

The way forward

Effective water governance is vital for sustainable development in the Arab region. Water security requires appreciating water's proper value—including social and environmental as well as financial costs—and adopting new approaches. Cost-effectiveness analysis can help identify the most effective strategies to address the escalating water crisis. Shifting from supply management to demand management is also necessary. Decision-making mechanisms should incorporate principles of good governance such as transparency, integrity, accountability and active stakeholder participation.

Effective water governance is anchored by five foundations: efficiency, economic and environmental sustainability, responsiveness to socio-economic development needs, accountability before stakeholders and the public, and adherence to ethics and moral values.

Towards effective and sustainable water governance

Sustainable and effective water governance looks at the water sector as part of a broader framework for social, political and economic development, and therefore as capable of affecting and being affected by other sectors and the overall context.

The water sector can act as an agent of change for prevailing governance systems. Because water is central to well-being, health, advancement and almost all socio-economic activities, water sector reforms can be easily promoted at government and popular levels. Mechanisms should be established to allow effective and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders (such as water user associations) in formulating, implementing and monitoring water governance policies and strategies. Several approaches can be

introduced, such as decentralization and the transfer of responsibility and authority to local user groups, and legal frameworks can be formulated to expand public-private partnership capacity. The cost-effectiveness approach can help evaluate and guide policy towards water security so that the Arab region can guarantee the well-being of its citizens (Figure 6.1).

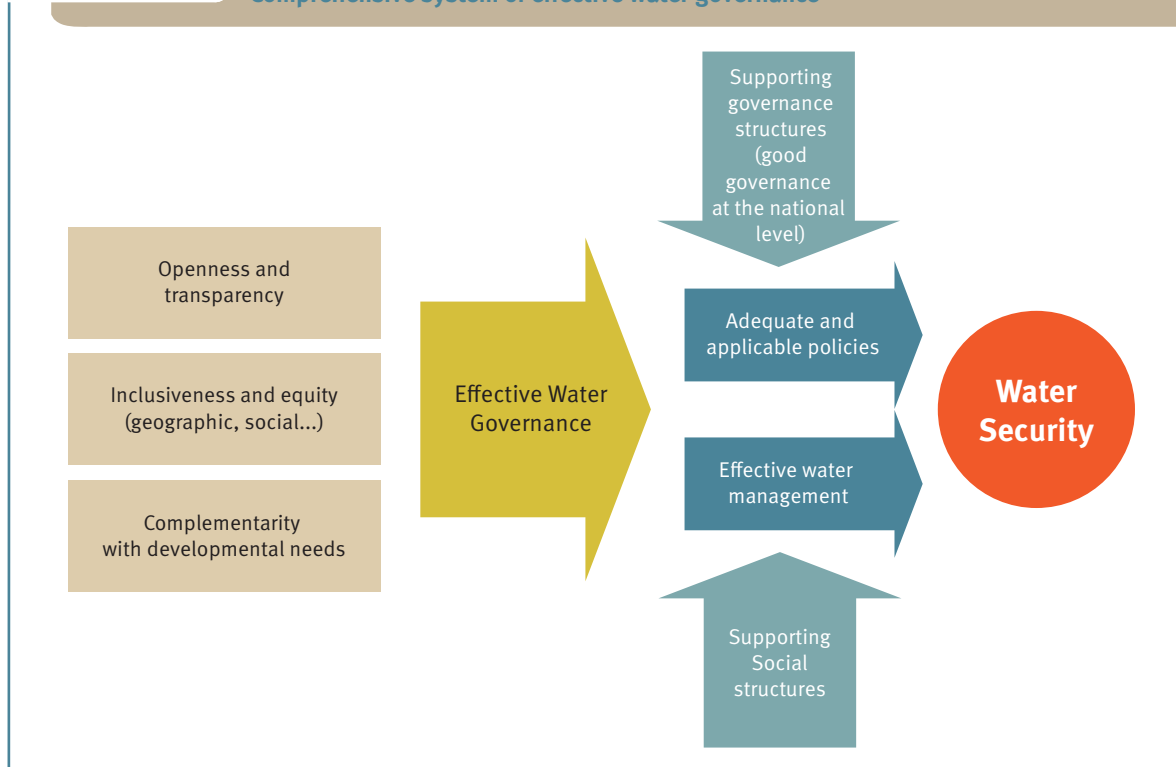
A major shift in water policies is required, emphasizing conservation and demand management to secure long-term water supplies while meeting strict criteria for socio-economic, financial and environmental sustainability and public health requirements. The following guiding principles and recommendations can help realize effective water governance in the Arab region.

Reorienting policies

Implementing a water management strategy based on securing supplies, without adequate

Figure 6.1

Comprehensive system of effective water governance



Source: Authors

attention to use and allocation efficiency, has led to unsustainable water use patterns. Also, lack of transparency, participation and political will has prevented policy implementation.

National and regional political institutions are now in flux, increasing the potential for change in water governance. Transformation to a more flexible, adaptive water management system must go hand-in-hand with growth and economic diversification. Improved accountability and other governance mechanisms inside and outside the water sector will be crucial for allowing the transformation to lead to improved water policy reforms. Main recommendations include:

- Developing water policies and strategies based on consultations with stakeholders, including government officials, politicians, water user associations, local communities and the private sector.
- Having strong political will and avoiding politicization of resource competition.
- Developing distributed governance systems, taking into consideration local context and moving away from more traditional

hierarchical and market-led governance.

- Promoting democratic cultures of accountability, transparency and political will.
- Linking water economy and policies with other economic sectors.
- Arranging for cooperative management and governance of shared and transboundary water resources between all riparian countries.

Instituting reform

Water governance structures in the Arab countries are undergoing reform to improve the sector's efficiency in service delivery, coverage, client-orientation and equity of distribution. Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia offer successful examples of public-private partnerships. Institutional reform—addressing laws, regulations, decrees, organizational arrangements, customs, markets and economic and financial instruments—should include capacity building, coordination efficiency, accountability and transparency, monitoring and evaluation, and reform in legislation and enforcement. Main recommendations include:

- Establishing higher water councils for setting water policies and coordination among water institutions.
- Addressing human resources and skill deficiencies through capacity building, training and organizational development.
- Developing and strengthening efficient and expedient decision-making and coordination in and across organizational structures.
- Instating the spirit of shared responsibility and a sense of ownership and accountability.
- Strengthening partnerships and networking between different stakeholders and water-related institutions, including research centres, private institutions, consumer associations, farmer and agricultural associations and organizations, and municipal and agricultural authorities.
- Addressing interagency competition, especially for budgets and other resources, through coordination and accurately set policies, roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing monitoring, feedback and assessment mechanisms for water policies and decision-making at all levels (forming and implementing). These mechanisms should involve the various stakeholders, researchers and media. This includes making water-related data and updated statistics available, developing performance indicators and monitoring them, and integrating incentives in performance and efficiency indicators.
- Policy-makers should not escape the responsibility of implementation and ensuring adequate capacities and funding for effective implementation. Policies should be modified as they move to local levels for ultimate enforcement.
- Each country should adapt indicators and data to its own priorities, but a regional monitoring system could contribute to better understanding common problems and promoting cooperative solutions.

Addressing inadequate and weakly enforced legislation

Although many Arab States have applied different legislation and approaches to manage and protect their scarce water resources, most efforts have been hindered by inadequate compliance

and poor enforcement. The challenge remains in embedding the laws in the region's socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. Existing laws and legislations should be updated or modernized to strengthen institutional arrangements and water governance. Examples of the negative impact of weak legislative enforcement include illegal well drilling, resulting in overexploitation of already stressed groundwater resources. Other examples concern pollution and illegal dumping of chemicals.

Legislative enforcement in the water sector should be conducted through the judicial system and, more important, through building public support and stakeholder involvement; publicizing success stories and developing better economic incentives such as fees and subsidies; and education, information dissemination and technical assistance. This also includes developing competent inspection capacities, credible monitoring, accredited and standardized measuring systems and certified reporting systems.

Empowerment

Actors in the water sector have their own roles, rights and responsibilities, often with conflicting interests.¹ Today local community stakeholders and user associations are established in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and Yemen. Integrating all relevant stakeholders into the discussion on distributing water resources is very important for good water governance. Main recommendations include:

- Supporting and facilitating the establishment of water user associations, water-related NGOs and civil society organizations.
- Establishing and supporting research centres and studies on the water sector, especially in finance, research priorities and connections with policy-making platforms.
- Establishing dialogue forums that raise water issues in current policy debates and national priority agendas.
- Guaranteeing legal rights to information access, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, and adapting legislations accordingly.
- Establishing an updated dataset and depository of key publications and statistics on the water sector and its various dimensions.

- Reliable, accessible, high-quality water data supports effective governance at every scale.
- Raising public awareness through education, training programmes, interactive initiatives and media, among other means. Major themes can include sustainability, use efficiency and participation and common responsibility. Long-term awareness programmes should be tailored to specific local contexts.

Sustainability: the companion of success

Social, economic and environmental sustainability is a prerequisite. Social sustainability cannot be secured without equity and justice. Active and meaningful engagement of relevant stakeholders should be an established policy at all governance levels. Economic sustainability entails calculating benefits and costs of water governance policies. Other sustainability dimensions include institutional, financial and organizational levels. Environmental sustainability should first and foremost take into account the need for continued water availability. Special attention should be made to rationing renewable water resources. Water governance should also attend to ecological preservation and conservation of natural environments in the Arab region. Countering diversification and preserving wetland ecosystems and oases are among the most urgently needed steps.

Addressing water-related challenges and nexuses

Mitigating water scarcity and variability and ensuring that water of adequate quantity and quality is available when and where it is needed requires broad and sustained efforts of all involved stakeholders, including decision-makers, planners, engineers and the public. A top priority for adaptation in the water sector should be reducing the vulnerabilities of poor and disadvantaged people. Securing environmental and ecological sustainability is another major priority. Coping with water scarcity requires adaptive behaviours and actions. This will allow for better management of challenges such as climate change, water and food security and the water-energy nexus, among others.

Specific water governance challenges are

highly contextual and depend on individual country priorities. Main recommendations include:

- Building partnerships with beneficiaries and the private sector, thus encouraging participation in modern, timely and well-monitored and metred water delivery services.
- Expanding water services to vulnerable communities and encouraging local initiatives in building and managing such services.
- Reforming agricultural policies and food crop productivity, taking into consideration the ecological system and water value.
- Increasing irrigation efficiency from its current average levels of about 50 per cent to 70–80 per cent to increase irrigated areas by about 50 per cent and significantly reduce the Arab region’s water deficit and food imports.
- Increasing Arab cooperation in areas of water, food and energy trade. Establishing a common Arab market could be one step in this direction.
- Reforming the energy sector, raising awareness of water’s importance in energy-related decisions and establishing coordination and cooperation schemes between the energy and water sectors.
- Establishing energy-water balance in desalination.
- Researching and developing efficient, reliable and scalable renewable energies, desalination and water treatment technologies that better meet the region’s demands.
- Studying climate change and investigating possible measures to limit its effects or adapt to them.
- Developing emergency and priority intervention plans, especially for more vulnerable, heavily populated areas.
- Setting legal instruments to identify and regulate water rights, regulate water allocation among and within sectors and regulate permit systems for drilling wells.
- Promoting and supporting the use of treated wastewater and drainage water after ensuring its quality treatment.
- Investing in transfer and localization of water-related technologies and knowledge.

This includes researching and testing non-conventional water resources, especially at low scales and for domestic uses.

Finally, the transitions in several Arab countries have resulted in major changes in the political environment through calls for improved democracy, accountability, participation and development. Although these changes are not directly associated with the water sector, they may provide an opportunity to advance overall water governance reforms. Meaningful public participation, good governance and cost

effective use of resources require the utmost attention from decision-makers. Balancing evolving demands across sectors such as energy, food, agriculture and industry is critical and will vary according to national priorities and resource availability. While these political transitions increase people's expectations, putting more pressure on governance systems, they can also bring about awareness and increase people's readiness to shoulder more responsibility for scarce resources.

Endnotes

¹ Laban 2008.