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Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Symposium on Women and Water Security for Peacebuilding in the Arab Region
Beirut, 9-10 May 2018

Information note

1. Background

Numerous international frameworks clarify the connection between women, water insecurity and, more recently, conflict. Women are the primary users and managers of household water, and therefore have a major stake in water matters and must be involved in decisions about water issues.

In 2016, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) recognized that women and girls are disproportionately affected by inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and urged governments “to improve water management and wastewater treatment with the active participation of women and to provide universal and equitable access for all to safe and affordable drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene, in particular in schools, public facilities and buildings, paying special attention to the specific needs of all.” The Commission also expressed concern over the challenges faced by women and girls who are “disproportionately impacted by man-made disasters and conflicts.” The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly recognizes these intersecting interests when reviewing the targets embedded under in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG5 (gender equality), SDG6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG11 (human settlements), and SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

The Arab region is the most water-scarce region in the world, and this condition affects the ability to access to basic water and sanitation services needed to ensure water security at the household, national and regional levels, as well as the water resources needed to support rural livelihoods. The Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) SDG baseline for 2015 reports that 13% (51 million) of the population in the Arab region lack access to basic drinking water services, while 19% (74 million) lack access to basic sanitation services. The number of people lacking access to these basic services was most concentrated in Sudan, Yemen and Somalia. Damage, destruction and the deterioration of water-related infrastructure has worsened in parts of the region since 2015 due to armed conflicts, civil crises and occupation. This has complicated efforts to ensure access to water services and resources under water scarce conditions.

Women in the Arab region are deeply impacted by the intersection of water security and conflict. Deeply entrenched discriminatory practices, exacerbated by conflict and water scarcity, may make it difficult for women and girls to assert decision-making power with respect to water security at the household, community, country or inter-state levels. This is especially true for displaced and refugee female heads of households who are often exposed to harassment, intimidation, and violence when seeking to access basic WASH services in informal settlements, and for women and girls seeking to fetch water in areas underserved by water services due to poverty and conflict. Women working in agriculture under conflict conditions also face hardship in securing the water resources needed to ensure water and food security of their families. Additionally, Arab countries rank among the weakest performers in the Environment and Gender Index.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of the Symposium is to review and advance the emerging water security gender nexus in the Arab region in the context of current geopolitical considerations. Systematically addressing persistent gender gap in the response to gender, water security and peace is one of the most effective mechanisms for building resilience. Achieving this resilience also requires that serious considerations be given to monitoring and assessment of gender responsive data, indicators, monitoring, follow-up, and implementation. The symposium therefore aims to strengthen the national capacities of the Arab region to integrate water security and gender approaches in their national plans and strategies.

The specific objective of the activity is to enhance the capacity of governmental and non-governmental practitioners from the region, to formulate and implement strategies, policies, frameworks and programs in support of SDG3, SDG5, SDG6 and SDG16. Within the context of the implementation of the above-mentioned SDGs the Symposium will help achieve the following policy-relevant outcomes:

- Develop ways in which women can be recognized as agents of change; this will include approaches that can help surpass stereotypes of women's role in water security, especially women refugees, and women head of households, and help bring about true behavioural and policy changes.
- Formulate actionable recommendations for mainstreaming gender in policy planning and implementation of water policies at the community level including refugee communities.
- Community mobilization, with an aim to achieving positive health outcomes through improved knowledge and implementation of better hygiene practices.
- Modelling inclusion of women to serve as interlocutors in times of conflicts and in enhancing conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

The Symposium will undertake an evidence-based assessment of country experiences (Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) in integrating women and water security programs, by sharing lessons learned and good practices with the intent of improving women's access to WASH, and eventually contributing to peacebuilding and sustainable development.

3. Agenda

The agenda will foster discussion and the sharing of experiences and lessons learned on the challenges impacting women as they pursue water security under conditions of conflict or in post-conflict situations, and how women can contribute to peacebuilding in this area. A series of national case studies on women and water security in the Arab region will inform the discussions.

Breaks for coffee and lunch will be arranged during the two-day meeting. The draft agenda and a background paper on "Women and water security in the Arab region - issues in conflict and post-conflict conditions" will be circulated to registered participants two weeks prior to the Symposium to inform the discussions.

4. Participants

Representatives of Arab member States are invited to participate in the meeting, as well as senior representatives from relevant international, regional and national organizations, including civil society institutions and experts engaged in gender and water security challenges affecting women and girls in Arab States.

5. Partnerships

The symposium is organized by the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) at United Nations Headquarters in New York, in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission

for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon and the Pacific Water Research Centre of Simon Frazier University in Vancouver, Canada.

6. Date and venue

The symposium will be held from 9 to 10 May 2018 at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon. Registration will commence on Wednesday, 9 May 2018 at 9:00 am. The meeting will conclude by 5:00 pm on Thursday, 10 May 2018. Pedestrian access to the United Nations House (the ESCWA Secretariat) is located through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden one block from Riad Al-Solh Square.

Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification on the first day of the meeting and to allow sufficient time to pass through security to collect their identification badge. Access to the United Nations House is provided through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance.

7. Language of the session

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation from and into Arabic and English will be provided.

8. Registration

Invited participants are kindly asked to submit their completed meeting registration form to DESA by Monday, 23 April 2018. A colour, scanned passport-like photograph should be submitted with the registration form to allow for issuance of an identification badge to access the United Nations House in Beirut.

A limited budget is available for the sponsorship of speakers and invited participants. Sponsorship includes roundtrip travel to Beirut, a daily subsistence allowance to cover hotel, meals and incidental expenses for up to three nights, and a terminal allowance to facilitate ground transportation to and from the airport. Roundtrip tickets will be issued in economy class on the least expensive route, in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations. Requests for sponsorship must be received by DESA no later than Monday, 9 April 2018 to be eligible for consideration. Requests for sponsorship must be indicated on the registration form and include a copy of the national passport. Except in exceptional cases, participants approved for sponsorship will be asked to complete a bank details form to allow for the electronic transfer of their sponsorship entitlements following the meeting.

9. Accommodation and transportation

The Markazia Suites hotel (www.markaziasuites.com) is located two blocks (five-minute walk) from the United Nations House and offers preferential room rates to ESCWA meeting participants. The single room rate is US\$ 106/night and the double room rate is US\$ 128/night, inclusive of breakfast, internet access and all taxes. Airport pick-up can be arranged with the hotel management for US\$ 24 per car. A listing of other suggested hotels can be provided upon request. Participants are encouraged to arrange for airport pick-up through their hotel.

10. Local information

The Lebanese Pound (LBP) is the currency of Lebanon. The LBP to United States Dollar (USD) exchange rate is 1 USD = 1519.60 LBP. The currency symbol is ل.ل. . United States Dollars and Lebanese Pounds are used interchangeably in the local market at a 1 USD to 1500 LBP exchange rate. Credit card facilities are generally limited to hotels, restaurants and larger vendors.

The average temperature in Beirut in May is warm at 20.7 °C (69.26 °F). Afternoons can be fairly hot with [average high temperatures](#) reaching 25 °C (77 °F). [Overnight temperatures](#) are generally mild with an

average low of 17 °C (62.6 °F). The average daily temperature variation in May is 8 °C (14.4 °F). The weather in May is generally dry with infrequent [rain](#).

Health requirements: Organizers shall not be responsible for health insurance coverage and participants must have adequate insurance to cover any medical services required.

11. Entry visas

Participants are requested to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary. To facilitate the issuance of a visa, a copy of the invitation of the co-organizers should be attached to the visa request. Participants are advised to initiate their visa application at their earliest convenience to allow sufficient time for the processing of visa requests.

ESCWA can coordinate with the Government of Lebanon to assist in obtaining entry visas for participants who are unable to secure visas in their place of residence. Those who need assistance in this matter should send their contact information and a colour, scanned copy of their national passport containing all relevant information to Mr. El Hadi Radwan at the ESCWA secretariat (radwan@un.org) no later than Monday, 9 April 2018.

12. Correspondence

Inquiries and completed registration forms should be submitted to the following officials:

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