



UNITED NATIONS

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ESCWA

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

# Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region

## Objectives

The goal of the project is to strengthen **food and water security in the Arab region** through improved and coordinated policy design, strategy development and programme implementation. This will require a wider national and regional knowledge base, capacity-building and greater regional cooperation.

The project will involve improving assessments of the impact on agricultural production of changing water availability associated with climate change; enhancing the institutional set-up for greater intergovernmental coordination in the water and food sectors; developing a unified regional framework of good agricultural practices; and upgrading the regional food security monitoring system for informed and integrated policymaking.

## Partners

Member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); League of Arab States and its ministerial councils and Specialized Agencies; Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD); Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO); International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA); Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); American University of Beirut; Arabian Gulf University; and King Saud University.

**Estimated four-year budget: \$2.7 million**



An illustration of watershed management practices that promote food security and environmental sustainability. Photo taken by Dr. Gerhard Lichtenthaeler near Dhibin, Amran Governorate in Yemen.

## Institutional progress and implementation challenges

Having realized the importance of an integrated regional perspective on food security, Arab States have taken several steps, under the umbrella of the League of Arab States, towards greater cooperation and coordination in this area. Policy documents developed in recent years include the following:

- Strategy for Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development for the Upcoming Two Decades (2005–2025): the Strategy calls for a joint agricultural policy that ensures the provision of safe food and the sustainability of agricultural resources;
- Riyadh Declaration to Enhance Arab Cooperation to Face World Food Crises: adopted in 2008, the Declaration called for the launch of an initiative on an emergency Arab food security programme and the preparation of a plan of action for the coordination of agricultural policies in Arab countries;
- The Emergency Programme for Arab Food Security and its Action Plan: launched in 2009, the Programme is aimed at improving current agricultural production levels and enabling horizontal agricultural expansion through integrated investment projects and a better management of water resources.

However, commitments made at the institutional level have largely failed to translate into significant improvements on the ground, due to a number of issues. The project addresses some of them, including: weak policy dialogue between decision makers of the agriculture and water sectors; lack of knowledge on the impact of water availability and climate change on agriculture; low safety and quality of produce; and lack of clarity on how to monitor food security as a multidimensional concept.

## Expected Accomplishments

1. Strengthened capacity to assess the impact of changing water availability on agricultural production in the Arab region.
2. Further intraregional policy coordination on food and water security.
3. More efficient food production.
4. Improved assessments of the status of food security in Arab countries.

## Project governance

The project is in line with the regional initiatives adopted by Arab States, including the Strategy for Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development for the Upcoming Two Decades (2005-2025) and other resolutions made by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the Arab Ministerial Water Council under the umbrella of the League of Arab States and its specialized agencies, such as ACSAD and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD). It helps to address the same concerns, chiefly the need to stabilize the food situation in the Arab region while promoting the conservation of its depleting natural resources.

The project is also in line with the mandate of ESCWA to support member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals, notably Sustainable Development Goal 2 on achieving food security.

The project will build upon the outputs of previous projects, such as the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR).

## Geographic Focus

The project is regional in nature. Most activities are vetted by Arab intergovernmental bodies and are expected to benefit all 22 Arab countries. Some will target Arab countries where agriculture is socioeconomically significant and is expected to be affected by climate change.

## Project Components and Activities

### 1. Mapping of national and regional agricultural production under anticipated impacts of climate change on water availability in the Arab countries

Component 1 will engage countries in an exercise aimed at forecasting national and regional agricultural production under the projected variability of water availability associated with climate change. Activities include:

- Establishing national agriculture-water teams;
- Training those teams on climate and hydrological modelling and agricultural production assessment tools;
- Applying the above tools to national conditions for the preparation of assessment reports.

### 2. Institutional arrangement for improved coordination between existing water and agriculture structures

Component 2 of the project is aimed at achieving greater coordination between agriculture and water institutions in the Arab region as a prerequisite for coherent and integrated policy development. This is especially relevant now that food security is perceived as a multidimensional issue that encompasses social, economic and environmental dimensions. Activities include:

- Mapping existing water and agricultural institutional arrangements in the Arab region, and assessing the level and efficacy of coordination between them;
- Developing a proposal for an enhanced intergovernmental coordination mechanism on agriculture and water;
- Providing technical and logistical support to operationalize the institutional set-up once officially approved.

### 3. Adoption of good agricultural practices in the Arab region

Component 3 of the project is aimed at developing a framework to guide and promote the adoption of good agricultural practices (GAPs) in the Arab region. It can be seen as an initial step towards the establishment of regional binding standards on agricultural production and trade. Activities include:

- Developing a draft guiding framework on GAPs, based on a review of existing frameworks at the global, regional (other regions) and national (Arab countries) levels;
- Promoting the official adoption of the proposed guiding framework ;
- Carrying out training workshops on the guiding framework.

### 4. Monitoring of food and water security in the Arab countries

Component 4 of the project is aimed at developing a clear vision of food and water security in the Arab region, taking into consideration contextual specificities and global directions. Such a vision will need to be translated into a set of indicators for monitoring the state of food and water security at the national and regional levels. Activities include:

- Reviewing current systems for monitoring food and water security, including the indicators used and institutional arrangements at the national, regional and global levels;
- Developing a monitoring system adapted to the region's specificities, and establishing a unified methodology for data collection and indicator calculations;
- Training national authorities on this methodology.

**For more information, visit the project at**  
<https://www.unescwa.org/our-work/land-and-food-security>