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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**REPORT**

**ON THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING TO REVIEW AND PROMOTE  
WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION POLICIES AND RELATED  
ORGANIZATIONAL REFORMS IN WESTERN ASIA  
CAIRO, 15 JULY 2008**

**Summary**

In response to the recommendations laid out in the Compendium of Actions issued by the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a high-level meeting to review the "Regional Assessment Report on the Status and Achievements of ESCWA Member Countries Towards Improved Water Supply and Sanitation."

The meeting was held on 15 July 2008 in parallel to the League of Arab States (LAS) meeting of the Arab ministers responsible for water resources, both of which were organized at the LAS headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting was organized with the support of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and in partnership with LAS. The purpose of the meeting was to present the findings and recommendations of the draft report, to discuss the appropriateness of the recommendations with member countries, to approve its dissemination and to ensure approval of its submission to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) for inclusion in events aimed at capping the 2008 International Year of Sanitation.

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## **Introduction**

1. In adopting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the nations of the world pledged to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. However, progress in meeting this goal has been slow and uneven and, therefore, radical change and swift action are of utmost necessity. To this end, the Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation was established by the Secretary-General to provide guidance on how best to expedite the achievement of the water and sanitation targets of the MDGs. The Board formulated an action plan consisting of a Compendium of Actions that aims at facilitating the achievement of these targets.

2. In order to support this effort, the Water and Environment Team of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a High-level Meeting on 15 June 2008, as a parallel session to the League of Arab States (LAS) meeting of Arab ministers responsible for water resources at the LAS headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting was organized with the support of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and in partnership with LAS. During the meeting, participants were invited to comment on the draft study entitled "Regional Assessment Report on the Status and Achievements of ESCWA Member Countries towards Improved Water Supply and Sanitation," which was prepared by ESCWA.

3. The findings of the report were presented, together with suggested policy options and proposed institutional and legislative reforms. The feedback and recommendations of the participants, summarized below, were incorporated into the final assessment report for submission to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), inclusion in the joint United Nations publication summarizing events and outcomes of the 2008 International Year of Sanitation, and preparation of the Secretary-General's report to the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly.

4. The structure of the meeting allowed for in-depth discussions and sharing of experience while facilitating the reaching of a consensus and a common position for all ESCWA member countries. The main aim of the meeting was to:

- (a) Review the status of the water supply and sanitation component in the ESCWA region;
- (b) Conduct an analysis of the current situation (gaps, challenges, constraints and opportunities);
- (c) Propose policy options to expedite the achievements of MDGs (policy, institutional arrangements and proposed reforms);
- (d) Discuss and suggest appropriate recommendations.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. Following presentation of the draft report, a number of valuable comments, suggestions and recommendations were offered by participants based on their respective experiences. In particular, it was noted the success of Bahrain in reducing the domestic consumption of water through a well-planned public awareness and advocacy campaign. It was also pointed out that engaging stakeholders in planning exercises improves the ability of water and sanitation suppliers to provide services at adequate levels to a larger share of the population and can improve consumption patterns.

6. A number of participants pointed out the need for coordinated efforts in the water supply and sanitation field both at national and regional levels. Even though coordination among the various entities responsible for water issues within one country remained difficult, the need to coordinate among countries remained high. The benefits of decentralizing certain services were also highlighted as it was felt that local water operators could respond more quickly and appropriately to local conditions than outside operators.

7. Participants also pointed out the need for capacity-building initiatives throughout the region. Country representatives expressed their interest in learning about success stories from neighbouring countries, especially those with similar climatic, cultural and institutional conditions. They also expressed their wish to learn more about advanced technological solutions in the water supply and sanitation sector and ways to improve scientific research in this field.

8. Participants suggested that working groups or study groups be established both within countries and between countries in order to encourage the exchange of information and experiences. In response to this suggestion, it was noted that both the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) and the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET) have already created or are creating working groups for this purpose.

## **II. THEMATIC SESSIONS**

9. Three presentations were given by ESCWA during the meeting, each of which was followed by discussions to elicit the feedback of participants on specific topics. Overall, the participants agreed with the findings and recommendations of the presentations and the report.

10. The first presentation reviewed the status of each member country in meeting the MDG targets on water supply and sanitation. The analysis grouped countries into four categories according to their levels of gross domestic product (GDP), urbanization, and conflict status in addition to their ability to provide water supply and sanitation services. It was noted that most countries have fairly high levels of achievement in water supply and sanitation but that large disparities exist between urban and rural areas, the latter having a far lower percentage of the population to be served. Common economic and social constraining factors were also provided.

11. The second presentation analysed the results of a survey on management practices and provided explanations for the results obtained. The five major areas that were explored included policies and strategies, institutional set-ups, legislative and regulatory mechanisms, stakeholder participation and private sector participation. The findings show that most countries are introducing institutional reforms within an integrated water resources management (IWRM) framework and are working on building capacity in water supply and sanitation. Public awareness is being raised in most countries, but to date little has been achieved in improving the role of women in water supply and sanitation or in promoting the involvement of the private sector in most countries. The survey also showed that donor-supported investments are fairly significant in countries not pertaining to the Gulf Cooperation Council.

12. The third presentation was geared towards presenting policy options and facilitating discussions on the best way forward for ESCWA member countries to achieve the MDG targets related to water supply and sanitation. In brief, the recommendations presented called for:

- (a) Mainstreaming access to water supply and sanitation into national IWRM plans;
- (b) Prioritizing domestic drinking water among the various competing uses;
- (c) Improving wastewater treatment and reuse;
- (d) Reducing water loss;
- (e) Protecting drinking water quality;
- (f) Upscaling delivery of water supply and sanitation in urban and peri-urban areas;
- (g) Upscaling delivery of water supply and sanitation in rural areas;
- (h) Strengthening monitoring of water supply and sanitation systems;
- (i) Strengthening the financial positions of water supply and sanitation utilities.

### **III. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

13. The meeting was attended by 59 participants from 11 ESCWA member countries, three Maghreb countries, United Nations regional organizations, several specialized regional organizations, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), as well as representatives from the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany (BGR). The Minister of Water and Environment of Yemen and the Minister of Water Resources of Algeria participated, as well as a number of high-level Government representatives and water specialists from the region.

14. The meeting was held on 15 June 2008, as a parallel session to the LAS meeting of Arab Ministers responsible for water resources at LAS headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting consisted of two substantive sessions in addition to the opening and concluding sessions. The meeting was organized by the Water and Environment Team in the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division at ESCWA with the support of GTZ and in partnership with LAS.

### **IV. MEETING EVALUATION**

15. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to all attendees in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the meeting. The feedback received was positive. All attendees rated the overall quality of the meeting as good or excellent, except for one attendee who rated the meeting as poor. The participant who rated the meeting as poor commented that the meeting could have benefited from advanced technical and scientific experts in the subject area.

16. The majority of participants found that the workshop met its objectives and expectations. Nearly all participants rated the preparation of the meeting as good, though a number of comments suggested that the report and related materials should have been sent earlier to allow participants to better prepare for the meeting. Most participants found the material relevant to both their expertise and the expertise of other experts. The usefulness of the meeting was deemed good by most participants. The clarity and quality of the written material circulated and the organizational arrangements were all deemed good to excellent with only a very small number of participants thinking otherwise. The duration of the meeting was considered acceptable.

17. Most participants called for follow-up actions to the meeting. Many participants requested the preparation and dissemination of a meeting report, including a summary of the recommendations discussed during the meeting. A few participants indicated the need for capacity-building programmes so that they could implement the proposed recommendations. A couple of participants expressed their wish to hold a follow-up meeting in mid-2009 to re-evaluate progress made towards achieving the MDGs. Another participant wanted more contact with experts in the region in order to exchange knowledge and technical expertise.

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## Annex II

### **PROGRAMME OF WORK**

- 9:30 – 10:00      **Opening statements**
- LAS
  - Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Development (welcoming note)
  - ESCWA
- 10:00 – 11:00      **Session 1: Status and Analysis of Water Supply and Sanitation in ESCWA Region**
- Chairperson  
Speaker 1: Mr. Paul Hanna (ESCWA)  
Speaker 2: Mr. Hosny Khordagui (ESCWA)
- 11:00 – 11:30      **Coffee Break**
- 11:30 – 12:00      **Session 2: Suggested Policy Options, Institutional and Legislative Reforms**
- Chairperson  
Speaker: Mr. Hosny Khordagui (ESCWA)
- 12:00 – 13:00      **Discussion**
- 13:00 – 14:00      **Recommendations and concluding remarks**
- Chairperson
- 14:30                **Lunch at the Nile Hilton Hotel**
- 19:00                **Dinner reception at Nile Pharaon (boat cruise)**