



ARAB INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S FORUM
المنتدى العربي الدولي للمرأة



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The Joint Conference of the
Arab International Women's Forum &
The Center for Mediterranean Integration

Women, Water & Youth: Perspectives from the MENA Region

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

26-27 September 2018
Amman, Jordan

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Recommendations emerging from the joint conference of the Arab International Women's Forum and the Center for Mediterranean Integration on *Women, Water & Youth: Perspectives from the MENA Region*

Amman, Jordan | 26-27 September 2018

Acknowledging that as a global community, we face many serious challenges such as extremism and hunger, as well as political crises, climate change and water scarcity. In addition, water shortage in Arab countries will be a major cause of regional instability. The Arab water deficit is expected to reach unprecedented levels, as well as the effects of climate change and global warming that affect precipitation rates. Nowhere in the world is the challenge of water scarcity more acute than in the Middle East and women and young people to be part of the progress for sustainable agriculture, rural development and food and water security in the region.

Acknowledging that water is a human rights issue, and despite the progress in all areas and the technological revolution that has impacted water management for the better, the world's international realities on water require more concerted efforts and cooperation to ensure the optimal distribution of water in accordance with the human rights approach, which stresses the right to clean water in order to secure a decent life for all humans.

Acknowledging that increasing consumption, paired with undervalued water, inadequate Governance arrangements, and weak enforcement is leading to the depletion of water resources —especially groundwater—at an unprecedented rate. Of all the challenges the Middle East and North Africa region faces, it is least prepared for water crises. Water governance issues, especially the failure to create incentives that signal extreme water scarcity and promote water conservation, are the common denominator of water management in the Middle East and North Africa. Countries that fail to achieve water security forgo potential growth, increase vulnerabilities to hydrological shocks, and may potentially compound social and political fragility. The MENA region has the greatest expected economic losses from climate-related water scarcity, estimated at 6-14% of GDP by 2050 (World Bank 2016).

Acknowledging that water security in the MENA region is directly related to the participation of women and youth in agricultural activity and the roles that can be played by both in different agricultural areas. When considering the issue of enhancing agricultural productivity and activating the role of youth and women in the agricultural sector, all barriers and obstacles, including the issue of water scarcity, must be considered, especially as the lack of clean water and access to health facilities affects women more so than men, and poses a serious challenge to the efforts made to eliminate gender discrimination.

Acknowledging that to achieve the objectives of sustainable development, we must continue to develop strategic plans based on improving land productivity with the sustainable development of human, land and water resources, and improving the economic conditions of the population through the development of humanitarian programs and the coordination of existing desertification control activities within a vision of human parity, to support both the host communities and refugees, based on the approach of international partnership, the promotion of the role of women and the activation of the role of private sector and governments.

Acknowledging that the three challenges addressed by *Women, Water & Youth* are interlinked:

- 1 Water scarcity and food insecurity disproportionately impacts women and young people.
- 2 The low participation of women in the workforce persists despite improvements in educational attainment and gender barriers to women's inclusion are reflected in the low number of women entrepreneurs in the MENA region despite its thriving startup culture.
- 3 Youth unemployment in the region still stands at 25-30%. AIWF's position has long been that enhanced support to youth will create much-needed jobs and failing to support opportunities for Arab women and young people will ultimately reflect negatively on future stability in the region.

Acknowledging that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) adopted in September 2015 highlights the important role of science and technology in addressing current critical world challenges, and that multi-level engagement is essential for the achievement of water security (SDG 6) in the MENA region. This will only be feasible if we work in a holistic, participatory approach under the umbrella of the 2030 sustainable development goals while linking it to achieving SDG 5 (Gender) and SDG 17 (Partnerships).

Taking forward the above acknowledgments, these are the recommendations to emerge from the observations and valued contributions of all distinguished Guest Speakers who participated at the AIWF / CMI Women, Water & Youth conference in Amman in September 2018.

Water governance

1. Regional collaboration on water governance could produce a successful roll out of a comprehensive MENA Water Strategy that would improve water governance across the region, benchmarking from the Jordan Water Strategy 2016-2025, which calls for:
 - a. Key interventions to improve water governance
 - b. Clarification of responsibilities and accountabilities among water institutions
 - c. Improvement of financial sustainability mechanism
 - d. Improvement of regulatory framework through moving to independent regulatory entity with clear mandates
 - e. Increasing women participation in governing water entities through ensuring women presentation in their Boards
 - f. Improving community participation in decision making process
 - g. Improving transparency through mandating information dissemination and accessibility
2. Best sanitation practices in the MENA region must employ a participatory approach, retain government engagement and endorsement, be socially acceptable and technically appropriate, and aim to:
 - a. Create jobs
 - b. Protect the environment and natural resources
 - c. Reuse treated wastewater
 - d. Develop capacity building and mobilisation
 - e. Focus on women and gender equity
 - f. Engage the youth population
 - g. Deliver educational impact
3. Combating corruption that hinders MENA development in general and the improvement of water resources management in particular.

4. Recognising the importance of building a community of knowledge sharing and cooperation among donors and financiers in partnership with national governance structures, where these stakeholders can influence the environment in which they are financing projects. Enabling women to not only participate but to have equal influence on the governance of water resources and services is vital in protecting this essential resource.

Technological innovation

5. Enhancing awareness (radical shift in water use and mindsets on water use) urgently needed together with understanding at regional and national levels that we can no longer address the continuous challenges facing the Arab region without innovative science and technology – especially green technology – for advancing sustainable development, productivity and economic development.
6. Promoting the use of hydroponics, a technology using a minimal amount of soil and water - alternative ways to traditional farming through innovation and technology. As so many conference participants were involved in hydroponics projects, a technical meeting should be organised in this area as a follow up to the conference to build on expertise and leadership from the MENA region.
7. Utilising technology to address the 80% of wastewater that is not treated or reused. Wastewater is the world's largest untapped water source, the only natural resource that increases as cities and populations grow.
8. Introducing concepts of modern technology for alternative energy and raising awareness about local and regional strategies that contribute to water supply, through the application of water harvesting techniques, the reuse of grey water, and the separation of treated water sources from natural and flood waters, achieving the sixth sustainable development objective of “ensuring the availability, management and sustainability of water and sanitation services for all by 2030.
9. Technological and governance innovations – in the region and globally – are accelerating to meet an urgent need for action. Some of the most notable water management innovations in the world are being implemented in the Middle East and North Africa. Irrigation modernization programmes are among the largest ones in the Mediterranean Region and offer new opportunities for increasing production, saving water and reducing the amount of work that men and women dedicate to this activity. On farm irrigation modernization may also lead to more intensive and productive crops.

Gender parity in sustainable agriculture

10. Women have an important role in water governance alongside men. Equal gender representation in the development and drafting of water policy of countries is essential. Currently, women work to provide water to meet the needs of their households, while men make decisions about water resource management and development at the local and regional levels. Therefore, projects, programs and policies aimed at addressing gender inequalities must empower women to contribute to the development of policy around water resource management and human development to ensure that both men and women – especially poor women and young people – can access and benefit from water resources, around the world.
11. Gender sensitive agricultural policies can play a strong role in closing the gender gap in rural societies, thus strengthening women's access to productive resources, rural services, infrastructure, advisory services and social protection. Focusing on “women only

empowerment” is a risky strategy and will not lead to transformative empowerment. Holistic multi-dimensional empowerment is needed to link between the public sphere of women’s life and her private sphere. It directly influences the household’s division of labour and on the gendered social roles and power dynamics of both women and men. Capacity building is key and more investment in women in agriculture is urgently needed if they are to have proper access to resources and play their rightful roles in food security.

12. The ‘feminisation of agriculture’ means that women are doing the lion’s share of work as many men have migrated away. A new generation of women farm managers unfortunately see their producing capacity limited due to lack of training and access to productive resources. Production and living standards of these women could be improved much if these constraints would be removed.
13. Women’s access to governing bodies of Water Users Associations (WUAs) is very limited due to their restricted representation as water users but alternative solutions (fix quotas, two water users for each piece of land, women water users’ committees, etc) are being tried out in several countries with interesting results. Access to irrigation water by women farmers must be guaranteed and enforced strictly.
14. Women are underrepresented in governing boards of water authorities and water regulating bodies and other community-based water organizations. Participation in professional networks can support the engagement and visibility of women in the water sector. The technical and capacity building activities offered by the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET) housed at ESCWA provides one such opportunity.
15. Special attention is needed to ensure that any agriculture development project, and in particular those concerned with irrigated agriculture, have adequate gender components that have resulted from the identification of the gender needs at the field level. Emphasising the importance of carrying out Gender Needs Assessments (GNAs) to ensure that new opportunities do not add more work to women without any compensation. For this purpose, it is important to know first if women under their present tasks (farming context) have any free time for anything else. When this is the case, additional work must be fully compensated and equal pay practiced. The multipurpose nature of water is highly evident in the rural context and therefore projects must also be multipurpose to attend these multiple water needs, which are particularly important for women, moving away from projects strictly addressing a single use.
16. Women’s health on the land must also be addressed (in context of the health of female farmers). This is part of a wider need to address the subject of women’s health in the MENA region overall and the urgent need to bring more young women into medical practice.

Research and information

17. Gender inclusive water strategies in the region still present a gap between policy and practice, caused by the different social and cultural perceptions that these strategies were built on. Strategies are typically built on research and science originated from Latin America, Africa and Asia, but in the MENA region culture and social norms are different. Therefore, these strategies will not necessarily work and will present implementation gaps.
18. Research and data in the Arabic language is very much needed but currently very much lacking, representing a major gap that could be filled through cross-border collaboration and international research exchange and partnership programmes. One of the most significant challenges in the field of the environment is the language issue and difficulties with terminology.

19. Information and research are urgently required on women in the MENA region overall as the region lacks workable, usable data that can power further research and innovation, especially in STEM and in relation to women's economic, entrepreneurial and academic engagement in STEM sectors.
20. We need to protect natural and environmental resources by integrating knowledge into interdisciplinary and interrelated issues (water, energy, the human environment) and adopting a scientific framework for improving ecosystems, as resource protection and management are the only guarantors of adequate water, food and dignity for future generations
21. Innovation research should be co-ordinated and classified in clusters and not on an individual / farm by farm basis (availability of research in the Arabic language and sectoral cluster data pertinent to the region is key). Specialised research should be conducted into women's role in innovation and in displacement crises where women typically take the lead in facilitating positive change and progress as part of reconstructive strategy.
22. Knowledge about the gender situation in the different Mediterranean countries is still very scarce. General figures are available, but specific information in the field and ethically sourced and usable data is still very much missing. This data is urgently needed to inform and improve inclusive gender projects and to generate workable data that can be used to address gender issues related to agriculture.
23. Intergenerational dialogue is key to success in addressing water scarcity challenges and correcting sustainability awareness gaps in every generation, imparting knowledge from one generation to the next (and vice versa) and engaging generations in working together to solve water, food, economic development and security issues.

Public and private sector partnerships, support and investment for women-led sustainability projects, initiatives and social enterprises.

24. More needs to be done than education and introducing new technologies: we need to create jobs, green jobs building a sustainable future. We need to have entrepreneurs starting green businesses. And these entrepreneurs need access to finance which can be raised, co-ordinated and distributed by public-private investors and funding schemes.
25. Public-private partnerships have been implemented in the region to tackle the operational constraints of water utilities. The Middle East and North Africa has been the most active place in the world (along with China) regarding public-private partnerships in water management.
26. There is a need to identify the precise needs of women in the agricultural value chain. To support women-led projects, initiatives and social enterprises and improve opportunities for women in the water sector overall, the following is required: (a) Access to market; (b) Training; (c) Capacity building; (d) Equality in access to opportunities. Investment in these projects can yield the greatest impact as activities run by women supported by FAO have been more sustainable than others.

Public awareness and STEM education

27. Women's low participation in the scientific specializations and actual participation in the labour force can be attributed to social perceptions which associate the suitability of certain employments to either women or men and addressing the societal and cultural barriers would foster major social and economic benefits for Arab States. Eliminating cultural barriers for Arab women in STEM and sustainability sectors is an important first step to improving gender diversity in water governance as well as addressing the critical challenge of women's low economic participation and the ongoing challenge of youth unemployment.
28. The availability of fellowships and scholarships for young people aspiring to careers in science and water conservation could be made more readily available both with public sector support and through public-private partnerships.
29. Engaging and educating civil society on water issues and water conservation is also crucial. Changing water management practices to ensure better service delivery and sustainability of water use requires changing the attitudes of individuals and government officials, as much as putting in place institutional incentives and arrangements.
30. Public awareness is an issue in water scarcity as it is unclear whether the MENA populations are acutely aware of the scarcity challenges and the cost of 'free' water. We need to integrate women and youth into water and food security programs and to involve them in water decision-making, solutions, knowledge sharing, innovation, and training women, youth, boys and girls to deal with water-related issues and challenges and how to manage them, starting with practices and awareness of water use and conservation measures in the home.
31. There is a serious need for structured recycling programmes and initiatives in the region not only to educate the public about the value of water and the impact of scarcity on a prosperous, peaceful Arab future, but also to practically manage water and implement viable policies for water management on both national and regional levels.

Youth and family engagement in the water sector and conservation efforts

32. Women have an important and vital role in conserving the environment and water resources in particular and reducing their depletion. They are primarily responsible for rationalizing the consumption of water at home and have the primary role in guiding household members to the proper ways to benefit from water and not waste it. Achieving water security means acting together, from the household level to the regional level. From a household water perspective, this means engaging women, who often have the main responsibility for using and conserving water. What is needed is the right mindset to use water wisely, as something that is scarce and precious. This is where women come in. Women are the main water managers in the family. They can set an example and teach their children to use water wisely.
33. We need to break down unfair and outdated stereotypes surrounding youth and engage youth voices in every aspect related to water governance and management. Youth all around the region (including members of the MedyWat network) are developing solutions to water issues. Therefore, platforms need to be created for youth and primary level education, activism in the water field and enabling more democratic systems in which the abilities of young people thrive.

34. Young people must be better supported to launch initiatives that serve the environment, and use social media and digital technology, especially education technology, to increase awareness and deliver environmental messages to all segments of society.
35. Stakeholder participation is at the core of effective water and sanitation management. Therefore, investing in an enabling environment for youth as key stakeholders in the water sector is a prerequisite to successful engagement and will ensure the achievement of SDG 6. Engaging young people in the sector will involve:
 - a. Awareness projects related to water sector implemented in partnership with other parties, targeting students at school (primary and secondary level as well as through to tertiary level)
 - b. Providing scholarships for MAs and PhDs which creates opportunities for young people to continue their higher studies and specialize in the water and agricultural sectors
 - c. Establishing youth committees in the water sector
 - d. Improving the quality of education and offering high school students some guidance on their university degree choices according to the needs of their local societies and countries
 - e. Including women and youth in the water sector and development process and encourage them to engage in this sector in the professional levels through the use of quotas and teacher training programs

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

36. The issues of water and sanitation which are critically important especially when we address the ongoing and worsening refugee crisis that is a direct result of years of civil unrest, war and humanitarian crises. Water delivery in conflict areas should be considered a top humanitarian aid priority especially in IDP camps where women and children constitute the largest proportion of refugees.
37. We must reframe the focus on refugee development programmes as not being based on neediness but seeing refugees as talented, educated and motivated individuals who can bring a wealth of experience and skills to sustainability projects and initiatives as well as to entrepreneurship.
38. Addressing the challenges faced by Internally Displaced People (IDPs) together with refugees and providing for their basic needs (in Yemen alone, there are more than 2 million IDPs). The focus on refugees often neglects internally displaced persons forcibly displaced within their countries.
39. UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security must be integrated into strategies and solutions to development challenges for the region, including in the water sector, as peacebuilding is an urgent need for many Arab States today and women and youth have critical roles to play in peace and security.

Mobility and Labour

40. Freedom of movement for Arab citizens both within the region and internationally continues to present a serious restriction on women advocates and academics alike, either because of the legal requirement for a guardian to approve or accompany her on the travel. Taking forward the recommendation of the *UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality* on reducing barriers to mobility in the region – specifically, through relaxing visa restrictions and implementing a region-wide policy of mutual recognition of diplomas and other qualifications which is crucial for greater job mobility.

Conference Organisers



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