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

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**Integrated water resources management in the Arab region****Progress achieved in implementing the Regional Initiative for Establishing  
a Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access  
to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region (MDG+ initiative)****Summary**

The Regional Initiative for Establishing a Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region (MDG+ Initiative) is an outcome of a series of resolutions adopted by the Arab Ministerial Water Council requesting the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to lead the establishment of such a regional coordination mechanism in consultation and coordination with an advisory board, which comprises representatives from ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, the Arab Water Council and the Arab Network for Environment and Development. The World Health Organization was also consulted during the inception and implementation of the Initiative.

The present report reviews activities undertaken by ESCWA to implement the Initiative and future steps and measures to achieve its desired objectives. It also evaluates the benefits of implementing the Initiative in terms of the current negotiations on the related sustainable development goals and post-2015 development agenda.

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## Introduction

1. The Millennium Development Goals include two indicators to measure access to improved water supply and sanitation services; however, those indicators did not clearly cover the availability and quality of these services. To address the issue, the Arab Ministerial Water Council invited the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to lead the Regional Initiative for Establishing a Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region (MDG+ Initiative), which includes indicators that are specific to the Arab region to measure water supply and sanitation services.
2. The period for achieving the Millennium Development Goals expires in December 2015. The results of the MDG+ Initiative will help to support the transition to the period beyond 2015. ESCWA and the Arab regional stakeholders will ensure that the institutional and technical lessons learned from the implementation of the Initiative will contribute to the ongoing process of formulation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

### I. ADDITIONAL INDICATORS FOR WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

3. The MDG+ Initiative builds upon the two MDG indicators and includes additional indicators, listed in the table below, to measure access to water supply and sanitation services.

Water supply	Sanitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water consumption</li> <li>• Continuity of supply</li> <li>• Water quality</li> <li>• Distance to source</li> <li>• Tariff structure</li> <li>• Affordability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treated quantity</li> <li>• Treatment type</li> <li>• Reuse</li> <li>• Reuse type</li> <li>• Tariff structure</li> <li>• Affordability</li> </ul>

4. These additional indicators were discussed with partners and adopted by the Arab Ministerial Water Council at its third session, held on 15 June 2011. The Council resolution requests ESCWA to lead the implementation of the Initiative in consultation with the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, the Arab Water Council, the Arab Network for Environment and Development and WHO, under the auspices of the Arab Ministerial Water Council.

### II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE MDG+ INITIATIVE

5. The principle objectives of the Initiative are: enhancing regional and national monitoring capacities; establishing a regional data management platform; developing a regional monitoring programme; and strengthening regional dialogue on the post-2015 SDGs. These objectives will be implemented through a series of activities with funding provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The following sections review progress in implementing these activities.

#### A. FORMING THE ADVISORY BOARD AND APPOINTING NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

6. The Initiative's Advisory Board was formed at the start of the implementation process. It comprises representatives from ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), the Arab Water Council, the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe and the Arab Network for Environment and Development. The Advisory Board holds regular meetings in conjunction with the sessions of the Arab Ministerial Water Council and workshops organized in the framework of the Initiative.

7. In several of its resolutions, the Arab Ministerial Water Council has called upon States to appoint national focal points and form national teams to monitor the implementation of the Initiative. To date, the following 18 States have appointed national focal points: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Moreover, these States, except Lebanon, have formed 17 national monitoring teams. Somalia had expressed its desire to appoint a national focal point and follow-up team but the process has been delayed because of the security situation in the country. Djibouti and the Comoros have not yet responded to the Council's invitation. No reply has been received from the Syrian Arab Republic because of the ongoing crisis.

8. It should be noted that the responsibilities of data collection and questionnaire completion are not limited to the national focal points, but also extend to members of national monitoring teams supervised by national focal points. National teams should be chaired by a representative of the national body responsible for water services, with the vice-chair being a representative of the national member of ACWUA Board of Directors. A representative of the national statistical office should also be part of the team.

#### B. CAPACITY-BUILDING

9. ESCWA prepared a manual to facilitate the work of national monitoring teams by standardizing data collection and analysis mechanisms and methods for calculating indicators. It has also developed an e-tool to standardize data entry methods, which aggregated data inputs.

10. ESCWA held the first workshop on the Initiative at the United Nations House in Beirut, from 21 to 23 May 2013,<sup>\*</sup> which aimed at standardizing definitions, concepts, data collection mechanisms and methods for calculating the MDG+ indicators in all Arab countries, in preparation for the issuance of reports to the Arab Ministerial Water Council. The workshop included presentations on the following tools: the global mechanism to monitor progress in achieving the MDG target on access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation through the Joint Monitoring Programme of WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and methods for calculating the additional MDG+ indicators, and monitoring the implementation process. Participants reviewed practical applications of the computer software tool and methods for calculating indicators on drinking water and sanitation.

11. The workshop covered various procedural aspects of the preparation of the first MDG+ Arab periodic report. The following issues were agreed upon:

(a) Coordinating with national focal points on the formation of the national monitoring teams, their meetings and the participation of other national stakeholders;

(b) Designating 2012 as the base year for data collection and for the first periodic report, anticipated in 2014;

(c) Collecting and reviewing the required data by the national monitoring teams and transferring them to the MDG+ Unit at the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association by December 2013.

12. Some countries that did not participate in the first workshop requested ESCWA and ACWUA to organize national training sessions on the guide for calculating indicators and the e-tool. As a result, workshops were held for national monitoring teams and data collectors in Qatar (22-23 July 2013); Bahrain (24-25 July 2013); Tunisia (28-29 August 2013); the United Arab Emirates (30-31 October 2013); Algeria (11-13 February 2014); Oman (20-22 April 2014); Kuwait (27-30 September 2014); and Saudi Arabia (18-21 December 2014).

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<sup>\*</sup> The report on the workshop is available in document E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/WG.6/3.

13. A second regional workshop was held in Jordan, on 13 and 14 January 2015, on the sidelines of the Arab Water Week. A draft of the first Arab periodic report was distributed to participants for consideration, which contained data on water supply and sanitation from the following countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

#### C. DEVELOPING A REGIONAL DATA-MANAGEMENT WEBSITE

14. The MDG+ Initiative website is available in Arabic at [www.acwua.org/mdg+](http://www.acwua.org/mdg+), to be shortly followed by an English version. The website currently provides information on the Initiative, national monitoring teams, the Advisory Board, workshops and activities. In the future, users will be able to access the regional reports on the sites.

#### D. PILOT FIELD SURVEYS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

15. The Initiative relies on relevant national institutions for collecting data and calculating indicators on water supply and sanitation services. Gathering data directly from consumers (households), through area-specific surveys, provides an additional data source.

16. The Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), pursuant to a letter of agreement signed with ESCWA, is conducting pilot field surveys as part of the Initiative's activities. It was agreed to conduct the surveys over two stages in rural areas. The first stage covered Mauritania, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen, and its findings will be presented in the first periodic report; the second stage results will be presented in the second periodic report.

17. ESCWA and RAED organized a preparatory meeting and workshop to initiate the pilot field surveys which were held in Cairo on 30 April and 1 May 2014, in collaboration with ACWUA and the survey team leaders. Meeting participants agreed upon the final wording of the Arabic questionnaire for rural households in the target countries. ESCWA and RAED trained and guided the survey team leaders on how to complete the field surveys.

18. RAED presented the preliminary results of the pilot field surveys at the second regional workshop, held in Jordan, on 13 and 14 January 2015 and submitted the data sets to ESCWA on February 2015.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROGRAMME FOR THE COMING PERIOD

#### A. RECOMMENDATIONS

19. Participants at the second regional meeting on the MDG+ Initiative agreed upon the following recommendations:

(a) Requesting Arab water ministries to facilitate the work of national focal points and remove any obstacles to their efforts in order to expedite data collection at the national level;

(b) Proposing the following three options to the Technical Scientific Advisory Committee of the Arab Ministerial Water Council for the second stage of the field survey: using the same countries surveyed in the first stage; surveying other countries as per their request; or surveying countries that host informal settlements such as refugee camps;

(c) Using 2012 data to prepare the first periodic report and 2013 data to prepare the second periodic report;

(d) Distinguishing between urban and rural areas when possible, drawing upon the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation report;

(e) Including information on how to provide water and sanitation services to refugees in the second periodic report, and subsequently adding a box on large refugee populations similar to the boxes on urban and rural areas;

(f) Considering ways to disaggregate data on access to water and sanitation services by sex;

(g) Discussing, with the Technical Scientific Advisory Committee and relevant ministries, ways to collect sanitation data for households that are not connected to sanitation systems and how to include them in the periodic reports.

#### B. PROGRAMME FOR THE COMING PERIOD

20. Participants at the second regional meeting on the MDG+ Initiative also agreed upon the following programme for the coming period:

(a) Swiftly reviewing and approving 2012 data to publish the first periodic report;

(b) Collecting national data for the second stage of the field surveys, based on 2013 data, and commencing the second stage;

(c) Twinning countries that have progressed in data collection with those that are still facing difficulties;

(d) Completing the first periodic report and submitting it to the Arab Ministerial Water Council by mid-2015;

(e) Drafting the second periodic report between July and October 2015;

(f) Holding a third regional workshop to discuss the 2013 data, in October 2015;

(g) Completing the final draft of the second periodic report and submitting it to the Technical Scientific Advisory Committee by the end of 2015.

#### **IV. APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED IN THE FORMULATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

21. The MDG+ Initiative reaffirms the importance of the water sector to Arab countries, as a key pillar of sustainable development, the integrated management of water resources and the preservation of the environment. Current negotiations on SDGs are an opportunity for Arab countries to demonstrate their unified views on ways to improve monitoring and reporting on water supply and sanitation.

22. The Arab region has gained considerable experience from implementing the Initiative, which could be used to formulate the sustainable development goals and targets on water and sanitation within the framework of a post-2015 development agenda. Gains include the following:

(a) The MDG+ Initiative, compared to the Millennium Development Goals, contains additional indicators on water and sanitation, that address treated wastewater quantity, treatment type, reuse, reuse type, tariff structure and affordability; these indicators were included in the proposed SDGs on water supply and sanitation, in the post-2015 development agenda;

(b) Arab countries have gained expertise in institution building when forming national monitoring teams headed by national focal points and comprising representatives from the water supply and sanitation sectors (ministries and water utilities) and national statistical offices; this brings together stakeholders from various sectors under a single institutional framework which can be used to support follow-up on the post-2015 development agenda;

(c) Arab countries have gained experience in managing and implementing standardized data collection processes and methods for calculating new indicators, which they have learned through training materials and electronic tools; they have also benefited from training sessions, technical assistance and the exchange of experiences and lessons learned;

(d) The establishment of a regional data management platform and issuance of periodic reports on relevant issues can support further follow-up on the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs.

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