEPS, SDPD, ESCWA*
- 12:00 Closing  
*Reem Nejdawi, Chief FEPS, SDPD, ESCWA*