



Policy Brief

# WATER GOVERNANCE IN THE MENA REGION: THE CURRENT SITUATION

An International Conference in Sana'a, Yemen,  
16-20 July, 2006

**inWent**  
Internationale Weiterbildung  
und Entwicklung gGmbH



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## Water Governance is becoming 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 nation-wide 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 organizations 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. Thus, these resources must be managed efficiently on a long-term basis. 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 in 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 Partner For a 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. Zaragoza, Spain, in 2008, in conjunction with Expo 2008, the focus of which will be on water.

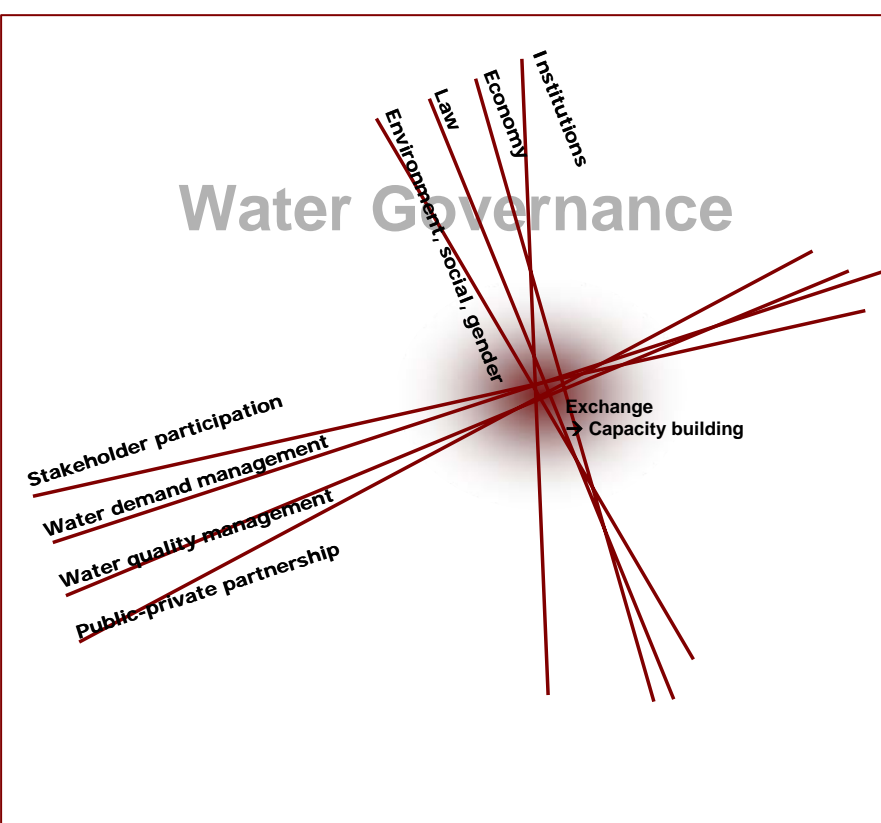


## First International Conference in Sana'a, Yemen

The first international Conference 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 Conference 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.



Priority questions on these topics were presented for discussion to the 16 working groups of the Conference. Some 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 common cross-cutting theme throughout the Conference was "prerequisites and respective needs for capacity building". The participants also paid special attention to the possibilities to enhance the regional co-operation.



## Water Governance: The Current Situation

The concept of governance appeared to be somewhat new for an appreciable number of the participants. Accordingly, the process used during the event to bring every participant to a common level of knowledge and understanding 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.

Groundwater-related issues were noted to be more challenging in terms of control and regulation, compared those related to surface water. A particular concern was shared aquifers, which for Palestine was considered critical. Also, efficient and equitable transboundary river basin management was considered to be important.

It was argued that the water sector in the MENA Region is subjected to an exceptionally dynamic and rapidly changing external environment. The following interconnected trends pose major challenges to the water sector in the coming years:

- rapid population growth, especially in urban areas;
- rural water stress and poverty;
- economy under structural pressures;
- regional integration still low;
- good quality education under massive pressure from an increasing population;
- growing problem of unemployment and underemployment;
- food security increasingly based on self-reliance rather than self-sufficiency;
- climate change may decrease reliability of water availability;
- changing political landscapes.

The water sector has so far mostly ignored the consideration of the above factors and their potential roles in shaping future water strategies for the region.

It was also noted that the whole concept of development is evolving continually. The following schematic Table of key evolutionary changes in the concept of development was relevant in the process of identifying the major contemporary trends in the water sector.

	<i>Modern sector 1980s</i>	<i>Modern sector 2000s</i>
<i>Underlying reality</i>	<i>Simple Uniform</i>	<i>Complex Diverse</i>
<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Growth Macro</i>	<i>Development Micro</i>
<i>Research approach</i>	<i>Measure Survey Reductionist Deduction Abstract models Aggregate</i>	<i>Listen Participate Holistic Induction Complex reality Disaggregate</i>
<i>Planning approach</i>	<i>Plan Model Top-down Centralize</i>	<i>Enable Interact Bottom-up Decentralize</i>
<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Blue-print Role culture Standardization</i>	<i>Process Task culture Flexibility, innovation</i>

These commonly used descriptors are generally valid for the formal sector. Now, a large proportion of the economic activities and labour force in the MENA Region is engaged in the informal, subsistence or traditional sectors, which operate under different concepts:

<i>Subsistence (traditional) sector</i>	<i>Modern sector</i>
<i>Uses no or very little money</i>	<i>Is driven by money</i>
<i>People supply themselves with basic commodities such as food, water, fuelwood, etc.</i>	<i>Nature is used as a resource of tradable goods that are primarily valued after their trade value</i>
<i>Institutions are primarily customary, religious, etc.</i>	<i>Institutions are primarily set up by government, etc.</i>
<i>People are living within the nature</i>	<i>People are using nature as a resource base and are living out of the nature</i>
<i>Example activities: family farms/fishery/forestry for village-level supply</i>	<i>Example activities: cash-crop farming, commercial fishery, fish farming, industry, hydropower generation, urban water supply plants</i>

This distinction is particularly important when dealing with the largest water user of the region, namely agriculture, wherein the smallholders form a specific group, but with limited contribution to the national economy, even though farming has an important social and economic function. If problems in the livelihoods of these smallholders may emerge, there may be a population exodus to the urban informal sector, which may further deteriorate the existing conditions. Thus, this dual economy is structurally an important concept which needs to be incorporated in the water sector policies.

The focus of development is shifting at present in many dimensions, such as:

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
<i>Centrally planned</i>	<i>Market-oriented</i>
<i>Low-value uses</i>	<i>High-value uses</i>
<i>Public sector</i>	<i>Private sector</i>
<i>Centralization</i>	<i>Decentralization</i>
<i>Supply provision</i>	<i>Demand management</i>
<i>Water quantity</i>	<i>Water quality</i>
<i>Sector specialization</i>	<i>Interdisciplinarity</i>
<i>Government</i>	<i>Civil society (participation)</i>
<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Modern</i>

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.

## Capacity building

In the Conference, the participants from the region identified the needs and priorities of capacity building in the water sector. They concluded that there were important missing links at all different levels of decision-making: from end-users to technicians, engineers, managers and decision-makers. While this is to be expected to be the case in any country, it was noted that the shortcomings in terms of capacity building are hindering the water sector from improving and moving forward in general in all the countries of the MENA Region.

The areas in which capacity building is needed include numerous technical, managerial and awareness-related issues. The tools that were identified as to how to respond to these needs included, but were not limited to, sound professional training to personnel in public, private and local institutions; exchange of experiences between the different countries in order to learn from each other; team building; improvement of communication skills; information campaigns and report writing.

The needs for capacity building in the water sector are so extensive in the MENA countries that there is a real danger that their identification may result in the preparation of “laundry lists”. While capacities need to be built in nearly all areas of the water sector, a “laundry list” type of approach is likely to be counterproductive. What is thus necessary is to prioritise the needs of capacity building in each specific country, and then carefully formulate and implement short-, medium-, and long-term programmes to meet the identified needs in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Human resources deficiencies have been identified as a key part of the water-related problems of the region. Therefore, education, capacity building, training and organisational development constitute a cornerstone for the optimal development of the water sector in the MENA Region. 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.

## 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 organizational 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 stands for human resource and organizational development within the framework for international cooperation. InWEnt's services cater to managers, skilled and executive personnel as well as to decision makers from business, politics, administrations and civil societies worldwide.

Programmes and activities at InWEnt aim to foster the capacity for change on three levels: strengthen the capacity of individuals to act, increase the performance of organizations, administrations and businesses, and improve the capacity for decision-making action at the political level. InWEnt methodological tools are in modular form, so that they can be used for customized programmes according to needs and demand. In addition to face-to-face training, exchange and policy dialogue, emphasis is also given to networking with the help of e-learning platform. InWEnt hosts approximately 55,000 participants from developing, transition and industrialized countries per year.

Activities are offered in eight business fields:

- Good governance and reform processes
- Crisis prevention and peace development
- Social development
- Environmental and natural resources
- Sustainable economics
- International trade and relations
- Regional development and urbanization
- Development education

InWEnt's shareholders are the Federal Republic of Germany represented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft representing the economy, and the German Foundation for International Development representing the German Federal States.