

Water Governance in the MENA Region: Critical Issues and the Way Forward

Policy Brief



on behalf of:
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In cooperation with:



in  **Went**

Capacity Building International
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Policy Brief

Water Governance in the Mena Region: Critical Issues and the Way Forward

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Water Governance: a critical Issue in the MENA Region

In the Middle East and North Africa, an area that often suffers from seasonal and annual aridity, some of the most important challenges that are to be faced during the 21st century is the rapid population growth, increasing urbanisation, and rising demand for food.

The demographic changes have put immense stresses on the water institutions of the region as water demands have increased exponentially. Consequently, many water institutions have effectively operated in a “crisis mode” for much of the second half of the 20th century. Their main objective has been to provide as much water to as many people as possible in the shortest possible

time. This has inevitably meant that there has been a tendency to consider short-term solutions rather than pursuing a policy of nationwide planning and management of the water resources which can ensure long-term efficient management. Under these conditions, the general performance of the water institutions has been consistently sub-optimal.

Regarding the agricultural sector, for most MENA countries, this sector is now contributing a low and declining percentage of the national GDP. Unfortunately, most water institutions have only recognised this fact in recent years and, as yet, few have done anything about it.



A worrying trend is that sometimes service and industrial sectors, which may account for 75% of the total GDP of these countries, often face water shortages, as the urban centres receive unreliable and interrupted water supplies. The impacts of these unreliable water supplies on the national economy and health are very significant, and yet very limited investigations have been undertaken by the water institutions to understand and appreciate the implications on the national economy and quality of life of the people.

The water sector incorporates activities from the small to the large scale, carried out by a range of different organisations and individuals. However, the growth of nation states in the MENA Region during the 20th century has meant that the water sector is controlled and managed by government organisations. In spite of this development, the range and performance of institutions within the water sector varies widely from one MENA country to another. In addition, coordination and interactions between different water-related institutions in anyone country leave much to be desired. Rivalries between different water institutions are common, especially as their responsibilities are not always clearly established. The net result is often inefficient delivery of water services.

Because of the above and other related factors, reform of the water sector institutions is urgently needed. Many MENA countries have already initiated a reform process, which requires clearly enunciated and implementable guidelines, improved institutional performance, good governance practices, and

ensuring national, regional and international cooperation. Participation of all concerned stakeholders is another essential requirement for efficient water management. This includes capacity building at all levels, and empowerment of the public and private sectors as well as community organisations so that they all contribute to the overall improvement of the water sector.

It is a fact that water availability is extremely scarce in the MENA Region. These resources must be managed efficiently on a long-term basis and therefore water governance is essential for the Region. Since it is the governmental institutions the ones responsible for water management, they have to improve very significantly their governance and management practices. A major constraint for this has been the availability of trained and experienced personnel at all levels in the water sector. Accordingly, education, capacity building, training and organisational developments constitute an essential cornerstone to pursue good management and governance-related practices for the water sector in the MENA Region.

The InWEnt Capacity Building Programme for the Water Sector for the MENA Region

InWEnt - Capacity Building International, acting on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has formulated a four-year Programme on Capacity Building in the Water Sector for the MENA Region, focusing on eight countries: Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. The regional partner for this programme has been the Arab Water Council.

The main objectives of the overall programme include strengthening regional cooperation; facilitate the development of management strategies for the water sector in selected countries within the MENA Region in order to formulate and implement appropriate water sector reforms; establish a functional partner network; and promote awareness of policy-makers and the general public on water-related issues.

The outputs of the programme include, but are not necessarily limited to, improving the institutional performance, increasing the awareness of policy-makers of the priority issues involved, and support the development of a functional network on water issues within the Region.

The InWEnt approach is focused on the implementation of a series of activities such as dissemination of regionally-relevant and up-to-date professional knowledge and

methodical competence; capacity building needs assessment and how these needs can be met in a cost-effective and timely manner; and periodic monitoring and evaluation of progress made. It also includes public relations, public awareness, and promotion of best practices in communities, and overall, regional cooperation through internal funds, third-party funds, and partner projects.

The present four-year programme consists of a number of training events and seminars as well as three interrelated International Fora on:

- I. [Water Governance in the MENA Region: The Current Situation](#). Sana'a, Yemen, 16-20 July 2006.
- II. [Water Governance in the MENA Region: Critical Issues and the Way Forward](#). Cairo, 23-27 June 2007; and
- III. [Water Future to 2025 for the MENA Region: How to Act and How to Proceed?](#) Marrakesh, Morocco, 9-13 June 2008.

First International Forum in Sana'a, Yemen

The first international Forum on Water Governance in the MENA Region: The Current Situation, took place at Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 16 – 20 July 2006 and was hosted by the Yemen Ministry of Water and Environment. It was supported by the Yemeni-German Technical Cooperation Water Sector Programme.

The objectives of this Forum were the following:

- carry out critical reviews of the water management situation in the MENA Region and analyses of trends and future outlooks;
- review experiences and identify key issues of water governance;
- assess and prioritize appropriate key elements for water governance;
- identify needs and future directions of capacity building strategies for improved water governance; and
- strengthen regional cooperation and networking processes.

The concept of governance appeared to be somewhat new for an appreciable number of the participants. Accordingly, the participants were brought to a common level of knowledge and understanding on the concept which proved to be essential and productive.

An array of governance issues was identified to be common throughout the MENA Region.

The most important issues identified were:

- strong fragmentation of the sector;
- problems with institutional set-up, in particular unclear roles of the different actors as well as coordination problems;
- notable shortcomings in enforcement of laws and policies;
- shortage of funding and release of funds in a timely manner;
- need for increasing use of economic instruments and involvement of the private sector;
- crisis management rather than long-term management;
- need to shift the focus from physically increasing water supply to water demand management;
- scarcity and non-sustainable use of water, including growing water quality problems;
- contrasts between traditional and modern water management practices which has led to abandonment of traditional methods;
- needs for further decentralization;



- need to increase reuse and water conservation;
- technological shortcomings;
- insufficient data and information, particularly in terms of reliability, accessibility and sharing;
- public awareness; and
- capacity building requirements at all levels.

While the levels of relevance and importance of these identified factors vary throughout the region, they appear to be applicable to all the MENA countries.

It was recognised that whereas water resources are extremely scarce in the MENA Region, the water problems are dominantly related to governance and management shortcomings. Human resources deficiencies thus a key part of the water scarcity problem. There-

fore, education, capacity building, training and organisational development constitute a cornerstone for the development of the water sector in the MENA Region.

For the next Forum, the participants requested a focus on new policy concepts within the topics of water governance and capacity building and related case studies. Participants also committed, on behalf of their institutions, to provide support on capacity-building related activities.

With its four-year programme, InWent plans to support national and regional institutions to develop their own strategies in terms of capacity building, including the necessary human, technical and financial assistance. In partnerships with the countries concerned, the next step will be how to make the best use of this development support.

Second International Forum in Cairo, Egypt

The Second International Forum on Water Governance in the MENA Region: Critical Issues and the Way Forward, took place in Cairo, Egypt, 23 – 27 June 2007 and was hosted by the Egypt Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation.

The objectives of this Forum were the following:

- familiarise the participants with the findings and outcomes of the Sana'a Forum;
- analyse in-depth the critical issues that were identified by the participants during the Sana'a Forum, including opportunities and constraints;
- identify appropriate approaches and concepts to overcome constraints and to build on opportunities;
- strengthen regional co-operation and networking.

65 leading experts from the water sector, mainly from the Region, attended the exercise. Participants also included a few leading experts from outside the region who analysed latest development on different aspects of water governance from a global framework and perspective and presented relevant experiences for consideration for the MENA Region. A set of plenary lectures on relevant topics were included in the programme.

The Cairo Forum builds in essence to the outcomes of the Sana'a Forum. Four focal areas were chosen for detailed investigation and discussion in working groups. They were:

- Law and enforcement
- Institutional performance
- Economic issues
- Water quality management

A common cross-cutting theme throughout the Forum was “prerequisites and respective needs for capacity building”. The participants also paid special attention to the opportunities to enhance the regional co-operation.

Legal and institutional aspects that were discussed in the workshops focused on constraints, challenges and opportunities, and were based on personal, sectoral and country experiences and view-points. Even though legal and institutional aspects are intertwined, they were viewed separately with the objective to have more time to analyse them as specifically or as generally as considered by the participants.

Critical Issues and the Way Forward

It is clear from the outset, that the water sector challenges are notable and growing. But it is not equally generally recognised that these challenges are primarily related to governance problems and not solely to physical scarcity. Equally important is to understand that factors inside as well as outside the water sector are important, and that the water sector does not develop in a vacuum, but instead it is an intrinsic and important part of a more general development process.

All in all, water related challenges are notable and rapidly growing in the MENA Region countries. It has become obvious that a deep-going water sector reform is necessary. Institutions and organisations need profound reform. Organisations and their staff must function in an efficient, adaptive and coordinated manner.

All this can be done provided there is political will and commitment from all actors. This will not be a trivial task but, instead will be necessary, in order to achieve the visions developed by the four working groups of the Cairo Forum. It was striking to see how deeply interlinked the four visions were, none of them being isolated from each other.

They are components of the same game, they must evolve hand in hand, and as unfortunate as it is, in games such as this one, the worst performer typically defines the success or the lack of success of the totality.

Capacity building and human resources development (including organisational development) is one of the most important building blocks, if not the most important one, in developing the water sector governance in MENA countries. Only then will be meet the vast challenges that the waters sector in MENA countries are exposed to and will increasingly be exposed to.

Political will is necessary for performing the reforms needed to achieve the visions produced by the working groups and creating public awareness may help in enhancing political will. Even though there was no working group on public participation, this topic was mentioned very much by all groups as a prerequisite for economic, legal and institutional issues, as well as water quality related matters, to be able to be implemented in the extent they are necessary.

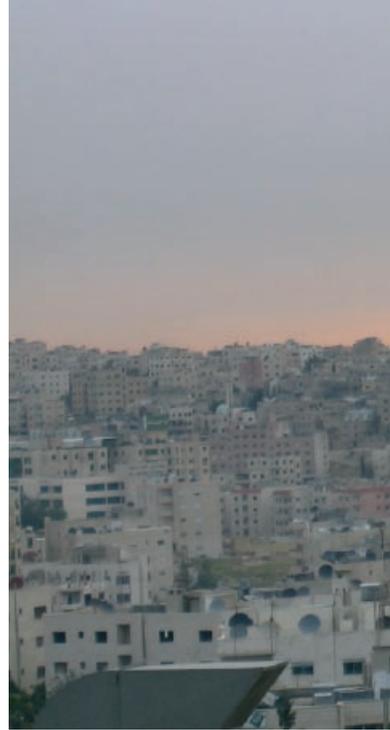
It was discussed that there is increasing stakeholder participation in the MENA Region mainly at the level of non-central governments, private sector and agricultural users. In general, the participation of societal actors such as organised civil society groups, including NGOs, is still in its very early stages. There were very concrete examples of how processes of stakeholder participation in Morocco and Yemen have rendered, and are rendering, very positive results in spite of their complexity.

The conclusions in the four main priority areas can be summarised as follows:

Law and enforcement. The working group on law and implementation characterized the challenges, drawing upon various national experiences, as well as some ways that they have been able to be developed with varying degrees of success the key aspects.

Following a description of a general vision for improving water laws and enforcement in the region, the working group elaborated a series of concrete activities that would help to address the various aspects. The activities include developing a network to share experiences, assessing the current status and appropriateness of the legal systems in the region, including their implementation, legislative and regulatory drafters, and developing a water law curriculum that could be institutionalized in existing capacity building institutions (including universities, judicial academies, and specialized water training centres). Other proposed activities, such as case studies on addressing fragmentation and coordination, could be stand-alone activities or they could be integrated into the other activities (e.g., the water law and regulation toolkit).

Most of these activities could be undertaken at the regional level to assist national initiatives. Some activities, such as periodic assessments of needs and effectiveness, would be primarily, if not exclusively, at the national level.



Institutional performance. The water sector reform in the MENA countries leans very much on the level of success in reforming and developing proper institutional arrangements. The need to develop and reform institutions is vast, and exchange of regional experience and visions is crucial and vital.

There is a need to first define the necessary policies to set the frame. These policies have to be based on the legal water framework. Specific policies that were mentioned: PSP (Public Sector Participation, specifically Public Private Partnership), benchmarking policies, water using bodies, coordination mechanisms, representation and role of each body, specifically of a regulatory body. By-laws, instructions and procedures have to be derived from the set policies, and the organisational landscape has to be structured to facilitate the implementation.



The group expects high internal as well as external resistances (see results from Phase 2). To face specifically internal resistances, the group advises that all parties should be involved in the various stages. The change must be stepwise and in a transparent manner and has to go parallel with the development of human resources.

To enhance political will and avoid cheating by any party involved, there should be a neutral body which has no interest and who facilitates the process of restructuring and change. A common platform for exchange of information was suggested to ensure dissemination and transparency.

Economic issues. The working group strongly endorsed the widening application of economic instruments in the water sector. Main points raised in the working group discussion were:

- Conflicts between charging a price for water and religious and social values.
- Elimination of agricultural subsidies that have the effect of promoting water consumption.
- Difficulties in recovering costs for wastewater treatment from residential users.

An important consensus was reached around the following most critical aspects:

- Developing a dynamic system for improved water allocation.
- Promoting the use of non-conventional resources and water saving technology of practices.

- Increasing the sustainability of water supply systems by increasing cost recovery.
- Developing alternatives to capital investment (other than public investment).

That consensus was a must in order to develop a common platform among the participants that will help greatly in developing a common realistic vision toward 2020.

Water quality management. The water quality working group pointed out that the future working environment of the water quality managers is strongly preconditioned by the achievement of the visions of the three other working groups. The following is a list of issues and aspects that were considered the main entry points for addressing water quality challenges as identified by the working group:

- The first main point was about data. This issue includes monitoring, collection, analysis and dissemination.
- The second issue was water quality as a national priority which was changed during the discussion to a strategy to alleviate (minimize) the adverse effects of pollution
- The third issue was infrastructure including organisational reform, availability of equipment, training needed, human resources development, etc.
- The fourth issue was waste management technology as well as public awareness and education as an integrated part of the establishment and enforcement of environmental regulations.

Epilogue. The MENA water sector governance is thus under a many-dimensional pressure of paradigm and focal change. Under these conditions, capacity building has the potential to help policy-makers inside and outside the governments to understand how best to find a balance between public good and special interests; to assess long and short term impacts of water policies, programmes and activities; and then to get the best out of the strengths of players in water management processes.

The process that started in Sana'a with an analysis of the current situation on water governance in the MENA Region, and continued in Cairo with the discussions of the critical issues and the way forward, will reach





its conclusion in Marrakesh with the formulation of most suitable and implementable visions for the region.

Governance of the water sector must take into consideration the continual changes, both from within the water sector and those outside the sector which affect the water sector and on which water professionals have limited control. The success of any long-term vision on water governance for the MENA Region will thus require proper understanding of the immense challenges and changes that are likely to be faced in the coming years and also defining the ways in which these can be best understood and addressed for the overall socio-economic benefit of the region. This will not be an easy task, but one that must be undertaken.

Arab Water Council

The Arab Water Council (AWC) was formally launched on 14 April 2004 in Cairo, Egypt following many years of planning, discussions, and consultations. The council is a civil society, not-for-profit, regional organisation dedicated to water issues in the Arab States. An interim General Secretariat has been established in Cairo.

The mission of the AWC is the following:

- promote better understanding and management of the water resources in the Arab States in a multi-disciplinary, non-political, professional and scientific manner; and
- disseminate knowledge, enhance sharing of experience and information for the rational and comprehensive water resources development of the region for the benefits of its inhabitants.

The Founding Assembly elected Dr Mahmoud Abu-Zeid as the President of the Council and requested him to chair the Founding Committee, which has the tasks of, inter alia, completing the organisational structure of the AWC, formalising its constitution, continuing the broadening of the membership, and preparation to hold the meeting of the First General Assembly. The Founding Assembly met in Cairo and included some 400 experts, scientists, professionals and individuals with interest in water issues from seventeen countries of the Arab States.



InWEnt

InWEnt – Qualified to Shape the Future

InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany, is a non-profit organisation with worldwide operations dedicated to human resource development, advanced training and dialogue.

InWEnt works together with people in key positions, assisting them in shaping change processes in their own countries. Our capacity building programmes are directed at experts and executives from politics, administration, the business community, and civil society. InWEnt qualifies people who pass on their knowledge, thereby working towards long-term, structural change.

Our Clients

As an organisation of international cooperation, we are commissioned by the German federal government, the German business sector, and the German Länder or federal states and make an important contribution to an equitable and sustainable development. 60 percent of all our programmes are implemented at the request of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In addition, we conduct programmes for other German federal ministries. We are also working in cooperation with German companies in public private partnership projects.

On an international level, InWEnt works together with the European Union, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, and the United Nations.

Our Programmes

The programmes for people from developing, transition and industrialised countries are tailored to meet the specific needs of our partners. InWEnt offers practice-oriented advanced education and training, dialogue sessions, and e-Learning courses through our own internet platform Global Campus 21®. After the training programmes, our participants continue their dialogue with each other and with InWEnt via active alumni networks.

InWEnt provides support for the activities of the German business sector in developing and transition countries. We are increasingly focusing on the successful model of public private partnerships (PPP) that can be designed to incorporate economic, social, and environmental goals.

InWEnt also prepares experts from the field of international cooperation for their time abroad. By offering exchange programmes and arranging scholarship programmes, InWEnt thus provides young Germans with the opportunity to gain professional experience abroad.

Our Offices

InWEnt gGmbH is headquartered in Bonn. In addition, InWEnt maintains fourteen Regional Centres throughout the German Länder, providing convenient points of contact for all regions. Our foreign operations in Beijing, Cairo, Hanoi, Kiev, Lima, Managua, Manila, Moscow, New Delhi, Pretoria, São Paulo, and Tanzania are usually affiliated with other organisations of German Development Cooperation.



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