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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

First consultation meeting on component I of the food and water security project:
Criteria for selecting geographical coverage of the project

Cairo, Egypt, 29-30 May 2016

INFORMATION NOTE

Background

Traditionally, the Arab region sought to achieve food security through domestic agricultural production, thereby exerting greater pressure on the already limited water resources, where on average, agriculture uses around 85% of the total water withdrawals. Besides a direct contribution to food security, agriculture in the Arab region remains an important and a sensitive economic sector as it contributes to social stability by providing formal and informal employment to a large segment of the rural population. Although agriculture is the leading water using sector, increasing demand by cities, service sectors and industries, and the fact that more than half the region's renewable freshwater resources originate from outside the national borders of Arab countries making them susceptible for supply restrictions, allocation of freshwater resources to the production of food is expected to decline. Water scarcity and security concerns are thus expected to put additional stresses on agricultural production, rural livelihoods and food security in the region.

The Emergency Arab Food Security Programme, adopted by the Arab Summit in 2009, aims at; a higher level of food security in the Arab countries through; a focus on more efficient use of water and land resources; improved agricultural institutions through research and knowledge transfer; promotion of higher private investment levels in agriculture; and the development of farmer based organizations. The programme anticipates increasing agricultural production partly through horizontal expansion, where additional water requirements are to be satisfied from savings expected from increasing irrigation water use efficiency projects. It seems that this proposal is triggered by the assumption that future availability of water resources will continue at the current levels. A closer look at the water availability situation in the region suggests however that greater variability is increasingly anticipated as a result of the impacts of climate change. It becomes important therefore to validate this assumption by engaging in an assessment process that forecasts the impacts of climate change and its associated water variability on agricultural production in the different parts of the Arab region. This would require developing a methodology that utilizes the outputs and results of the regional climate and hydrological modeling activities that were developed within the RICCAR¹ initiative as inputs for agricultural production assessment tools like the FAO-AquaCrop model.

Having developed the methodology by FAO and ACSAD with support of GIZ, the pilot² application of the methodology needs to be up-scaled to cover other Arab countries. While the development process of the methodology can be viewed as a research oriented undertaking, up-scaling its application to a wider

¹ The Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region.

² Within the framework of the FAO-ACSAD-GIZ-ESCWA collaboration, the methodology was tested for selected crops in three sub-national pilot areas in Egypt Jordan and Lebanon.

geographical coverage within the Arab region will further validate and maybe fine tune the methodology and its applicability to assess agricultural production under the various climatic and environmental zones of the Arab region. Additionally, capacities of the countries need to be enhanced so as to be able to benefit from the developed assessment tools, which can play a role in informing policy development in integrated land and water management at the national level.

Objective

Prior to up-scaling the application of the developed methodology, FAO in collaboration with ACSAD will analyze and assess the criteria, requirements and risk factors associated with identifying the geographical coverage and thus the selection of the countries to be included in the project. On the basis of this preliminary analysis, a list of countries will be proposed by FAO and ACSAD to be discussed and finalized in the consultation meeting. The main objective of the meeting is therefore to provide the opportunity for the members of the project coordination committee and other regional experts to review the analysis and resulting draft proposal of the geographical coverage of the project, and based on the two-day discussions and deliberations, finalize the selection of target countries to be included in the project.

Participants

In addition to the project coordination committee, which includes representatives of; the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council, AOAD, ACSAD, ICARDA, GIZ, FAO and ESCWA, experts from the Arabian Gulf University, King Saud University, and the American University of Beirut are invited to participate in the meeting.

Organization of the meeting

The consultation meeting is organized by ESCWA in collaboration with FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE) within the framework of FAO RNE's Water Scarcity Initiative and of the Food and Water Security Project supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida). The meeting will be held in Cairo, Egypt, in FAO-RNE premises, on 29-30 May 2016. As shown in the draft Agenda, the meeting is expected to start at 9:00 a.m. after 30 minutes for registration of participants. The working language of the meeting is English, without formal simultaneous interpretation.

Logistical information

Participants are requested to initiate their hotel reservations and airport/hotel transport arrangements on their own. ESCWA will cover travel cost and provide a Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) in accordance with UN rules. Participants are kindly requested to fill-in the attached registration forms and send them to ESCWA no later than 1 May 2016 to allow sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements for their travel. Participants are responsible to obtain the entry visa to Egypt; nevertheless, for participants requiring special assistance, please contact the FAO's Project Coordinator, Mr. Fawzi Karajeh at (Fawzi.Karajeh@fao.org).

Correspondence

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