

Wednesday , 14 October 18:00– 19:30

Iran Room

Water governance in the near east and North Africa: A policy debate on tenure, equity and gender

#50

ORGANIZERS

FAO (ESP, OPC, NRL and the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa)

Jordan

Civil Society Mechanism (as participants)

IFAD

International Water Management System (IWMI)

Abstract: This hands-on event will bring policy practitioners together to discuss about water governance in the NENA region. This exciting no-PowerPoint talk show will run the audience through practical cases that will trigger the plenary discussion. The side event aims to present evidence and good practices from applied policies in the region. Increasing scarcities and competing demands by a multiplicity of users and sectors make water governance for agriculture and food security particularly problematic in the NENA region, the most water scarce in the world. There is an urgent need to consider how issues of access to water can be tackled to ensure efficiency, equity and sustainability. The main topics analysed will be: the current water scarcity in the region; governance issues and how each constituency is participating in decision making; the equity situation in terms of access for both men and women; as well as how rural women’s access to water could be supported through targeted policies. Civil society will contribute through the Civil Society Mechanism Water Group. The NENA region will be represented by Jordan, who will present the latest on water policies; IFAD, FAO and IWMI will present their work on water governance and gender. South Africa will share experiences on gender-responsive water governance from Africa, which has the potential to be replicated in the NENA region.

KEYWORDS: Water scarcity and poverty , Governance in the Near East and North Africa , Gender equality , Rural women

Languages: EN,FR,SP,AR

Refreshments

Summary: The event provided the opportunity for an engaging discussion on the challenges related to the governance of water resources in North Africa and Near East, with a specific focus on gender equality, social inclusion, rights, and tenure. The interventions of the panellists, very relevant and stimulating, triggered an animated debate, mainly driven by the numerous questions from the audience. The experts shared and discussed experiences, lessons learned and good practices from the NENA Region, highlighting approaches and programmes that help promote inclusive governance systems and strengthen women’s control over water resources. Responsible investments are needed to bring about sustainable changes. Elements of success that were identified relate to building on political willingness and adequate incentives; mobilizing local champions; reaching out to the private sector; and empowering civil society to play its role. This hands-on debate helped clarify the role that different stakeholders (governments, civil society, development agencies, research institutions, private sector) can play in promoting inclusive and responsible water governance. It was emphasized that water access and use are not only influenced by infrastructure, rainfall and geography, but that social, political and economic power relations – including gender relations - are just as important. The panel therefore discussed the urgent need to prevent or redress existing power imbalances among different water users and decision-makers, as an essential means to ensure “good” and democratic governance of water resources. Implementing meaningful participation processes is essential to empower women to take on decision-making positions, including in relation to agricultural water use and management. From a gender perspective, the panel discussed the role institutions can play in providing women with better access to key natural resources (water and land, in particular) as well as with opportunities to fully exercise and benefit from these entitlements. The experts shared experiences and lessons learned from the field that had a positive impact on women’s participation in water management schemes and governance mechanisms. The importance of collecting further evidence and data on what works to improve women’s control over water resources in the specific context of agriculture and food security was repeatedly emphasized. "Women" tend always to be considered and depicted as a homogenous group. Research can play an important role in correcting this misleading idea: women constitute a diverse group, and face diverse challenges in relation to their access to resources, services and opportunities. Several interventions from the audience focused on climate change, its impact on natural resources and livelihood opportunities for both women and men in the NENA Region. The panel highlighted how climate change will create additional social tensions and imbalances within communities and societies, including further reinforcing existing gender inequalities.