

WATER SCARCITY: A CHALLENGE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

CLOSING SESSION: KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants in the high level meeting held on 17th November, 2021 at The League of Arab States premises, representing executive government officials and members of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the Arab Water Ministerial Council, development partners, donors, civil society, academic and research agencies and representatives of international organizations and institutions, discussed water scarcity as a challenge to sustainable development in the Arab region through four technical sessions. Below are the key messages and recommendations arising from presentations, discussions, panelist interventions:

First technical session: Economic impacts of water scarcity

- The most important measures that can be taken to enhance the affordability of the Arab region's high infrastructure in terms of cost recovery, even in part, are to improve efficiency in the provision of water services, determine the exact economic value of water in different sectors and review strategies to enhance financial returns (e.g., water accounting, water auditing and tariffs).
- The cost and volume of large investments in infrastructure in a water scarce environment, whether by the private sector or governments, must be balanced against the cost of operation and maintenance considering stakeholders affordability. This can be done by developing financially sustainable solutions that include donations, introduction of innovative technology and smart investment.
- An enabling environment should be created to attract and increase financing to ensure water security and sustainable water development goals, particularly innovative private sector financing linked to climate change adaptation.
- There is a need to establish Water Economics Research Center in the region.

Second technical session: Challenges and opportunities for the use of non-conventional water resources

- Public policies should include promotion of production and use of non-conventional water and linking it to public health and food production, particularly as it is a viable

option to reduce pressure on freshwater resources and contribute to the sustainable use of scarce Arab water resources.

- To ensure a greater role for non-conventional water resources as an augmentation to freshwater resources States should be supported, both technically and institutionally, to reduce uncertainties that prevent the expansion of the use of non-conventional water, considering social, economic, and environmental impacts.
- Governments are urged to increase non-conventional water resources through the expansion of wastewater and drainage water treatment and reuse through new methods and techniques. Incentives should be developed to encourage their use as non-conventional water resources are the only freshwater resource that will steadily increase over time.
- Adopt non-conventional water planning through the circular economy to offset deficit in freshwater demand while taking advantage of increased nutrients for agriculture.
- Take advantage of the rapid technological development and innovation in water-related areas and expanding its field applications and use.
- Link scientific research outputs to water and agricultural policies, including holding annual Science to Policy forums as a resource to inform the Ministerial Council.

Third technical session: Management of Scarce Water Resources during Protracted Armed Conflict

- Protect essential services (water, wastewater, energy, health) from the impact of armed conflicts as protracted armed conflict in urban contexts present a growing challenge for water supply and sanitation (WSS) service providers.
- Local service providers, humanitarian organizations and development actors need to work together to strengthen the resilience of essential services pre- and during protracted armed conflict. Humanitarian and development actor need to work together to:
 - Support emergency preparedness plan and establish partnerships pre-conflict.
 - Coordinate and align their work to support resilience, during conflict.
 - Ensure that service providers reach underlying vulnerabilities, pre- and during conflict.
- The scale, complexity, and duration of some of today's conflicts indicate the need for better respect of the rules of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to mitigate humanitarian needs. IHL is applicable in situations of armed conflict, and it contains relevant rules for the protection of essential services that are

vital to ensure the subsistence of the civilian population, including water, wastewater, and electricity.

Fourth technical session: water scarcity and WASH services at community level

- Preserve individuals basic human right of access to water and sanitation services with priority, so it will not be affected in quantity and quality by water allocations to other sectors.
- Establish high-level coordination groups, at the highest possible level, to coordinate a multi-sectoral response between ministries and institutions concerned with water scarcity, with the aim of coordinating policies, unifying objectives, increasing technical capacity and developing efficient water management plans, including requirements for increased prevention and adaptation to the effects of climate change.
- Involve communities and stakeholders with rights-based and transformative gender approaches to raise awareness of water scarcity and its challenges and the need to preserve it, particularly taking into account hearing from women and youth.

Joint recommendations from all sessions

- Support capacity building, in particular training programs, with emphasis on new technologies and climate resilient planning.
- Develop specialized websites and platforms, research centers, such as the Center for Water Economics, with support from Arab and international donors on the various aspects of water scarcity.
- Plan and promote senior technical meetings periodically as they bring together political decision makers with technical experts.
- Disseminate and translate regional and international studies on climate change.
- Lead agencies, organizers and the General Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council should coordinate follow-up by holding a meeting in the first quarter of next year (2022) to conceptualize mechanisms needed for implementation of the key messages and recommendations of the high-level meeting and report accordingly to the next session of the Council.