



Regional Coordination Mechanism in the Arab Region Working Group on Water

Terms of Reference

1. Background and justification

The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to support regional cooperation and coordination of United Nations activities at the regional level. The first meeting of the RCM in the Arab region was convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 1999. The 11th RCM meeting in 2006 marked the formal participation of the League of Arab States.

The members of the RCM include the regional offices of United Nations organizations serving Arab States, the League of Arab States, and representatives of regional and international funding institutions. The RCM meetings focus on regional development priorities with the aim of fostering a common vision and approach among RCM members on regional issues and joint activities. The meetings are often chaired by the United Nations Deputy Secretary General and are convened once or twice a year. Working groups and task forces are established to support the technical work of the RCM.

In tandem, and in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/71/11 on “Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States” of 5 December 2016, the 13th Sectoral Meeting of the United Nations and the League of Arab States and their specialized agencies convened at the League of Arab States Secretariat on the topic of cooperation on the preservation and management of water resources in the Arab region (Cairo, 23-25 October 2017). The meeting resulted in a series of proposed areas for furthering cooperation on water between the United Nations and the League of Arab States and their respective agencies. To formalize cooperation arrangements and follow-up, the meeting recommended that a Working Group on Water be established within the framework of the RCM.

The recommendation was based on the recognition that numerous United Nations and League of Arab States agencies serve Arab States on water-related issues, and that no single agency can cover all the water-related challenges facing the Arab region on its own. This is because the planning, implementation and monitoring of water-related activities in the Arab region is pursued through various organs and intergovernmental processes. These cover various mandates and mechanisms focused on water resources, water services, agriculture, environment, disaster risk reduction, climate change, economic and social development, housing, health, children, migration, among others.

A similar finding at the global level regarding the broadness of work on water and the need to improve coordination and coherence across agencies led to the establishment of UN-Water¹ in 2003 under the Chief Executives Board for Coordination of the United Nations system. This global mechanism on water has also recommended the establishment of similar inter-agency coordination mechanisms at the regional level.

The establishment of a regional inter-agency coordination mechanism on water involving United Nations and League of Arab States organs on water-related issues can thus facilitate cooperation, collaboration and coherence of water-related activities for the benefit of the Arab region.

2. Objective

The purpose of the Working Group on Water is to support regional cooperation and coordination among the United Nations, the League of Arab States and their specialized organizations and agencies in the implementation of their work on water in the Arab region.

The Working Group would foster cooperation and coordination on programmes, plans and activities affecting water resources management and the delivery of water-related services in Arab States at the regional, sub-regional, inter-regional or national levels, as appropriate. This may include the pursuit of collaborative work in support of Arab States on water-related strategies and action plans, assessments, monitoring tools, capacity development and technical assistance for various stakeholder groups.

3. Functions and Scope of Work

The functions of the Working Group include:

- (a) Facilitating information exchange – by collecting and sharing information on recent activities and projects being conducted by the United Nations and the League of Arab States system organizations on water to better understanding their respective areas of work and mandates approved by Arab States, as well as by identifying the intersections being pursued between the management of water resources and services with respect other sectors, goals and priorities;
- (b) Disseminating best practices – by providing an inter-agency space through which lessons learned and region-specific best practices can be shared to support better programming and more tailored interventions on water in the Arab regional context;
- (c) Fostering collaboration – by providing a mechanism through which joint programmes, projects and activities could be discussed, elaborated and operationalized through bilateral and multilateral arrangements, consistent with the strategies and plans adopted by the governing bodies of the Working Group members;

¹ UN-Water is the United Nations inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater related matters, including sanitation. UN-Water provides the platform to address the cross-cutting nature of water and maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence.

- (d) Encouraging coherence – by mapping, maintaining and monitoring cooperation in response to water-related mandates, programmes and projects, in view of encouraging coherence across water sector programmes and encouraging efforts to build upon the regional knowledge base;
- (e) Pursuing results-based programmes – by thoroughly examining joint initiatives and providing a network of support in the formulation of collaborative projects and proposals that can improve the wellbeing of people at country level; and
- (f) Optimizing the use of available resources – by fostering integration, complementarity and synergy of implementation processes in view of enhancing efficiency, reducing duplication and optimizing the use of human and financial resources available across member agencies.

These functions would be operationalized in a work plan agreed to by the Working Group members at their annual meetings.

4. Membership

Membership in the Working Group is open to the regional offices and bureaus of the United Nations system, the League of Arab States Secretariat and its specialized organs, as well as bilateral and multilateral funding agencies working on water-related issues in support of Arab States.

Each member agency interested in serving in the Working Group will designate a member and an alternate member who would be responsible for representing the institution. The designated member is responsible for ensuring the designation of his or her replacement or that of the alternate on the Working Group, as may be necessary. The nomination of members and alternative members should be conveyed in writing to the RCM Secretariat.

5. Governance

The Working Group will be governed by a Chair and Vice-Chair, who will be supported by a Secretariat.

The Chair is responsible for reviewing or revising the work plan; preparing the meeting agenda; leading the conduct of the meeting; preparing the meeting report; and ensuring annual reporting to the RCM. The Vice-Chair and Secretariat will support the Chair in his/her functions. The Vice-Chair will represent the Chair in his/her absence.

The Secretariat will support the Chair and Vice-Chair; coordinate with the Chair, the Vice-Chair and the League of Arab States Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council on the date and venue of a meeting; facilitate communication with Working Group members and alternate members; and maintain the documentation, records and webpage of the Working Group in line with RCM practices.

The Chair and Vice-Chair will each serve a one-year term. One position would be held by an institution from the United Nations system and one position would be held by an institution from the League of Arab States system, on a rotating basis. ESCWA will serve as the Secretariat of the Working Group and conduct its work in consultation with the League of Arab States Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council.

The Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected from among the Working Group members present at the first meeting of the Working Group. The rotating system will then take effect the subsequent year whereby the Vice-Chair takes on the position of Chair at the start of the regular meeting, and a new Vice-Chair is elected from among the Working Group members present at the meeting.

The Working Group will convene one regular face-to-face meeting per calendar year attended by the designated member and/or alternate member of the participating agencies. Efforts will be made to schedule meetings back-to-back with an intergovernmental meeting related to the water sector in Cairo, Egypt to facilitate the participation of the greatest number of Working Group members and minimize travel costs. Virtual meetings may be scheduled based on coordination requirements.

The League of Arab States would facilitate arrangements for a meeting room at its Secretariat should the meeting take place in Cairo, unless another Working Group member offers to host the meeting, and would coordinate with the Working Group Secretariat to this effect.

Task Forces

Based on the interests, needs and endorsement of the Working Group, Task Forces may be established under the umbrella of the Working Group to support its work on specific themes or activities.

The work of a Task Force must be clearly defined, time-bound and reported upon to the Working Group on an annual basis. A coordinator designated by the Working Group members and approved by the Working Group Chair would facilitate the work of a Task Force for up to two years. The Task Force coordinator must submit an annual progress report to the Working Group secretariat at least two weeks prior to the regular meeting of the Working Group.

6. Monitoring and Reporting

A work plan will be prepared and regularly reviewed to organize the activities of the Working Group. The plan will include potential, planned and active areas of collaboration for exploration, elaboration and implementation.

The Chair of the Working Group will be responsible for reporting on the work plan and its progress in an annual report that would be submitted to the RCM for consideration.

The Secretariat would be responsible for recording and disseminating the approved work plans and annual reports of the Working Group.