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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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NEWS RELEASE

Effective Management of Water Resources in Arab World Key to Future Growth and Stability

New report outlines risks associated with region's water challenges and the policies needed to address them.

STOCKHOLM, 28 August 2018 – Water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region can either be a destabilizing factor or a motive that binds communities together, according to a new joint report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank, with the difference determined by the policies adopted to cope with the growing challenge.

The report, ***Water Management in Fragile Systems: Building Resilience to Shocks and Protracted Crises in The Middle East and North Africa*** warns that instability combined with poor water management can become a vicious cycle that further exacerbates social tensions, while emphasizing that the actions needed to break the cycle can also be essential elements for recovery and consolidating stability.

Launched today during a special session focused on MENA at the World Water Week conference in Stockholm, Sweden, the report calls for a shift away from current policies focused on increasing supplies toward long-term management of water resources. Ineffective policies have left both the region's people and communities exposed to the impacts of water scarcity, growing ever more severe as a result of rising demand and climate change. More than 60% of the region's population is concentrated in places affected by high or very high surface water stress, compared to a global average of about 35%. If left unchecked, climate-related water scarcity is expected to cause economic losses estimated at 6 to 14% of Gross Domestic Product by 2050, the highest in the world.

“Economic losses mean rising unemployment, compounded by the impact of water scarcity on traditional livelihoods such as agriculture,” said **Pasquale Steduto, FAO Regional Programme Coordinator for the Near East and North Africa** and co-lead author of the report, *“the result can be food insecurity and people forced to migrate, along with growing frustrations with governments unable to guarantee basic services, which risks becoming another driver of the region's widespread instability. The good news is that actions can be taken to prevent water scarcity and instability from becoming a vicious cycle, by focusing on sustainable, efficient and equitable water resources management and service delivery.”*

A balanced approach will be needed that addresses the short-term impacts of water scarcity while investing in longer-term solutions, including the adoption of new technologies, as the basis for sustainable growth. An FAO project in Iraq is supporting resilience to drought by providing cash-for-work to internally displaced people and refugees. A World Bank financed water-treatment plant in Gaza aims to reverse years of neglect due to instability with the reliable supply of safe drinking water and the gradual replenishment of the aquifer with treated water. In Egypt, 10 percent of agricultural water is recycled drainage water, while Morocco plans to install more than 100,000 solar pumps for irrigation by 2020.

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“Water scarcity always has both a local dimension, as it directly impacts communities, and a regional one, as water resources cross borders,” said **Anders Jagerskog, World Bank Senior Water Resources Management Specialist** and report co-lead author. *“Addressing water scarcity is an opportunity to empower local communities to develop their own local consensus on strategies for addressing the challenge. At the same time, it is a motivation for strengthening regional cooperation in the face of a common problem.”*

More than half of all surface water in the region are transboundary, and all the countries share at least one aquifer. The long history of shared water management in the region demonstrates how water offers an opportunity to bring people together to solve complex challenges related to the allocation and delivery of water. Consultations at the local level coupled with the restoration of water services, can help rebuild the bond of trust between citizens and the government. Regional partnerships to manage shared resources is a step toward greater regional integration. The report emphasizes that while the policies are critical for effective water management, they are also vital contributions to long-term stability.

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Notes to Editors

About FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Headquartered in Rome, Italy and operating in over 130 countries, it provides development assistance aimed at strengthening agriculture, forestry and fisheries, improving nutrition, and reducing poverty. FAO focuses special attention on developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry.

For more information about FAO and its work visit www.fao.org/neareast

About World Bank

The World Bank Group has set two goals for the world to achieve by 2030: End extreme poverty by decreasing the percentage of people living on less than \$1.90 a day to no more than 3%; and Promote shared prosperity by fostering the income growth of the bottom 40% for every country. The World Bank is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. We are not a bank in the ordinary sense but a unique partnership to reduce poverty and support development. The World Bank Group comprises [five institutions](#) managed by their member countries.

For more information about the World Bank visit <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do>

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