

Cairo Declaration
First Joint Meeting of Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Water
4 April 2019
League of Arab States Headquarters, Cairo, Egypt

We, Arab Ministers of Agriculture, Arab Ministers of Water, and heads of Arab delegations participating in the First Joint Meeting of Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Water held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States (LAS) in Cairo on 4 April 2019 at the conclusion of the Second Regional Land and Water Days Conference,

Express our thanks and appreciation to LAS, partner organizations, and representatives of regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, donor organizations, and regional and international finance institutions - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development - for the good preparation of this meeting and their support to policy-makers in the Arab countries to develop a new generation of policies and investments to address current challenges and future risks associated with water and food security.

In implementation of the Arab Water Ministerial Council's decision in its 10th session held in Kuwait in May 2018, and the related decision of the Executive Council of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, which was held in March 2019,

Recalling the decisions of the Arab economic and social development summit, which was held in Beirut in January 2019, and also those of previous summits,

Recalling the Arab Foreign Ministers Ministerial Council's decision No. 7935 – d.a (144) - C 2 - 13/9/2015) adopted in its 144 session on the conservation of water resources in the Arab World,

[We declare the following:](#)

The water scarcity challenge is more pressing now than ever before, and unless appropriate actions are taken, countries of the region will face Difficulties in achieving sustainable development

We realize the magnitude of the challenges facing the Arab region, including the increasing water scarcity, the declining water quality, the degrading agricultural lands, climate change, and the shared water sources with non-Arab countries, which poses a growing threat to the achievement of the SDGs.

We are concerned about the exacerbation of these challenges as a result of population growth, rapid urbanization, and internal and forced migrations in many Arab countries. This will increase pressure on water resources, food systems and social cohesion. There is also food waste and loss, while poor land and water use efficiency and productivity result in economic growth levels below what can potentially be achieved on local, national, and regional levels, as well as decrease in employment opportunities and increase in youth migration from rural areas and movement from agriculture to other more productive sectors.

We recognize the need to develop coordination mechanisms and activate existing ones between the water and agriculture sectors in the areas of policy development, investment planning and

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implementation of programmes and projects to ensure food security and water security amid sustainable use of water and land resources.

We emphasize the fundamental role of sustainable land and water management in achieving the second goal of sustainable development on "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" and the centrality of this goal to the achievement of the other sustainable development goals.

We are concerned about the increasing levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, and hunger in some Arab countries in the past few years as a result of armed conflicts, and we stress the need to address this through a short-term relief track and a medium- and long-term development track, in cooperation with regional and international organizations.

We appreciate the role of LAS, specialized Arab organizations, and partner international organizations in supporting Arab efforts to implement the Arab Strategy for Water Security 2010-2030 and the Sustainable Agriculture Development Strategy 2005-2025.

[Under this Declaration, we call upon all Arab governments and partners to:](#)

First: On activation of regional coordination mechanisms and mobilization of all stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of new policies and investments

1. a. Activate regional institutional coordination between the agriculture and water sectors through the establishment of a joint high-level permanent committee and the holding of regular ministerial meetings for the ministers of agriculture and water every two years.
- b. Commitment to coordination between the agriculture and water sectors on the national level.
2. Improve the governance of the two sectors through good coordination and the effective participation of all stakeholders, including farmers, the private sector and NGOs, to ensure comprehensive planning and implementation, taking into consideration the interests of rural women, children and small farmers and breeders.
3. Establish a sustainable regional mechanism to build individual and institutional capacities necessary to plan, design, and implement water and land management programmes efficiently, while considering their linkages to other sectors.

Second: On harmonization and integration of policies across the agriculture and water sectors

1. The importance of increasing the added value of agriculture by correcting market distortions and their implication on agricultural water policies that negatively affect sustainability and food security.
2. Ensure coherence between policies related to water use in agriculture and other public policies, in particular agriculture and social protection policies, to achieve the double goal of food security and sustainable water and land management.
3. The importance of reviewing and reforming agriculture, trade, water, and social protection policies to achieve food security for all, in particular for the poorest segment of the population. And increasing agricultural water productivity and economic value, while considering the quantitative and qualitative sustainability of water resources and improving the food trade balance in value terms.

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4. It is essential that agricultural water policies deal with food security on a holistic manner, taking into consideration all dimensions of food security, including access to food, reduction of food loss, and the importance of proper nutrition and its connection with public health.

5. Adjust the value of water in proportion to its scarcity level through the adoption of appropriate incentive mechanisms that enhance its use and aim to maximize the social, economic, and environmental returns from its uses and ensure its sustainability and good quality.

6. Review and develop legislations, regulations, and mechanisms on the use of water and lands to enhance the sustainability of their resources and the rationalization of their use, while ensuring that vulnerable groups attain their rights.

7. Activate integrated water and land management programmes that systematically adopt water accounting, develop institutional frameworks, and secure the required investments.

Third: On increase of investments in agricultural water management

1. Support and develop a new generation of flexible policies that support and enhance return on government investments and at the same time create conditions for further private investments in the agriculture and water sectors.

2. Call on donors and funding institutions to contribute to the reconstruction and development of the water and agriculture infrastructure in the Arab countries, especially those affected by armed conflicts and by the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, and to prepare specific programs to support efficient and fair water management in these countries.

3. Increase public investments and other investments in the agriculture and water sectors to achieve the SDGs by increasing public spending, leveraging knowledge and training, increasing the level of financing by development partners, and encouraging youth to work in agriculture.

4. The importance of focusing Public and other investments on modernization and maintenance of the agricultural water infrastructure, and also on providing critical public goods to accelerate the transition of the agricultural sector towards competitive, high value added and sustainable activities.

5. Create an encouraging institutional and legislative environment to attract private sector financing and leverage its innovation capacity in the water and agricultural sectors and to build partnerships with the public sector.

6. Finance innovative social protection programs in rural areas with special emphasis on smallholder farmers and breeders, youth and women, aiming to support access to decent employment and enhance incomes while ensuring sustainable use of water and resources.

Fourth: On the utilizing innovations, data management and analysis, and exchange of expertise

1. Develop, adapt and finance technologies, including digital technologies, for adoption in water and agriculture through supporting scientific research and innovation and the development of localization and entrepreneurship.

2. Strengthen the science-policy interface by ensuring that policies are based on scientific knowledge, and ensure the provision of an appropriate, guided incentive and funding environment to improve the

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performance of research institutions, especially in the areas of arid lands, marginal lands, and rain-fed agriculture.

3. Develop and update mechanisms for collection, analysis and sharing of data and statistics on water and land in cooperation with regional and international organizations, and benefit from digital technologies, such as geographic information systems and remote sensing.

4. Build a database to share successful experiences and best practices among countries in the area of water and land governance, including legal, institutional and financing frameworks, related to maximizing the social, economic and environmental benefits from water and land uses to ensure their sustainability, and inviting regional and international organizations to support the achievement of this.

5. Finance studies and research to develop non-conventional water sources and their use to ease the pressure on fresh water resources.

6. Direct and adapt capacity building and training to meet the requirements of the labour market in the agricultural sector, increase innovation-based employment, and create job opportunities in the water and agriculture sector targeted towards agricultural productivity.

7. Increase the ability of fragile rural communities, particularly women and rural youth, to address the challenges of food security by building their capabilities to adapt to climate change, applying and incorporating appropriate green technologies to ensure good agricultural practices, and formulating national and regional measures and policies that support youth and technology.

Finally, we call on the Technical Secretariat of the Ministerial Arab Water Council, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, FAO, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to cooperate with the joint high-level prominent committee to enhance coordination among partners and other stakeholders to align with the 2030 sustainable development agenda, the Paris agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 so as to ensure effective integration of Arab water security and food security into the sustainable development strategies.

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