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Updates on the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Background

1. At its 26th session (1-5 October 2018), the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) requested FAO to provide technical and policy assistance to countries, including through South-South Cooperation and innovative approaches, to enhance their involvement in WASAG activities. The Committee also requested FAO to report to COAG periodically on the progress of the partnership. Finally, the Committee requested FAO to develop an umbrella programme, including a funding strategy. All the above has been acted upon as included in the progress report to COAG on the implementation of the Resolutions of COAG 26¹.

2. While the understanding of water scarcity tends to be limited to physical water scarcity associated with drier and arid climates where competition for water is greater because of the limited supply, countries in wetter climate are more and more subjected to unpredictable rainfall patterns because of the irregularity of formerly predictable rainy seasons. In addition, extreme events, including droughts and mostly floods disrupt conventional water resources planning, causing at times important economic losses. All these, including lack of access to water because of sub optimal development of water infrastructure or deficient governance, are different facets of economic water scarcity, which considered together with physical water scarcity, affects more and more all countries, in the context of climate change. Water scarcity particularly affects the sustainable management of agriculture, including livestock. The poor, and especially women and youth are likely to be the most affected by increasing water scarcity. This justifies that all countries should be invited to be involved in WASAG's activities.

II. WASAG's work

3. Since the establishment of the 6 WASAG Working Groups (Water and Migration, Drought preparedness, Financing mechanisms, Water and nutrition, Sustainable Agriculture Water Use and Saline Agriculture), reviewed at the First International WASAG Forum (hosted by the Government of Cabo Verde, a WASAG partner, in Praia city in March 2019), the partnership has produced technical and policy guidance on water productivity improvements under water scarcity and a number of virtual information dissemination webinars due to COVID-19. Three webinars have been conducted, including a World Water Day message on Water and Climate Change focusing agriculture, with additional seven planned for this year².

4. As for country support, technical assistance was provided in form of Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) Project to Burundi, Djibouti and Rwanda on Reducing climate vulnerabilities of the agriculture sector and, currently under development with the Government of Cabo Verde, Climate smart agriculture in the face of saline groundwater intrusion and a persistent drought, with a scoping mission completed in December 2019.

5. WASAG is developing a Quinoa Programme in collaboration with the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD) with the contribution of four FAO regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Near East and North Africa) and technical divisions to target 18 countries. With the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and in collaboration with prospective partners on quinoa, a joint project proposal for submission to South-South Cooperation will be initiated.

6. WASAG visibility has been supported by partners and featured in several international events: The Stockholm World Water Week (25-30 August 2019); the Third World Irrigation Forum (Bali, Indonesia, 1-6 September 2019) with participation in a High Level Panel and a side event organized by WASAG partners; the COP 14 of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, a WASAG partner (New Delhi, India, 2- 13 September 2019); international symposium on Non-Conventional

¹ Implementation of the recommendations of the COAG 26th Session of the Committee (COAG/2020/3).

² Detailed information on the work of WASAG as well as the webinars is available at <http://www.fao.org/land-water/overview/wasag/en/>

Water for Food Security was hosted by the Government of Spain, a WASAG partner, in November 2019.

7. Other key WASAG Working Group activities involve the World Bank, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) on the financing framework for bridging financing gaps for Nationally Determined Contribution Agriculture projects which is targeted for publication in 2020. Similarly, work on water productivity and on nutrition will be published in 2020

8. Having developed the umbrella programme as reflected in the FAO Business Development Portfolio, efforts to implement the programme continue. The current Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture contribution to the Umbrella Programme, grant equivalent to USD 300 000, supported the WASAG activities to-date.

9. WASAG is also exploring how to develop a response to COVID-19 in the context of water scarcity in agriculture

III. Emerging perspectives

10. To date, WASAG has 68 partners who are involved in the above activities with a committed Steering Committee which meets 4 times a year. The support from Members was key in achieving all the above. A greater involvement and support from all Members will increase the impact of WASAG in contributing to food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture development, including livestock under a changing climate.

11. WASAG will continue to rely on the continued support and greater involvement of the Members in the activities of its Working Groups. In this respect, all Members are invited to become Partners in view of the fact that water scarcity, in its physical and economic dimensions, concerns all countries and requires concerted collaboration for sustainable solutions and impact.

12. WASAG is establishing synergies with the Global Programme on Sustainable Dryland Agriculture,³ for the development of resilient and sustainable agriculture in the context of water scarcity in a changing climate. In support to the four pillars of the Global Programme on Dryland Agriculture, expertise from the WASAG partners is relevant for sustainable water use, drought preparedness, agriculture in marginal lands, saline agriculture, promotion of underutilised crops, forages among others. The Global Programme could also build on the current support from members of WASAG and extend outreach to beneficiaries across countries, regional entities, river basin organizations, civil society organizations and local communities.

³ See discussion paper Towards a Global Programme on Sustainable Dryland Agriculture in collaboration with the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG), (COAG/2020/17)