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**Progress towards achieving the water-related Sustainable
Development Goals in the Arab region****Summary**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to achieve global sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental in a balanced and integrated manner while pledging that no one will be left behind. The 2030 Agenda lays out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets, their means of implementation and 232 indicators. SDG 6 is dedicated to the goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation. Other SDGs are implicitly or explicitly water-related, such as those related to food security, health, energy, human settlements, ecosystems and climate change, and include several priority targets for Arab countries. The monitoring and reporting of these targets and their indicators is well underway at the global level as methodologies are developed and the availability of data is increasing. Several reports were issued during 2018 and 2019 related to water, SDG 6 and other water-related issues in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adding to this body of work, ESCWA will issue the Eighth Water Development Report on *the Water-Related Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region* in 2019. Many global and regional forums that still to be held in 2019 will focus on water-related SDGs and the year 2020 promises to be a comprehensive review year for all SDGs.

Member States are invited to recommend ways forward to support Arab countries in the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the water-related SDGs, in view of the outcomes of first global reporting exercise and the outcomes of the recent global and regional meetings.

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Introduction

1. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the process of implementing this development agenda has been extensive and inclusive, involving a series of consultations with Governments, civil society and other concerned stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels. In the Arab region, the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) has been held each year following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in Amman (29-30 May 2016), Rabat (3-5 May 2017) and twice in Beirut (24-26 April 2018 and 9-11 April 2019). Convened by ESCWA in partnership with the League of Arab States, the outcomes of these regional consultations contributed to global deliberations at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, in alignment with the annual themes and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review.
2. The 2018 HLPF reviewed in depth SDG 6 on the availability and management of water and Arab States delivered their key messages in the 2018 AFSD outcome document under the theme “Natural Resources, Future Generations and the Common Good”. UN-Water produced the first SDG 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation, providing a baseline for Member States on this goal. Moreover, the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028, which commenced on World Water Day (WWD), 22 March 2018, focuses on achieving water-related goals and targets including those contained in the 2030 Agenda. On the next WWD the United Nations World Water Development Report 2019 under the theme “Leaving No One Behind” was issued.
3. Integrated and indivisible, the 17 SDGs balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Water is crosscutting through all of them and is a central element of the 2030 Agenda. Water-related goals and targets are central to comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for ensuring policy coherence across sectors and in national development plans. That said, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is challenging and intersects with other agendas and commitments including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Continuous efforts are underway to monitor and report on the 2030 Agenda, and specifically on the water-related SDGs.

I. SDG 6: ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

4. Water is the focus of a dedicated, stand-alone goal (SDG 6) which aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. SDG 6 comprises six targets and two means of implementation, the progress of which is measured according to 11 indicators. The six targets are related to various aspects of water including clean drinking water, sanitation, wastewater, water-use efficiency and water stress, integrated water resources management (IWRM) and transboundary cooperation and water-related ecosystems. These targets are to be achieved by 2030 except for target 6.6 on water-related ecosystems which is to be accomplished by 2020.

II. SDG 6 INDICATORS

5. There are significant efforts to expand a harmonized monitoring and reporting framework for assessing progress towards the SDGs at the global level. The United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) and its Inter-agency and Expert Group on the SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) prepared a set of proposed indicators for each SDG and its related targets and identified one or more custodian agencies from the United Nations system for each indicator. Indicators are classified as tier I, II or III, depending on availability of sufficient data at the global level needed to calculate the indicator based on the established methodology. IAEG-SDGs also set up working groups in 2016 that meet regularly to examine specific issues, such as a working group on challenges related to geospatial information, Working Group on Interlinkages of SDG Statistics to allow for Integrated Analyses in the Monitoring, and Working Group on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) for data exchange and dissemination.

6. The fiftieth session of the UNSC (New York, 5-8 March 2019) reviewed the ongoing work for the implementation of the global indicator framework for the SDGs and their targets. The session reviewed the activities of the IAEG-SDGs carried out during 2018 which included tier classification updates, methodological development of tier III indicators and the criteria for the implementation of the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the SDGs and best practices. According to the updates to the tier classification following the reviews, as of 4 April 2019, out of the 232 indicators, 101 are tier I indicators, 91 are tier II, 34 are tier III and 6 are multiple tiers (meaning different components of the indicator are classified into different tiers). However, many proposed indicators require further development and numerous additional indicators remain under consideration. Therefore, the group agreed that the 2020 comprehensive review would consider the replacement, deletion, refinement or adjustment of some indicators and, in some select cases, additional indicators.

7. Arab member States have also been represented in the IAEG- SDGs to finalize and consolidate indicator methodologies on the 17 SDGs and their associated 169 targets. Regarding the SDG 6 targets, the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 has provided IAEG-SDGs with substantive contributions on the formulation of indicators and their associated methodologies. Arab States have been actively engaged in the global processes for the finalization and follow-up on the water-related SDGs through participation in the yearly global workshops on SDG 6. Workshops were organized by UN-Water in The Hague in October 2017 and in Stockholm in August 2018. Moreover, UN-Water produced the first SDG 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation in 2018, in addition to a series of reports that track progress towards SDG 6 targets and indicators. The reports set out the initial findings for and status of each SDG 6 indicator on the global, regional and national levels.

TABLE 1. SDG 6 INDICATORS, TIER CLASSIFICATION, AND CUSTODIAN AGENCIES AS OF 4 APRIL 2019

Indicator number	Indicator	Tier	Custodian Agency(ies)
6.1.1	Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services	II	WHO, UNICEF
6.2.1a	Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services	II	WHO, UNICEF
6.2.1b	Proportion of population using a handwashing facility with soap and water available	II	WHO, UNICEF
6.3.1	Proportion of wastewater safely treated	II	WHO, UN-Habitat, UNSD
6.3.2	Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality	II	UNEP
6.4.1	Change in water-use efficiency over time	II	FAO
6.4.2	Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources	I	FAO
6.5.1	Degree of IWRM implementation	I	UNEP
6.5.2	Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation	I	UNESCO-IHP, UNECE
6.6.1	Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time	I	UNEP, Ramsar
Means of Implementation			
6.a.1	Amount of water- and sanitation related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan	I	WHO, OECD
6.b.1	Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management	I	WHO, OECD

8. With respect to some SDG 6 targets, it should be mentioned that some aspects are not reflected in the assigned indicators. For example, target 6.1 mentions “affordable drinking water for all” but the respective indicator 6.1.1 does not measure this aspect. Similarly, in targets 6.3 and 6.4 on “wastewater reuse” and “number of people suffering from water scarcity” cannot be measured by indicators 6.3.1 and 6.4.2, respectively. Hence, adoption of additional indicators on these aspects needs to be considered by the IAEG-SDGs in coordination with the custodian agencies.

III. WATER-RELATED SDGS

9. Interlinkages across the SDGs are critical to foster a coordinated and integrated approach to monitor and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Considering the interlinkages across the SDGs can maximize synergies and resolve trade-offs between a specific SDG/target and other goals/targets. It will also ensure coherence and appropriate sequencing of institutional and policy reforms and public investments so that limited resources are used more efficiently and sustainably. Water is a crosscutting issue that affects the achievement of nearly all the 17 SDGs, and it plays a particular role in the 2030 Agenda because of its centrality to each of the three dimensions – social, economic and environmental – of sustainable development.

10. As such, water is not only relevant to SDG 6 targets, but it is also relevant to all the SDGs either explicitly or implicitly. The table below presents the explicit linkages between SDG 6 targets and indicators and other targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda. Some of these linkages are related to poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), human settlements (SDG 11), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) and ecosystems (SDGs 14 and 15).

TABLE 2. MAPPING WATER IN THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDG Target	Indicator	Related SDG 6 Indicator
1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services , ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance	1.4.1 Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services	6.1.1 6.2.1a 6.2.1b
3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases	3.3.3 Malaria incidence per 1,000 population	6.1.1 6.2.1a 6.2.1b
3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination	3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services)	6.3.1 6.3.2
4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	4.A.1 Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water ; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities ; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)	6.1.1 6.2.1a 6.2.1b

SDG Target	Indicator	Related SDG 6 Indicator
8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead	8.4.1 Material footprint, material footprint per capita, and material footprint per GDP 8.4.2 Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP	6.4.1
11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums	11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	6.1.1 6.2.1a 6.2.1b
12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources	12.2.1 Material footprint, material footprint per capita, and material footprint per GDP 12.2.2 Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP	6.4.1
12.4 By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment	12.4.1 Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement 12.4.2 Hazardous waste generated per capita and proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment	6.3.1 6.3.2
14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds , in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution	14.1.1 Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density	6.3.1 6.3.2 6.6.1
14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans	14.2.1 Proportion of national exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches	6.6.1
15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands , mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements	15.1.2 Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type	6.6.1

11. Although SDG 2 (food security) and SDG 7 (energy) are implicitly linked to SDG 6, the gains of considering the water-energy-food nexus are indispensable to achieve progress towards sustainable development. The demand for these three resources is significantly increasing in the Arab region. Hence, achieving security to the Arab population for these three resources is dependent on the actions taken in each

of these sectors. Food and energy are intrinsically related to water, and a nexus approach is essential to promote the integrated implementation and monitoring of SDGs 2, 6 and 7 across the various sectors when implementing sector specific indicators.

12. In the same vein, SDG 13 on climate change is also implicitly linked to SDG 6, but the water-climate interlinkages are strongly evident in the Arab region. The Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR) examined the impacts that climate change is expected to have on freshwater resources in the Arab region until the end of the century. The water-related impacts are expected to exacerbate the vulnerability of water resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, agriculture, infrastructure and human settlements and people. Thus, water issues should be mainstreamed in national development policies and climate-change adaptation plans and in order to enhance resilience in the various socioeconomic sectors.

13. The eighth issue of the ESCWA Water Development Report, to be published in 2019, will examine the water-related SDGs from the perspective of water security and water scarcity in the Arab region. The report will address how monitoring and implementing water-related SDGs through national strategies and plans can assist in achieving water security in the region. The availability of water resources used by different sectors will be examined, following a science-based approach to analyse the projected impacts of climate change on water resources within the context of the 2030 Agenda. The publication will suggest ways to deal with present and projected water scarcity at the regional and national levels based on a set of scenarios and by considering SDG 6 interlinkages with regional and national water strategies and action plans.

14. ESCWA has also published a working paper on Progress on Shared Water Resources Management in the Arab region: Regional baseline for SDG Indicator 6.5.2 (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2018/WP.1). This working paper provided a baseline for cooperation on shared water resources for the Arab region based on reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2. Only nine Arab countries responded to the first round of reporting on this indicator with limited information and often inconsistencies regarding same shared basins. Firm conclusions on shared water cooperation in the Arab region could not be drawn but the second round of reporting on this indicator could benefit from improved global to regional coordination with a link to regional and national initiatives.

15. Water interlinkages are broad, complex and intricate. Countries still need to assess these interlinkages according to their national circumstances and needs in order to prioritize actions and policies for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

IV. PURSUING A REGIONAL APPROACH

16. The challenge facing ESCWA member States is how to coordinate and follow up on the various goals, targets and indicators adopted under the 2030 Agenda, and even on other related agendas and commitments including the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The key for Arab countries is to benefit from the interlinkages across the SDGs and other agendas, the multitude of indicators and the harmonized methodologies developed and adopted by specialized agencies that support global monitoring and reporting on progress towards these targets.

17. In this context, the MDG+ Initiative, which was derived from the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda, established a regional mechanism for monitoring and reporting on water supply and sanitation in the Arab region. The initiative developed a set of region-specific indicators related to the accessibility, affordability, quality and reliability of water supply services as well as wastewater treatment and reuse. These indicators built upon indicators that were globally monitored under the UNICEF-WHO Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) and later incorporated into the SDG 6 targets. Moreover, the mechanism of data collection and the preparation of the 2015 and 2016 reports of the MDG+ initiative guided Arab countries in pursuing an integrated approach to monitoring and reporting on SDG 6 and other water-related SDGs.

18. With respect to the water-related SDGs, the following meetings organized in 2017 and 2018 addressed regional and national priorities and concerns related to SDG 6:

(a) Expert Group Meeting on Methodologies for Meeting the Water-related SDGs at the Global, Regional and National levels (Amman, 22-23 March 2017);

(b) Expert Group Meeting on Pursuing Improved Shared Water Resources Management within the Framework of Global and Regional Agreements (Cairo, 29-30 November 2017);

(c) Final Regional Policy Workshop on the Water-Energy Nexus (Beirut, 11-12 December 2017);

(d) Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD & HLPF (Beirut, 28-29 March 2018);

(e) Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, 2018 (Beirut, 24-26 April 2018);

(f) Expert Group Meeting on Improving Shared Water Resources Cooperation within the Framework of Global and Regional Agreements (Beirut, 6-7 December 2018).

19. The Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF resulted in an outcome document that highlights a set of key messages, regional priorities and recommendations for examination and action. Below are some of the key recommendations proposed:¹

(a) Enhancing regional cooperation on shared water resources and infrastructure; especially during conflicts and sociopolitical unrest, through cooperative frameworks, global and regional conventions and agreements to ensure mutual benefits and address challenges among riparian States sharing water resources;

(b) Strengthening IWRM; along with increasing water-use efficiency and the use of non-conventional water resources and improving water governance to cope with water scarcity and protect surface and groundwater resources;

(c) Mainstreaming water resources issues in national and regional climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction plans and strategies, and in climate change negotiations;

(d) Accelerating efforts to expand national safe water and sanitation services and rebuild and upgrade water-related services and infrastructure for all to reduce the equity gaps including disparities between rural and urban communities and the gender gap.

20. In terms of means of implementation, the regional preparatory meeting on water issues concluded with recommendations related to regional cooperation, national coherence and coordination, technology transfer, financing and investment, and capacity development, including the following²:

(a) Developing regional indicators, performance measures and standards that take into consideration national specificities to address priority issues in the Arab States and promoting knowledge exchange and cooperation with other regions in monitoring groundwater quantity and quality as part of the SDG indicator methodologies;

¹ All the recommendations are in the outcome document of the Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF [E/ESCWA/RFSD/2018/CRP.2](#).

² All the proposed means of implementation are in the outcome document of the Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF [E/ESCWA/RFSD/2018/CRP.2](#).

(b) Pursuing participatory approaches to ensure national coherence and coordination across sectors and the water users of different sectors; in addition to exploring tools for integrating SDG indicators in national monitoring systems;

(c) Enhancing the use of efficient agricultural and irrigation techniques to ensure sustainable water use and promoting technology transfer on remote sensing and technology tools for water assessment and management;

(d) Encouraging banks, funds and potential donors to invest in the achievement of the water-related SDGs in Arab countries and promoting financing for innovative regional initiative to enhance cooperation on shared water resources;

(e) Developing capacity on surface and groundwater storage for climate change adaptation.

V. NEXT STEPS

21. ESCWA in collaboration with UN Environment-DHI Center for Water and Environment (UNEP-DHI) is preparing a regional report on SDG indicator 6.5.1 on the implementation of IWRM in the Arab region. The report is based on the responses received from Arab countries on the survey of SDG indicator 6.5.1, collected by the custodian agency and supported by expert knowledge and case studies from the region. The report focuses on groundwater management and cooperation on shared water resources as key water resources concerns in the region. The draft report has been made available to the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET) group on IWRM for review and commentary and will be published in 2019 with the aim to foster regional dialogue and progress on IWRM.

22. The global achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires action at the regional, national and local levels. As water is central to sustainable development, this necessitates mainstreaming and prioritizing water in national and sectoral development plans, as well as considering water conditions and constraints when planning for climate change adaptation. Such efforts should be pursued through integrated approaches that ensure coherence across regional and national plans and commitments related to the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

23. The 2019 theme of the AFSD (Beirut, 9-11 April 2019) is in line with that of the HLPF (New York, 9-18 July 2019): “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships) will be reviewed in depth. Under SDG 13, water remains a focus issue in the 2019 AFSD and HLPF given the interlinkages between the impacts of climate change on water resources and the pivotal role of the water sector in adapting to climate change in the Arab region. In this context, ESCWA and the League of Arab States jointly held the Regional Consultation on Climate Change (Beirut, 21-22 March 2019) which resulted in the development of a set of key messages on regional climate change priorities³ to be conveyed during the sessions of the 2019 HLPF. Six Arab countries will submit their first voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to the 2019 HLPF under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which marks the end of the first four-year cycle of follow-up and review of the 17 SDGs. The SDG Summit, which takes place every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly, will be held in September 2019 to take stock on progress of the 2030 Agenda considering the Global Sustainable Development Report.

24. The year 2020 is critical for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as it marks the deadline for 21 SDG targets, including SDG target 6.6. Moreover, there will be a comprehensive review of the SDG targets and indicators which is an opportunity to improve the global monitoring framework of the 2030 Agenda and to

³ All the key messages are in the outcome document of the Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum [E/ESCWA/SDPD/2019/INF.4](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pubs/2019/04/2019-04-01-afsd-outcome-document).

provide guidance to countries in their national implementation and reporting efforts. According to the IAEG-SDGs, the 2020 comprehensive review would include the replacement, deletion, refinement/ adjustment of some indicators and additional indicators, in a few selected cases. Nevertheless, the Expert Group agreed that the review will ensure that the changes to be made are limited in scope and maintain the same size of the framework in order not to impose significant burdens on the ongoing national statistical work.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

25. The following recommendations are submitted for consideration by the Committee. The Committee requests ESCWA member States to undertake the following:

(a) Prioritize the implementation of water-related SDGs policies according to national and local needs and circumstances;

(b) Incorporate water-related goals, targets and indicators in national and sector development plans in relation to the water sector;

(c) Inform ESCWA on the modalities and mechanisms carried out at the national level to implement, report on and monitor the water-related SDGs.

26. The Committee requests the ESCWA secretariat to:

(a) Continue to provide technical support to Arab countries on the reporting and monitoring of SDG 6 indicators by taking into consideration regional specificities, especially water scarcity, which would require additional indicators and/or more harmonized methodologies for data collection and calculation;

(b) Ensure that regional priorities on the water-related issues are reflected in global, regional and national follow-up on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as in related efforts for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda;

(c) Participate actively and engage member States in the preparations for the end of the first review cycle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016-2020) and for the beginning of the second review cycle in 2021;

(d) Support member States in the work of the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028) to achieve progress on the water-related SDGs.
