



Launching Workshop

Dates:	2-4 June 2013
Venue:	Fairmont Nile Hotel, Cairo
Participants:	100 participants

SUMMARY

The Near East and North Africa Region (NENA) faces the challenge of addressing a wide range of complex and intertwined issues associated with the management of natural resources, particularly land and water, and to securing food supply for a growing population. To address these challenges, FAO has launched a regional 'Initiative on Water Scarcity in the Near East'. The overall goal of the initiative is to support Member Countries in streamlining priority areas of action in agriculture water management that can significantly contribute to boosting agriculture productivity, improving food security and sustaining water resources, by highlighting the specific areas that require action and building partnerships to move the process forward.

The initiative will inject fresh thinking into the process of finding sustainable solutions to water scarcity and food security problems through facilitating the implementation of cost-effective water investments and management practices, based on FAO's publication 'Coping with Water Scarcity: an Action Framework for Agriculture and Food Security'.

The initiative will enhance cooperation between member countries and between countries and international and regional partners associated with the initiative. It will focus on the policies, investments, approaches and practices that are necessary to ensure sustainable intensification of agricultural production under water scarcity conditions and utilize innovative assessment methodologies to analyse the costs associated with options to ensure national food supply, in combination with the accounting of the availability and use of fresh water resources.

The initiative will have two major outcomes: (i) a Regional Collaborative Strategy on sustainable agriculture water management for increasing the level of food security, and (ii) a Regional Partnership to support countries in the implementation of the collaborative strategy. The findings and recommendations will be presented for endorsement to the 32nd FAO Regional Conference for the Near East in February 2014.

The launching workshop will gather delegates from the 20 countries of the FAO NENA region and FAO partners in this initiative. It will present the initiative, discuss its main components and serve as first step in establishing a regional partnership in support to the initiative.

The Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity

The Regional Water Scarcity Initiative comes in support of FAO Member Countries in identifying priority areas of action in agriculture water management that can significantly contribute to boosting agriculture productivity, improving food security and using water resources in a more sustainable way.

The rationale behind the initiative is described in FAO's Water Report 38: 'Coping with Water Scarcity: an Action Framework for Agriculture and Food Security'. The proposed approach helps guiding decision-makers' choices among the range of the available food supply options associated with water management. It distinguishes between 'supply-side' options, aiming at increasing the volumes of water available for food production, and the 'demand-side' options that focus on efficient use of water for food production. It also acknowledges that options to cope with water scarcity lie both inside and outside the water domain, and extends the discussion beyond water to issues to national food security and trade, and control of food waste.

Defining water scarcity

Simply stated, water scarcity occurs when demand for freshwater exceeds supply. This condition arises as consequence of a high rate of demand from all water-using sectors compared with available supply, under given institutional arrangements and infrastructural conditions. It is manifested by partial or no satisfaction of expressed demand, economic competition for water quantity or quality, disputes between users, depletion of groundwater, and negative impacts on the environment. Water scarcity is both a relative and dynamic concept, and can occur at any level of supply or demand, but it is also a social construct: its causes are all related to human interference with the water cycle.

It varies over time as a result of natural hydrological variability, but even more so as a function of prevailing economic policy, planning and management approaches. Scarcity can be expected to intensify with economic development, but, if correctly identified, many of its causes can be predicted, avoided or mitigated. The three main dimensions that characterize water scarcity are: a physical lack of water availability to satisfy demand; the level of infrastructure development that controls storage, distribution and access; and the institutional capacity to provide the necessary water services.

The range of possible options to ensure food security in conditions of water scarcity will be assessed in terms of their effectiveness, cost, and technical, social and environmental feasibility. A rapid 'water accounting' will review the current status of water availability and use and the potential for further agricultural production, while a 'water audit' will review the policy and institutional environment that sustain water resources management. The 'food supply cost curve', a simple but powerful method for identifying and ranking options for future food supply in terms of their cost will be employed. These analyses will be complemented with a gap analysis based on the current knowledge of agriculture water management in the region in order to provide insight in the way the region and the individual countries can bridge their food supply gaps in a cost-effective way.

A series of National Assessments will be performed, based on three pillars:

- 1) A water accounting/water auditing that will review the country's water resources, their use and the potential for improvement in efficient use of water for agriculture; combined with a review of the policy and institutional environment that sustain water resources management;
- 2) An analysis of national food supply options through a cost curve approach that reviews agricultural water management options in terms of costs and expected benefits;
- 3) A knowledge gap analysis, focusing on evidence-based findings, of the causes of successes or failures of past policies, strategies and programmes dealing with water management for agriculture.

The launching workshop

The workshop is organised to launch the activities of the initiative, establish a regional partnership between the focal points and provide information and guidance as to how to undertake the above studies. It will gather focal points from member countries and international and regional partners associated with the initiative (FAO Regional Partnership on Water Scarcity)¹.

National multidisciplinary teams (NMDT) are being established in each country to support and implement the initiative. Focal points from these NMDT are invited to attend the launching workshop and, as a follow-up, to convene meetings of the multidisciplinary teams in their respective countries in order to convey the outputs of the workshop and to launch the national assessment process.

During the meeting, country focal points are expected to provide inputs on behalf of the NMDT to adapt the assessment framework to their countries, amend and approve the methodology and provide inputs into the decision making tools that FAO is proposing to use in this initiative.

FAO will encourage the establishment of a network of focal points for exchange of experiences throughout the project implementation and the workshop will offer the opportunity for a first contact and extensive exchange.

Objectives of the launching workshop

1. Presentation and launch of the Water Scarcity Initiative;
2. Discussion and agreement on the national assessment framework, including
 - a. Water account and water audits
 - b. Food supply cost curve
 - c. Knowledge gap analysis
3. Agreement on the steps till final delivery
4. Establishment of a network of focal points for exchange of experiences throughout the project implementation.

Expected actions from the participants

1. To analyse and discuss the regional gap analysis;
2. To discuss the national assessment framework and adapt it to the country's context and needs;
3. To learn about the food supply cost curve and advice on the availability of data and expertise;
4. To work on a plan for implementation of the initiative at national level;
5. To agree on future steps till the end of the project including the technical assistance needs.

Background documents for the workshop

1. Regional gap analysis: a desk survey
2. The FAO Initiative on Water Scarcity in the Near East
3. FAO Water Report 38: 'Coping with Water Scarcity: an Action Framework for Agriculture and Food Security'
4. Water and Food Security, facing global change: what challenges, what solutions ?, CGAAER, 2012
5. Powerpoint presentations on:
 - a. The regional gap analysis
 - b. The water accounting/auditing
 - c. The food supply cost curve
 - d. The country assessment

¹ Partner institutions include International and regional financing institutions (World Bank, IFAD, AfDB, IsDB), International research centers/institutes (ICARDA, IFPRI, IWMI), UN and other development organizations (ESCWA, UNDP, WFP, UNESCO, UNEP, IDRC, USAID, GTZ) and Regional organizations (Arab League, AOAD, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), UMA; Arab Water Council and CEDARE).