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

Workshop on Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the Arab region:  
Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2  
Beirut, 5 March 2020

**MEETING REPORT****SUMMARY**

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Economic and social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a workshop on “Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the Arab region: Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2” which was convened in the United Nations House in Beirut on Thursday 5 March 2020. The meeting aimed to assist countries in the Arab region to collect, report and make use of data on SDG indicator 6.5.2 measuring progress on transboundary water cooperation, in the perspective of preparing the second reporting exercise to be submitted by 30 June 2020. The workshop was organized in the framework of the UN Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6.

The meeting discussed the outcomes of the first reporting exercise on transboundary water cooperation (SDG indicator 6.5.2) and discussed challenges faced by countries in collecting data and information as well as other challenges such as coordinating the national reports and harmonizing understanding of the survey instrument among riparian states and among SDG 6 target 6.5 indicators. Meeting participants discussed the ways they envisage to build on exchange of experience and lessons learned during the workshop to inform national mechanisms and processes for the reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The workshop on “Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the Arab region: Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2” was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Economic and social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with financial support from the European Union, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and with support received in the framework of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6.. The one-day meeting was convened at the United Nations House in Beirut, on Thursday 5 March 2020.

2. The overall objective of the workshop was to support countries in the Arab region to collect, report and make use of data on SDG indicator 6.5.2 measuring progress in transboundary water cooperation. Taking into account the results of the first reporting exercise in the Arab region and in view of preparing for the second reporting exercise, the main objectives of the workshop were to:

- Present the results of the first reporting cycle on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and the complementarity SDG indicator 6.5.1 at the regional level and identify linkages between the two indicators processes;
- Introduce the guidance materials for reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2, including the revised reporting template for the second reporting cycle, the revised step-by-step methodology for the calculation of indicator 6.5.2 and the Guide to reporting under the Convention as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2;
- Exchange good practices and lessons learned, as well as difficulties from riparian countries in completing the indicator 6.5.2 questionnaire, both from an organizational and institutional point of view and for the calculation of the indicator, data availability and methods;
- Discuss the types of gaps and discrepancies in the data provided in the national reports, in particular concerning aquifers, and possible solutions to increase the rate of responses, the quality of the responses, especially how to increase coordination of the answers at basin, aquifer or agreement level;
- Identify synergies between reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and SDG indicator 6.5.1, which measures the degree of integrated water resources management implementation (IWRM) at all levels, including at a transboundary level;
- Reflect and discuss on how the first reporting cycle can serve as a basis for reporting in the 2020 second reporting cycle, as well as on the use of reporting in informing decision/policymaking processes related to transboundary water cooperation at all levels;
- Increase the rate of responses and the quality of reports in the second reporting exercise in 2020.

3. The one-day meeting consisted of five sessions. Section I of this meeting report highlights the main topics of discussion, while section II reviews the organization of work as well as information regarding the meeting agenda, participants and evaluation. The full documentation of the meeting is available at the following addresses:

- <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53362> or

- <https://www.unescwa.org/events/supporting-monitoring-and-implementation-sdgs-arab-region-transboundary-water-cooperation-sdg>

## I. TOPICS OF DISCUSSIONS

4. Presentations and main discussion outcomes are organized in the following sections according to the substantive sessions of the meeting.

### A. SETTING THE SCENE: REPORTING ON SDG 6 AND TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION

5. UNECE opened the session with a presentation regarding the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6<sup>1</sup> (IMI-SDG6) which seeks to support countries in monitoring water and sanitation related indicators in an integrated and holistic manner. IMI-SDG6 aims to develop methodologies and tools to monitor SDG 6 global indicators, raise awareness on SDG 6 monitoring, enhance technical and institutional capacity for monitoring and compile country data to report on global progress towards SDG 6.

6. An intervention by ESCWA followed on ESCWA's role in providing a mechanism for the follow-up and review for SDGs implementation at the Arab regional level. These include regular preparatory meetings where Arab regional priorities and concerns in the fields of water, energy and the environment are discussed to inform the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (ASFD), the latter is convened every year by ESCWA to voice the Arab region concerns at the High-level political forum (HLPF). These platforms also provide an avenue to support countries in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) through consultations and exchange of ideas and lessons learned. The presentation also highlighted the Water Action Decade 2018-2028 and the events planned in the lead up to the decade Mid-Term Comprehensive Review in March 2023.

7. UNECE then presented the results and lessons learned from the monitoring of SDG 6.5.2 under the first reporting cycle at the global and regional levels. The challenges faced by countries in calculating the value of the indicator were discussed and were attributed to difficulties in assessing the surface areas of shared water bodies, especially in the case of groundwater resources, lack of data, and shortcomings in the understanding of the operationality criteria. The outcomes of the first reporting exercise were presented and depicted low response rates from the Arab region in terms of number of countries responding to the questionnaire (10 out of 21 sharing waters), as well as low average value of the SDG indicator 6.5.2 (19 per cent compared to a global averages of 59 per cent); but also when considering the quality of information provided. The lessons learned and key messages from the global roll-out of the first reporting exercise were elaborated and discussed.

8. Following that, a joint presentation by ESCWA and UNEP-DHI Partnership–Centre on Water and Environment (UNEP-DHI Centre), discussed the experience and outcomes of the first reporting exercise for the SDG 6.5.1. indicator and focused on the transboundary aspects of the questionnaire. The methodology and scoring system were explained and it was highlighted that the real value of the scores obtained lies in the answers provided for the individual questions. It was also highlighted that Global Water Partnership (GWP) and UNEP provided support to 35 countries in preparation to the first round of reporting through the organization of multi-stakeholder workshops. It was mentioned that a greater number of countries including a selection of Arab states are expected to receive such support in preparation to the following rounds of reporting.

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Water IMI–SDG 6: [www.sdg6monitoring.org/about/integrated-monitoring-initiative/](http://www.sdg6monitoring.org/about/integrated-monitoring-initiative/)

9. Results from the first reporting exercise have shown that while the Arab region on average is performing at a medium-low level across the four dimensions of IWRM, the region still lags in terms of allocating suitable financing for IWRM. It was also concluded that while overall development and governance influence IWRM implementation, national commitment is a stronger determinant of progress on SDG indicator 6.5.1. It was discussed that the key enablers for IWRM in the Arab region include Arab Strategy for Water Security, building on knowledge and capacities available through the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET), and experience from the global SDG indicator 6.5.1 reporting process to support planning and action at the countries level.

10. UNESCO provided an intervention through teleconferencing which highlighted that the assessment of cooperation on shared water was specifically challenging in the case of aquifers and presented the tools and material available to overcome those challenges. The global response rate for the SDG indicator 6.5.2 questionnaire was satisfactorily, nevertheless, the outcomes showed that cooperation level should be enhanced in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda ambition for that goal. In fact, only 14 countries, mostly located in Europe, Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa have confirmed that the totality of their aquifers are covered by operational cooperation arrangements.

11. Nevertheless, the exercise provided a starting point to initiate coordination, data sharing and exchange among institutions at the national level on shared water resources. Despite its shortcomings, the first reporting cycle presents the first indicator based global assessment for the status and trends in transboundary aquifer management with data provided by countries. The baseline report includes information on transboundary water cooperation which is being reported for the first time.

12. In ensuing discussions, participants highlighted the difficulty to fulfil the SDG indicator 6.5.2 four operationality conditions. Also, the questionnaires based on fixed answers allow for a small range of reply options which might lead in certain cases to inaccurate or incomplete information. In response, the custodian agencies for this indicator highlighted the importance of completing the descriptive sections to complement information gathered in addition to the multiple answers provided in the questionnaire. ESCWA also confirmed that the stories and insights captured from the descriptive parts of the SDG indicator 6.5.1 questionnaire were instrumental in the generation of an Arab regional analysis regarding progress in implementing IWRM.

## B. SECOND REPORTING CYCLE ON SDG TARGET 6.5 IN 2020

13. UNECE gave a presentation clarifying the succeeding steps for the second reporting exercise on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and discussed the documentation available to support countries to complete the indicator survey. It was mentioned that the guidance documents for national reports on SDG indicator 6.5.2 were revised and updated in light of lessons learned and experience gathered under the first reporting cycle. These documents<sup>2</sup> include the template for the second reporting exercise, a step-by-step methodology for the calculation of the SDG indicator 6.5.2 and the guide to reporting under the Water Convention which also supports reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2. The presentation also included tips and advices regarding the organization of the reporting process and with regards to filling the questionnaires.

14. ESCWA presented regional specific material available to support countries in their reporting on shared water cooperation, which mainly consists of the inventory of shared water resources in Western Asia ([www.waterinventory.org](http://www.waterinventory.org)). The inventory was launched in 2013 and is the first UN-led effort to take

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<sup>2</sup> Reporting template for the second reporting exercise

Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2 (ECE/MP.WAT/60)  
Step-by-step monitoring methodology for SDG indicator 6.5.2 (revised version '2020')

The three documents are available at: [www.sdg6monitoring.org/indicator-652/](http://www.sdg6monitoring.org/indicator-652/)

stock of the region's shared surface and groundwater resources in a comprehensive, systematic and standardized manner. The inventory avails data and information that countries can benefit from to complete the reporting on SDG indicators 6.5.2 and 6.5.1 such as extent of shared resources in shape file format, policies and legislations to support cooperation on shared water resources, existing joint cooperation bodies and existing cooperation arrangements.

15. UNEP-DHI Centre presented the SDG indicator 6.5.1 survey questionnaire and supporting materials. During the meeting, countries representatives were strongly encouraged to complete the free text fields after each question. The main milestones and corresponding timeline for the roll out of the second reporting exercise were presented.

16. Inquiries were raised on whether survey questions can be answered partially, and it was clarified that although custodian agencies need to convey complete answers and full scores to UN Statistical Commission the partial replies can still be useful to understand better the type of resources needed to support countries in their reporting exercise. The discussion emphasized that the aim is to collect scientific data and there is no judgement on the level of achievement.

17. Discussions also highlighted UNESCO's commitment to provide technical support to countries and knowledge resources available for that matter. Such resources include the IHP Water Information Network System ([http:// ihp-wins.unesco.org](http://ihp-wins.unesco.org)), the Transboundary aquifers of the world map, and UNESCO publications such as Transboundary aquifers: Managing a vital resource.

#### C. BENEFITTING FROM THE REPORTING EXERCISE TO ACCELERATE TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION IN THE ARAB REGION

18. Hungary representative presented the Hungarian experience for reporting on the SDG indicator 6.5.2 in the context of the country's multiple shared water bodies. The preparation of the report in 2017 engaged seven bilateral transboundary commissions for the management of shared waters, and seven neighboring states. The main challenge faced during the roll out of the first reporting cycle is that in many cases, different riparian states had differing understanding and interpretation of the questions included in the survey instrument. These challenges were overcome through extensive discussion and exchange among riparian states as part of the reporting process. The main lessons learned from the first reporting cycle show that joint coordination bodies serve as efficient platforms to level out differences and have accumulated experience that can be built upon for the second reporting cycle on the SDG indicator 6.5.2.

19. UNECE presented an overview of feedback received from countries on the value of the reporting and uptake of the results in the programme of work of the Water Convention. The experience of the countries from the roll out of the first reporting exercise highlighted the resulting benefits achieved at the national, transboundary and global levels. Countries that have adopted a consultative approach for the reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 mentioned that the exercise provided an opportunity to improve communication at national level among national institutions across various sectors and informed national policies and funding plans. The process also supported a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities among riparian states. The presentation also included one of the main outcomes of the first reporting cycle under the Water Convention, which was to reactivate its work on monitoring and assessment and information exchange, this area representing challenges not only for Parties but across all regions worldwide.

#### D. SESSION 4: COORDINATION AND COMPATIBILITY OF RESULTS: EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES ON THE REPORTING PROCESS AMONG RIPARIAN COUNTRIES AND ACROSS INDICATORS 6.5.1 AND 6.5.2

20. UNECE presented on means to enhance compatibility of results among countries sharing the same basin or that are party to the same arrangement. It was emphasized that sharing draft reports among riparian States served as an important tool to level out differences in views and insights and hence contributed to streamlining the reporting process.

21. The experience of Hungary with sustaining successful dialogue with Riparian states was presented. It was reiterated that Hungary is sharing water resources with 7 riparian states (Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Austria, Slovenia and Ukraine). Coordination on the use and management on these shared water resources is sustained through bilateral cooperation mechanisms such as Transboundary Committees and Transboundary River Commissions.

22. UNECE and UNEP-DHI Centre gave a joint presentation highlighting the linkages between SDGs Indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2. Discrepancies in information generated for transboundary water cooperation under both indicator frameworks were discussed and it was agreed that variation in methodologies, reporting processes, and stakeholder involvement, expertise, and opinion might have contributed to these differences. Consequently, the need for better coordinated reporting processes to improve harmonization of terminologies and methodologies across both indicators was emphasized. At the end of the session, the names of focal points for the overall SDG 6, SDG 6.5.1 and SDG 6.5.2 and the water convention were displayed for Arab countries that have made this information available.

23. A plenary discussion followed and focused on the main takeaways from the workshop. Country representatives were asked to elaborate on how they intend to make use of the knowledge transferred and experience shared among participants to inform national monitoring and reporting processes on SDG 6.5 indicators. Participants committed to convey main messages from the workshop to concerned officials in their respective countries and connect with their respective national focal points for potential technical support on indicator methodologies. Representatives of countries which have not yet assigned focal points for SDG Target 6.5 indicators promised to inquire with the national official bodies in charge regarding that matter. Finally, most participants were open to the idea of sharing focal point names for SDG 6 indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 nationally and across riparian countries to help coordinate reporting across indicators and across riparian countries.

#### E. SESSION 5: CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

24. The statements and remarks delivered by the organizers at the closing session re-emphasized the following steps for the second round of reporting on SDG indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 and stressed the importance of a national roadmap with associated targets. Also, the milestones for the reporting exercise were highlighted and the help desk<sup>3</sup> supported by UNECE and UNESCO was available to address countries inquiries. The deadline for countries to submit their reports is set for the end of June 2020, following which data will be conveyed to the UN statistical commission. A dedicated webpage provides information and guidance material to support countries in their reporting on SDG 6.5.2 including the reporting template, the step-by-step methodology and the guide to reporting<sup>4</sup>. It is also possible for online tracking of progress

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<sup>3</sup> SDG indicator 6.5.2: [transboundary\\_water\\_cooperation\\_reporting@un.org](mailto:transboundary_water_cooperation_reporting@un.org),  
[transboundary\\_water\\_cooperation\\_reporting@unesco.org](mailto:transboundary_water_cooperation_reporting@unesco.org),  
SDG indicator 6.5.1: ([iwrmsdg651@un.org](mailto:iwrmsdg651@un.org)),

<sup>4</sup> [www.unece.org/water/transboundary\\_water\\_cooperation\\_reporting.html](http://www.unece.org/water/transboundary_water_cooperation_reporting.html)

achieved towards the implementation of integrated water resources management at the global level through the following link: <http://iwrmdataportal.unepdhi.org/>. Countries were encouraged to coordinate reporting across SDG6 indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 and across riparian countries and use the reporting process as a catalyst for improved cooperation.

## **II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

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

25. The workshop on Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the Arab region: Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2 was organized on Thursday 5 March 2020 at the United Nations House, Beirut.

### **B. OPENING**

26. The meeting was formally opened by Mr. Ghaith Fariz, the director of UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science for the Arab States, Ms. Sarah Tiefenauer-Linardon, Reporting Officer at UNECE and Ms. Carol Chouchani Churfane, Chief of Water Resources Section, Climate Change and Natural Resources Cluster Lead at ESCWA.

### **C. PARTICIPANTS**

27. The meeting was attended by more than 20 participants and gathered government officials from Arab States representing ministries responsible for water and foreign affairs. Participants from international organizations and United Nations organizations were also represented in the meeting.

### **D. AGENDA**

28. Presentations and discussions were made over five sessions. The agenda of the meeting is summarized below:

- (a) Opening Session and Introduction;
- (b) Setting the Scene: Reporting on SDG 6 and Transboundary Water Cooperation;
- (c) Second Reporting Exercise on SDG Target 6.5 in 2020;
- (d) Benefiting from the Reporting Exercise to Accelerate Transboundary Cooperation in the Arab Region;
- (e) Coordination and Compatibility of Results: Exchange of Experiences on the Reporting Process among Riparian Countries and Across Indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2;
- (f) Closing Reflections and Next Steps.

### **E. EVALUATION**

29. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to participants to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the meeting. The form was made available in English language. The organizers received 8 filled questionnaires and information provided was compiled and analysed. The feedback received was positive with all respondents rating the overall quality of the meeting as good to very good. The vast majority of the those who have participated in the survey found that the meeting achieved its objectives and all agreed that their expectations were met.



30. The meeting organization was rated as good to very good by all respondents, most of whom (74 per cent) found that the issues discussed were relevant to their field of expertise. Most of those who have completed the questionnaires indicated that the meeting represented a very good forum to exchange information with other participating experts. Respondents also found that the written material were of good quality and appropriately covered the topics listed on the agenda. The need for follow-up activities to the meeting was recommended in all questionnaires. The nature of requested follow-up activities included capacity building to support coordination of responses to the questionnaires and better understanding of groundwater resources.

#### F. DOCUMENTATION

31. The meeting information note, agenda and presentations delivered during the meeting can be accessed, through the following links:

- <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53362> or
- <https://www.unescwa.org/events/supporting-monitoring-and-implementation-sdgs-arab-region-transboundary-water-cooperation-sdg>

## ANNEX I

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