



Tuesday 4 July, 12:30 -14:00

IRAQ Room - A 235

Addressing water scarcity and improving food security under climate change

Perspectives from the Near East and North Africa Region

Joint Side Event of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the League of Arab States

| Objective

The objective of this side event will be to gather perspectives and experiences from countries in addressing food security and water scarcity in the context of climate change, to discuss possible response options and to make recommendations to achieve higher and more sustainable food security levels under water scarcity in the Near East and North Africa Region and beyond.

| Synopsis

The Near East and North Africa is the region in the world that struggles the most with water issues. But water scarcity is a problem of global dimension and will become even more pressing in the coming decades. If not addressed properly, it could severely hamper efforts towards a world without hunger. Water is also at the center of the climate change adaptation debate. There is not a single issue related to climate change in agriculture that does not have a water dimension. As experts say: “If climate mitigation is all about energy, adaptation is all about water”.

Agriculture is the fulcrum of the water-food nexus: irrigation is by far the main user of freshwater in the world, with an average of 70% of all water withdrawals, reaching peaks of above 90% in many developing countries. It is critical to addressing both the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 on Zero Hunger, but also SDG 6 on Water for All. Sustainable and efficient water management practices in agriculture are therefore key to the success of the 2030 Agenda.

In order to address these issues, FAO has developed a Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity in the Near East, which supports the coordination of a Regional Collaborative Strategy, done in consultation with the League of Arab States and all main partners in the region.

On the basis of the success of the Regional Initiative, FAO launched the Global Framework for Action in a Changing Climate “Coping with water scarcity in agriculture” at COP 22 in Marrakesh in November 2016. Through this framework, FAO has committed to help developing a collaborative effort, based on good science, technology and governance, to address the critical issue of water and food security in a context of climate change.

| Background

In the Arab Region, per capita renewable water availability represents only 10 percent of the world average (about 600 m³ per person per year versus the world average of 6 000 m³). In the GCC sub region, the renewable water resources per person per year is less than 100 m³, an ‘absolute’ water scarcity level.

An unrestrained demand for water for agriculture in the region has led to groundwater over-drafting, to declines in water-quality and to land degradation- including salinization. Climate change is expected to compound these trends. Water scarcity, in a context of rapid population growth and urbanization, is also driving an increasing dependency on food imports, thus exposing the region to international food price volatility.

The impacts of water scarcity and climate change are being felt beyond agricultural production and food security and will affect economic growth, the environment and the societies as a whole. The ability of the region to achieve SDG goals 2 and 6 will hinge in large part on the implementation of a water reform agenda that can deliver sustainable management of agriculture water resources and adaptation of agriculture to climate change.

There are solutions. From the supply side, these include: the generation of new water, including through desalination; the treatment and reuse of waste water from the urban sector; rainfall/storm water harvesting; and more strategic and efficient management of staple food import and storage. From the demand side, the options are: reduction of food waste and losses; sustainable management of ground water use through decentralization of water management, the adoption of effective water allocation mechanisms, and the introduction of incentive mechanisms like water pricing; enhancement of irrigation water productivity; and the adoption of more sustainable, less water intensive diets.



Countries need to embark on more strategic planning of their water resources, taking account actual and future needs of the competing sectors: agriculture, domestic water supply, tourism, industry, ecosystems, and considering the impact of climate change. Notwithstanding the various existing solutions, a greater economic regional integration between Arab countries is the foundation for long-term sustainable development and food security. Inter-regional exchanges are also critical. In countries and communities that face water scarcity, innovative solutions are being designed and tested. Partnership and collaboration is therefore key to addressing the rising water scarcity problem across regions and continents.

| Draft Agenda

Item	Person/People
Welcome	Moderator (Director AOAD)
Opening Statement	Director-General FAO
Opening Statement	Secretary General LAS
Presentation of the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative	ADG RNE
Discussion: Experiences and Perspectives from the countries, and implications for global action.	Ministers, Representatives
Concluding Remarks	Deputy Director-General Natural Resources