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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and High Level Political Forum
Beirut, 28-29 March 2018

Information note

1. Background

Global processes

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development was established based on the mandate set out in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The Future We Want," in 2012. The Forum first met in 2013 and has become the main United Nations platform through which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are monitored and reviewed at the global level. The consultations undertaken during the sessions of the Forum result in the adoption of negotiated political declarations.

The HLPF meets annually under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council for eight days, which include the closing three-day ministerial segment. The HLPF focuses on a theme and a set of six SDGs during each of its sessions, with Goal 17 on "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development" reviewed each year. As part of its follow-up and review functions of the Forum, member States are invited to provide a voluntary national review (VNR) of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving its 17 goals. The format and organizational aspects of the Forum are outlined in United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/290.

The 2018 HLPF will be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City from 9 to 18 July 2018. The thematic focus of the 2018 session is on "**Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.**" The set of goals under review during this cycle are:

- SDG 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- SDG 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- SDG 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- SDG 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- SDG 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

Eight Arab States have offered to present their VNRs during the 2018 session, namely: Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan and United Arab Emirates. VNRs were previously presented by Egypt and Morocco in 2016, and Qatar and Jordan in 2017.

Custodian agencies have also been identified by the United Nations Statistical Commission to support monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. These agencies consult with member States through the Commission's Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) regarding

proposed indicator methodologies for collecting data on the 17 SDGs and their associated 169 targets. Over 230 indicators have been formulated to date, with at least one indicator identified to measure progress related to each target, noting that some targets may require more than one indicator. Custodian agencies also assist member States to vet their data based on the harmonized methodologies reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs.

UN-Water has consolidated the efforts of the custodian agencies responsible for follow-up on the SDG 6 indicators under the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6. The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), the inter-agency initiative GEMI, and UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) constitute the main components of this initiative. The initiative is producing an SDG 6 Synthesis Report this year, which is led by a UN-Water Task Force coordinated by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme.

Regional processes

The HLPF is preceded by five regional sustainable development forums, which are convened by the United Nations Regional Commissions. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) is convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership with the League of Arab States. The forum is coordinated through the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism in the Arab Region (RCM), which is comprised of United Nations organizations serving Arab States and the League of Arab States.

The AFSD allows for regional-specific discussion regarding implementation challenges, common concerns and priorities for advancing progress towards the SDGs. Arab States and representatives from civil society participate in the forum. Previous sessions of the AFSD were held in Amman (April 2014); Manama (May 2015); Amman (May 2016) and Rabat (May 2017).

The 2018 AFSD will be convened in Beirut from 24 to 26 April 2018. It will be organized under the same theme as the HLPF, namely "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies," but will pursue this theme from the entry point of "**Natural Resources, Future Generations, and the Common Good.**" In doing so, the regional forum aims to provide a platform for: (a) advocacy – by articulating regional perspectives on sustainable development and ensuring that these perspectives are voiced at the HLPF; (b) follow up and review (FUR) – by examining national experiences and regional efforts aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and (c) peer learning – by exchanging knowledge and experiences, and enhance learning and exchange methodologies and knowledge products from inside and outside the region.

It is expected that the eight Arab States presenting their VNRs to the HLPF in July will share their preparations in this regard during the AFSD. While the forum will address the full 2030 Agenda, sessions and side events will include focus on SDG 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 from a regional perspective, as well as their interlinkages with other commitments articulated in the global agenda.

The Ninth Session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (Cairo, 6 July 2017) mandated the establishment of an HLPF Working Group to support regional preparations on water-related issues for the HLPF. The Working Group is comprised of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), Arab Organization for Agriculture and Development (AOAD), Arab Water Council (AWC), Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme and ESCWA. ESCWA coordinates the working group in consultation with ACWUA and the League of Arab States. The Council endorsed the organization of a regional preparatory meeting on water to inform deliberations that will take place during the AFSD and HLPF.

In conceptualizing the organization of this preparatory meeting, the HLPF Working Group identified ten water-related issues and priorities of concern for the Arab region, namely: (a) water scarcity; (b) climate change; (c) SDG 6 and its linkage to other SDGs; (d) indicator methodologies including those related to wastewater, water stress and shared water resources; (e) the financing gap; (f) non-conventional water

resources; (g) water accounting; (h) the economic valuation of water resources; (i) water-related infrastructure, including their upgrading and rehabilitation, as well as rebuilding water installations damaged and destroyed due to conflict and occupation; and (j) integrated water resources management.

The Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) has supported regional coordination and engagement on water-related goals, targets and indicators since its establishment. This is demonstrated by the 2015 and 2016 reports of the Regional Initiative for Establishing a Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region (MDG+ Initiative), which were issued under the auspices of the AMWC with the support of the League of Arab States, ESCWA and ACWUA. The reports provided national data on a set of region-specific indicators focused on water supply, sanitation and wastewater that were compiled by national monitoring teams and were complemented by pilot household surveys conducted by RAED in selected areas.

The Arab State of the Water Report, prepared by the AWC and CEDARE, also provides regional reporting on water-related indicators. The forthcoming issue of the report is expected to consider SDG 6 indicators and possible alternative methodologies for application in the Arab regional context. In tandem, inter-agency consultations among League of Arab States and United Nations organization serving the Arab region led the FAO, as custodian of the SDG 6.4 target indicators, to prepare a draft “Working paper on Water Scarcity in the Arab Region: Components of an SDG 6.4.c indicator methodology” for consideration by member States.

2. Objectives

The Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and High Level Political Forum will be convened prior to the AFSD and the HLPF to consolidate regional views on water-related issues and priorities facing the Arab region. The aim of this preparatory expert group meeting is to issue a joint outcome statement, which will be conveyed for consideration at the AFSD and will support Arab States in their preparations for the HLPF. The objectives of meeting are thus to:

- Exchange experiences among Arab States on incorporating water-related goals, targets and issues in VNRs and national reports on SDG progress, including experience in monitoring and reporting on the dedicated water goal (SDG 6);
- Examine some of the SDG 6 indicators, including their proposed definitions and calculation methodologies from an Arab regional perspective, and consider possible alternative calculation methodologies;
- Discuss components of a draft indicator methodology for measuring and monitoring the number of people facing water scarcity, as articulated in SDG 6.4 target;
- Foster dialogue among water stakeholders in Arab States on the water dimensions of the 2030 Agenda in view of formulating a common position on priority issues of concern; and
- Prepare a joint regional statement on water issues related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for delivery to the AFSD and to support regional preparations for the HLPF in 2018.

3. Agenda

The agenda for this regional preparatory meeting will focus on the sharing of experiences and lessons learned during national and regional follow-up on the water-related commitments articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The format will inform on progress to date and foster regional dialogue in view of formulating a joint regional outcome statement. Plenary sessions comprised of presentations and interactive discussions will be included. The agenda will feature discussions on:

- Progress achieved in addressing water-related issues within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including lessons learned by Arab States;

- Regional issues and priorities identified by the HLPF Working Group;
- Preliminary findings of the SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 by UN-Water;
- Selected SDG 6 indicator methodologies from an Arab regional perspective;
- Working paper on a draft SDG 6.4.3 indicator methodology on water scarcity; and
- Drafting of an Arab statement on water-related issues and priorities.

Breaks for coffee and lunch will be arranged during the two-day meeting. The draft agenda will be circulated to registered participants.

4. Participants

Representatives of Arab member States are invited to participate in the meeting, as well as senior representatives from relevant regional and national organizations, institutions and civil society organizations engaged in water-related issues affecting Arab States. International experts and organizations will be invited to contribute to the discussions.

5. Partnerships and Processes

This regional preparatory meeting is organized by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, FAO and ESCWA in cooperation with the members of the HLPF Working Group, which was established under the auspices of the Arab Ministerial Water Council.

The outcome of this preparatory expert group meeting will be conveyed to the AFSD (Beirut, 24-26 April 2018) and to Arab States during the 10th session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (Kuwait, 2 May 2018). It is expected that these outcomes would thus help to inform regional preparations for the HLPF (New York, 9-18 July 2018).

6. Date and venue

The Regional Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and High Level Political Forum will be held from 28 to 29 March 2018 at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon. Registration will commence at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, 28 March 2018 and the opening session will convene at 9.30 a.m. on the same day. The meeting will conclude by 5:00 pm on Thursday, 29 March 2018.

Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification on the first day of the meeting and to allow sufficient time to pass through security to collect their identification badge. Access to the United Nations House is provided through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance.

7. Language of the session

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation from and into Arabic and English will be provided.

8. Registration

Designated officials, interested participants and regional partners are kindly invited to submit their completed meeting registration form to ESCWA secretariat by Wednesday, 14 March 2018. A colour, scanned passport-like photograph should be submitted with the registration form to allow for issuance of an identification badge to access the United Nations House.

A limited budget is available for the sponsorship of officials and representatives from Arab States. Sponsorship includes roundtrip travel to Beirut, a daily subsistence allowance to cover hotel, meals and incidental expenses for up to three nights, and a terminal allowance to facilitate ground transportation to and from the airport. Roundtrip tickets will be issued in economy class on the least expensive route, in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations. Requests for sponsorship must be received by ESCWA no later than Sunday, 4 March 2018 to be eligible for consideration. Requests for sponsorship must be indicated on the registration form and include a copy of the national passport. Participants approved for sponsorship will be asked to complete a bank details form to allow for the electronic transfer of their sponsorship entitlements following the meeting.

9. Accommodation and transportation

The Markazia Suites hotel is located two blocks (five-minute walk) from the United Nations House and offers preferential room rates to meeting participants. The single room rate is US\$ 106/night and the double room rate is US\$ 128/night, inclusive of breakfast, internet access and all taxes. Airport pick-up can be arranged with the hotel management for US\$ 24. Additional information, as well as the names of other hotels offering preferential room rates in Beirut, will be provided to registered participants.

10. Entry visas

Participants are requested to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary. ESCWA can coordinate with the Government of Lebanon to assist in obtaining entry visas for participants who are unable to secure visas in their home countries. Those who need assistance in this matter should send a colour, scanned copy of their national passport containing all the required information to the ESCWA secretariat no later than Sunday, 4 March 2018.

11. Correspondence

Inquiries and completed registration forms should be submitted to the following officials:

Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane
Chief
Water Resources Section
Sustainable Development Policies Division
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: + 961-1-978-518
Cel: + 961-3-769-466
Fax: + 961-1-981-510
E-mail: chouchanicherfane@un.org

Mr. Adnan Kaddoura
Administrative Assistant
Water Resources Section
Sustainable Development Policies Division
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: + 961-1-978-504
Cel: + 961-70-732-116
Fax: + 961-1-981-510
E-mail: kaddoura@un.org
