

Szentendre, Hungary
April 27, 2016

Conference outcome document

Launch of the Water, Growth and Stability Initiative

Water, Growth and Stability – Transboundary Water Cooperation for Sustainable Growth and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The Water, Growth and Stability conference, which took place on April 26–28, 2016, in Szentendre, Hungary, co-organised by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe ([REC](#)) and the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary](#) as a pre-event to the Budapest Water Summit 2016, constitutes a milestone in the REC project “Sustainable Use of Transboundary Water Resources and Water Security Management in the MENA Region ([WATER SUM](#))”, which is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency ([Sida](#)). Following field missions, workshops, trainings and ambassadorial briefings for the MENA region, the conference gathered a broad spectrum of key stakeholders from throughout the MENA region, including representatives of ministries in charge of water management and water security, local authorities, international organisations, NGOs, academia and the business community.

Main outcomes

Water for sustainable development

The strategic importance of water is illustrated by the fact that one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is devoted specifically to water: Goal 6 is to ensure the “availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. In fact, water is a key aspect of many of the SDGs (goals 1, 3, 4, 11, 12, 14 and 15 have an explicit reference to water; while goals 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13 have an implicit reference to water) since it forms the basis of life on earth, is vital for socioeconomic development and is essential for biodiversity. Water was recognised as a fundamental human right by the UN General Assembly in July 2010 (A-RES-64-292); by the Human Rights Council in September 2010 (HRC Resolution 15-9); by the Arab Charter on Human Rights (which entered into force on March 15, 2008); and by the constitutions of a number of Arab states (Morocco in 2011, Tunisia and Egypt in 2014). This legal recognition guarantees the right of all people to equitable access to safe water as a basic human requirement, while also enhancing public participation in water management.

Water for growth and stability

Sustainable water management is a key driver of economic activity, poverty alleviation and health, and a prerequisite for growth and stability. Poor water management, lack of good water governance and limited awareness contribute to water supply vulnerability and water pollution and are a source of conflicts that constrain growth and threaten both security and the water–energy–food–climate nexus.

Good governance for water

Good water governance should ensure a mix of policies, principles and tools such as water diplomacy; regional, transboundary and cross-border cooperation; integrated river basin planning and management; climate adaptation; public participation; accountability; transparency; subsidiarity; and appropriate decentralisation.

Means of implementation

A robust legal framework; adequate financial means; the transfer of knowledge and technologies; education and awareness raising among stakeholders, citizens, producers and consumers; systematic and harmonised data collection; on-going dialogue between the scientific community, decision makers, river basin countries and national and local authorities; and public–private partnerships — these are just some of the means that will make possible the sustainable management of water resources.



REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE
OF HUNGARY



SWEDEN

Based on the main outcomes of the conference outlined above, we are delighted to announce the launch of the **Water, Growth and Stability Initiative (WGS Initiative)**.

The Water, Growth and Stability Initiative

The REC, as a catalyst for positive change and an international organisation, is ready to continue the journey by supporting the creation of a knowledge-based platform; a dynamic network of water experts from the MENA region and Europe; and an e-learning tool for capacity building and the dissemination of lessons learned. The REC will also promote the implementation of pilot projects on sustainable water resources management.

The main objectives of the WGS initiative are to:

- support the MENA region and its water stakeholders in advancing water management at national and local level while also shoring up regional cooperation and engagement and identifying viable tools and solutions;
- stimulate the more sustainable use of the region's water resources, stronger cooperation between pivotal actors, and a long-term approach to climate change adaptation;
- promote a comprehensive and integrated approach to water security and ecosystem services and raise awareness of the increasingly interrelated nature of our global resource systems and their impact on water sustainability;
- develop a framework programme within the WGS Initiative in line with the priorities of countries in the MENA region; and
- mobilise additional resources and partners to expand the established framework steered by the MENA region, and identify synergies with other on-going programmes and initiatives.

Milestones

Second Water, Growth and Stability conference, 2016

The second Water, Growth and Stability conference is planned for July 11–14, 2016, in Tunisia. Three WGS Initiative forums will be launched during the conference: the Municipality Forum, the Civil Society Organisations' Forum, and the Women's Forum.

World Water Week, Stockholm (WWW2016, August 28 – September 2)

The WGS Initiative will contribute to the MENA Focus Day during WWW2016 by exploring solutions to the water crisis in the MENA region, promoting water governance for sustainable growth, raising awareness of the SDGs through the Arab MDG+ Initiative, and organising the World Café 2016 on the theme of water, growth and stability. (www.worldwaterweek.org)

Budapest Water Summit 2016 (BWS2016, November 28–30)

The WGS Initiative will contribute to BWS2016 with a special focus on the MENA region at the Civil Society Forum and via other channels. (www.budapestwatersummit.hu)

Water, Growth and Stability 2017

The third Water, Growth and Stability conference is planned for April 17–20, 2017, in Jordan. The 2017 conference will showcase the results of the WATER SUM project and pave the way for a long-term framework programme for the MENA region.