

Summary Report
On
MENA Water World Cafe 2015
Water Governance (Group 1)

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Brief problem description:

Water demand in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region constantly increases due to population growth, agriculture and industry development, the impact of conflicts and refugee crisis, and other factors. The limited water resources are unable to satisfy human needs and the gap between the demand and supply is increasing, which becomes an important limitation for the social and economic development of the region.

Although considerable progress has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the targets to achieve improved access to key basic services during the first 15 years of this century will not be fully reached. MENA region remains among the most water-stressed in the world and the negative trends are accelerated by political instabilities and climate change.

The Water Governance issues in the MENA region are various, but mostly common for all of the countries. The key issues can be grouped as: Insufficient institutional skills in applying the IWRM approach and adaptation to climate change; Insufficient understanding how impacts of policy instruments in water management can affect the economy and growth; Limited application of the holistic approach in water policies and multi-sectorial involvement and coordination of roles and responsibilities; Hesitant transboundary cooperation in promoting sustainable and equitable development of a shared watercourse; Unsatisfactory cooperation, insufficient joint research actions and knowledge sharing.

To encourage better management and protection of water resources, many countries in the region have initiated water sector reforms, while engaging stakeholders in policy-making and decision-making processes. Therefore there are commonly accepted needs for the development and

empowerment of human resources at various levels, development of institutional and technical capacities, research and development acceleration and technologies transfer in water sector.

Objective:

To define water governance gaps in MENA region and propose sound and viable policy development and capacity building solutions.

Expected outcomes / questions for discussion:

1. How MENA countries can contribute to meet water related SDGs?
2. Water & food & energy nexus characteristics in MENA region
3. How to foster dialogue and build trust between decision makers concerning regulatory frameworks, infrastructure and services, and enhance the performance of responsible public authorities and their water operators?
4. Needs for strengthening knowledge transfer and skills development?

Discussion:

Round 1

- Participatory water governance needs strong legal basis, enabling the stakeholder's involvement and public consultation processes. This include also the improved public access to information, involvement of Environmental impact assessment or equivalent procedures;
- Institutional setup for water governance should reflect the natural river basin scale;
- Tunisian case: access to water is stipulated as human right in the new Constitution, however the translation in executory laws and bylaws is still a challenge. There is still a confusion between "access to water right" and "water for free" which is an obstacle for cost recovery; MARH remains the main responsible institution however certain level of decentralization of water governance in rural areas is achieved;
- Water sector is state subsidized in all MENA countries. Although cost recovery principle applies to water supply service, the big capital investments are left completely on state budgets;
- Armed conflicts have huge negative impacts on water governance by depriving water authorities in conflict areas, blocking transboundary cooperation and refugees influx to neighboring countries with all the consequences for water sector;
- Water supply and sanitation differ significantly in urban and rural areas;
- The associations for agricultural development in Tunis (GDA) have important role in water supply and irrigation in rural areas. However they possess only limited technical and administrative competencies and still need significant capacity building in spite of the already implemented projects;
- Recent political changes ("Arab spring") initiated rapid transformation of policy and institutional frameworks, which resulted in and unclear roles and responsibilities for water authorities. However, it also provide opportunities for regulatory improvements and introduction of democratic (participatory) processes;

Round 2

- Water governance in MENA region has to include transboundary and international coordination as the countries share common water resources;
- Non-conventional water resources (including reuse of wastewater) should be properly addressed in national policies;

- Increased role of private sector and business models for valuations of water are necessary;
- Water governance is part of the overall governance process and dependent on the democratic processes in the society. Improved accountability is necessary from both the government and the water users;
- There is a need to improve agriculture practices, and use high-value and water-efficient crops;
- Water supply is energy intensive due to dependence on ground waters, water conveyance, desalination and utilization of other non-conventional water resources;
- Water scarcity is key limiting factor for agriculture and nutrition. In the same time shift to water-efficient crops is limited by the strategic food security interest, especially in context of instability and conflicts;
- Citizens need improved access to information; awareness raising campaigns are needed to prepare people for dialogue with governments and participation in water governance;

Round 3

- In many countries the legal framework is modern but law enforcement is insufficient. Legal framework is uneven in the region;
- Agreement that momentum is existing for structural changes, however these changes must be evaluated in financial prospective;
- Water quality concerns are raising besides the traditional water scarcity issues;
- Water use associations have increasing role but appropriate incentives are needed;

Conclusions:

1. The new water related Sustainable Development Goals are highly relevant to MENA region. This is valid not only for the SDG 6, aiming primarily to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, but also in synergy with SDG 2 on food security, Goal 3 on human health, Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 7 on access to energy, and Goal 13 on climate change. Integration of water-related SDG's and targets into national water policies and horizontally in other sector plans is a forthcoming and challenging process.
2. Water, food and energy nexus in MENA region is characterised by energy-intensive water sector due to dependence on ground waters and non-conventional resources, and higher food security dependence on the already scarce water resources. In the same time the region is vulnerable to the climate change impacts and consequently would benefit from global energy decarbonisation.
3. The complexity of water governance and the promotion of IWRM approach pose the need for improved cooperation between water authorities and other stakeholders. Additionally, modalities for fostering dialogue and building trust between decision makers should be improved.
4. As the water governance involves different levels of decision-making and cooperation (local, national, regional), capacity building programs should cover broad range of target groups. However priority is given to the authorities, directly responsible for policy-making and water management, as well the water users and their associations.