



Institutional Coordination and Policy Coherence for Achieving Water and Food Security in the Arab Region

Midterm Review 2019-2025

October 2025

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1. Executive Summary

The Arab Region is currently facing one of the most pressing development challenges of our time: securing water and food in the face of severe water scarcity, growing populations, and climate change. Nineteen out of twenty-two Arab countries already experience severe water stress, with thirteen facing an absolute scarcity of less than 500 cubic meters per capita annually. At the same time, the region imports more than half of its staple food, a dependence that is widening as demand grows and natural resource constraints intensify. With agriculture consuming up to 80 percent of available freshwater resources, the interlinkages between water and food systems are profound. Urgent action is required to accelerate efforts towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, this makes the imperative for integrated policy approaches, including the transformation of food systems both urgent and unavoidable.

Recognizing this, Arab Ministers of Water and Agriculture came together in 2019 to adopt the Cairo Declaration, establishing a framework to enhance coordination and coherence between the two sectors. The High-Level Joint Technical Committee (HLJTC) was established to translate this vision into action, supported by a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), composed of the technical secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council and Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, with technical and financial support from FAO and ESCWA. Since then, progress has been made in strengthening regional dialogue, defining cross-sectoral priorities such as water allocation for agriculture, non-conventional water use, climate resilience, data systems, and piloting initiatives in selected countries. Endorsement of an Action Plan in 2022 represented a significant milestone, signaling collective political commitment to operationalizing the Cairo Declaration.

Despite these achievements, the process still faces essential challenges that limit its impact on the ground. Country-level implementation lags behind regional commitments, with systemic constraints that could be reduced if strong follow-up mechanisms and more consistent reporting practices are adopted. Data availability remains uneven, and the lack of a harmonized organization at national level has hindered sustained engagement. Financing and resource mobilization have also proven difficult, with limited budgetary allocation to support regional and country-level action. Finally, the absence of region-wide architecture to guide and consolidate national monitoring practices has slowed the translation of regional initiatives into measurable outcomes.

This report takes stock of progress so far and outlines the way forward to transform the water-agriculture nexus process into a driver of regional and national change. The key message is clear: success depends on strengthening country-level engagement, institutionalizing monitoring and reporting, and aligning financial, technical, and political resources with the ambitions set out in the Cairo Declaration.

To ensure stronger and more consistent engagement from member states, the report recommends the adoption of a Country Engagement Protocol. This should include formal nomination of representatives (focal points) from the Ministries of Water and Ministries of Agriculture, ideally from planning and strategy units, with terms of reference to ensure continuity and expertise. These representatives should lead national teams, coordinate country-level pilots, and report annually to

the HLJTC. At the regional level, a community of practice and structured knowledge exchange platforms should be established, supported by a dedicated knowledge hub to host data, policy briefs, and case studies.

Strengthening the Joint Technical Secretariat is also essential. The Secretariat should be equipped with dedicated staff, including a coordinator and a monitoring and evaluation specialist, to oversee the implementation of the adopted resolutions, organize meetings, track progress, and ensure systematic follow-up with countries. Partner organizations, such as FAO and ESCWA, should continue to provide technical assistance while planning a progressive devolution process to countries and LAS. However, sustainability will need to build on strengthening LAS and AOAD's ongoing commitments, complemented by co-financing with countries, regional and international partners. Updated Terms of Reference for the HLJTC, TJS, and countries' representatives should be adopted to clarify roles and responsibilities.

Monitoring and accountability are critical for credibility. The report recommends the immediate establishment of a baseline through a regional survey, followed by annual national reports compiled into a yearly regional report. This report should become a standing item on HLJTC agendas, enabling peer review and shared accountability. A five-year programme of work (2025–2030) is proposed, aligned with the Arab Strategies for Water Security and for Sustainable Agricultural Development, as well as with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The process will continue to address key cross-cutting issues, including water allocation for agriculture, non-conventional water resources, data systems, as well as climate resilience and adaptation in agriculture, while strategically extending to other topics like groundwater governance, disaster risk management, food system resilience, artificial intelligence or climate finance, among others. It will continue to focus on the elements of agrifood system transformation that directly affect water management .

It is important that the process remains evidence-based and become more country-owned: drawing on national expertise and regional knowledge exchange; combining desk studies with country-led contributions; engaging national experts through consultations; and producing clear policy briefs for ministerial endorsement, backed by a monitoring package (baseline, country reports, annual regional brief) and measurable indicators. Technical topics will be framed to stay policy-relevant by highlighting cross-sector linkages, practical implementation pathways, and—where appropriate—financing options.

Financing and investment alignment remain a priority. The majority of resources will come from national budgets. Moreover, some countries in the region benefit from donor-funded programmes; therefore, Ministries of Water and Agriculture should ensure the alignment and coherence of their respective programmes and allocate specific funding for joint initiatives that integrate the water-food nexus. Engagement of development partners and donors at both regional and national levels is essential for some Arab countries, as is creating enabling conditions for private sector investment. The initial idea of establishing a Joint Working Group on Resource Mobilization was a positive step

forward. The working group should be strengthened, with agreed governance and clear terms of reference and deliverables.

A more inclusive process is also recommended. Civil society, producer organizations, women, youth, and the private sector should be systematically engaged, whether through observer participation in HLJTC meetings, pre-meeting consultations, or thematic dialogues. Broadening participation will increase the legitimacy and relevance of the process, while also mobilizing additional knowledge and resources.

Looking ahead, sustainability requires embedding the water-food nexus into the core of regional and national strategies. The HLJTC and Joint Ministerial Meetings should establish stronger linkages with existing regional strategies and ensure that resolutions are systematically reflected in national plans and policies. Mechanisms for risk management should also be strengthened, with measures to mitigate political disengagement, funding shortfalls, and high turnover of country representatives.

In conclusion, the intergovernmental process initiated with the Cairo Declaration represents a historic step towards integrated water and food security policies and governance in the Arab region. The foundation has been laid, and the achievements since 2019 demonstrate both the potential and the political will to act. What is now required is a decisive shift from process to impact: embedding policy coherence at the national level, ensuring measurable results, and mobilizing resources for implementation. With strengthened governance, robust monitoring, inclusive participation, and targeted investments, the Arab region can move from commitment to action, building resilient water and food systems that safeguard livelihoods, support economic development, and contribute to regional stability.

This report, therefore, calls upon Arab policymakers to reaffirm their commitment, endorse the proposed recommendations, and champion the integration of water and food security agendas. The years leading up to 2030 present a narrow yet critical window to secure sustainability, resilience, and prosperity for future generations across the Arab world.

2. Introduction

Background & Context

The Arab Region faces interconnected issues of water and food security, with worsening scarcity and quality threatening both the economy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Population growth, urbanization, and climate change intensify these challenges. Currently, 19 out of 22 Arab countries experience severe water stress, including 13 with absolute scarcity (below 500 m³ of renewable water per capita per year)¹.

The region faces a significant food production shortfall, importing more than half of its staple foods.²—a gap that continues to widen due to rising demand, limited land and water resources, and low agricultural and water productivity. Unpredictable rainfall and climate change further stress water supplies and hinder food production. With up to 80% of freshwater withdrawal³ Agriculture is both a victim and a major contributor to water scarcity. Inefficient land and water management in all sectors limits economic growth, leading to reduced job opportunities, and drives youth migration from rural areas. Additionally, unsustainable food systems, poor nutrition, and food waste exacerbate the region's food and water challenges, while conflicts, occupation, and political instability intensify the situation in many parts of the Region.

The Arab Strategy for Water Security (2010-2030) and the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development (2020-2030) guide efforts in these two critical sectors for the region.

Given these intertwined challenges, integrated policies and strengthened coordination between the water and agriculture sectors are essential for both food and water security. Actively strengthening joint mechanisms in policy formulation, investment planning, and project execution offers the potential to yield more stable food production, less reliance on imports, greater food system resilience, and more effective investments in water infrastructure. The result will be optimized water use in agriculture, enhanced adaptation to climate change impacts, including droughts, and a commitment to sustainable water and land resource management, bolstering water and food security for current and future generations.

In 2019, aware of the importance of better policy coordination, the Ministers in charge of water and of agriculture in the Arab Region gathered at a Joint Ministerial Meeting (JMM) under the aegis of the League of Arab States (LAS) and endorsed the “Cairo Declaration of the Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Water”⁴. The declaration outlined key principles for the water and agriculture sectors, targeting greater policy coherence, increased investment, sustainable resource allocation, and the establishment of cross-sectoral governance mechanisms.

¹ Source: AQUASTAT database <https://data.apps.fao.org/aquastat/?lang=en>

² Source : FAOSTAT – Food Security Indicators <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS>

³ Source: AQUASTAT database <https://data.apps.fao.org/aquastat/?lang=en>

⁴ <https://www.aoad.org/Cairo%20Declaration%20of%20the%20Arab%20Ministers%20of%20Agriculture%20and%20Water%20-Adopted%204%20April%2019.pdf>

A High-Level Joint Technical Committee on water and agriculture (HLJTC) was established to serve as the technical arm of the JMMs, providing policy guidance and recommendations on cross-cutting issues between water and agriculture. An Action Plan for the Implementation of the Cairo Declaration was endorsed, featuring a set of actions aimed at transforming the Cairo Declaration into concrete results on the ground.

Since 2019, six HLJTC meetings and two JMMs have been held to advance coordination efforts. The first HLJTC meeting took place on 23-24 October 2019. Since then, HLJTC has convened annually to address significant challenges in cross-cutting water and food issues, including water allocation in agriculture, non-conventional water use in agriculture, data availability and access, and climate resilience.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain to fully operationalize the coordination mechanisms, improve sectoral integration, and ensure that policies effectively translate into coordinated implementation at both national and regional levels, while also providing the sustainability and country ownership necessary for the process to succeed. The HLJTC commissioned the preparation of a keynote stocktaking report to guide discussions at the joint ministerial meeting scheduled for October 2025.

Objectives of the Report

This report assesses the progress made towards implementing the Cairo Declaration and its Action Plan as operationalized through the recommendations of the HLJTC and the JMMs resolutions. It evaluates the achievements of the intergovernmental process to date, highlights key challenges and gaps in implementation and policy development, and presents actionable directions to enhance the effectiveness of institutional coordination. The report outlines recommendations for strengthening water-agriculture policy coherence and coordination at both national and regional levels, aiming to reinforce the role and impact of the joint ministerial meetings and accelerate cross-sectoral policy coherence and implementation. It is intended to stimulate discussions and exchanges at the regional level and contribute to strengthening the process that leads to enhanced policy coherence between water and agriculture at the national level. Beyond descriptive analysis, the report delves into engagement processes, critically assessing actions, and outlining actionable future work modalities and priorities.

In particular, the report reviews progress on key cross-cutting issues addressed in the last five years, including water allocation for agriculture, non-conventional water use, data availability and utilization, and climate resilience. It also proposes cross-sectoral thematic priorities for the coming years. It discusses how to enhance countries' engagement in mainstreaming coordination between the water and agricultural sectors, ensuring alignment with national, regional, and global priorities.

To further strengthen the efforts of HLJTC, the report examines mechanisms to enhance governance and foster intersectoral collaboration. It proposes a structured engagement process that promotes active participation and ownership by member countries, ensuring that policy recommendations are translated into national strategies and actions. This includes refining roles

and responsibilities, promoting multi-stakeholder national and regional coordinated actions, and designing integrated governance structures to bridge the gaps between policy formulation and implementation.

Methodology

The process leading to the preparation of this report involved conducting a stocktaking exercise to highlight achievements, identify challenges, and address gaps, both in terms of the process and thematic elements. It combined a desk review and consultations, through an online survey and one-to-one interviews with key informants. The process was organized as follows:

- Review and analyze reports since 2019, including recommendations, resolutions, and policy documents related to the Cairo Declaration and its Action Plan.
- Review the theory of change associated with the process and assess its implementation.
- Consult with relevant stakeholders and key informants, both through an online survey and one-to-one interviews. These stakeholders included the Joint Technical Secretariat (LAS, AOAD), officials from national institutions having participated in HLJTC meetings, as well as leading international, regional, and national experts involved in the process.
- Hold recurrent in-depth discussions with LAS, AOAD, FAO, and ESCWA for fact-finding, cross-check, and validation of results.

About 50 documents were consulted as part of the desk review. They included the Cairo Declaration, the Action Plan, the resolutions of the two Joint Ministerial Meetings, the reports from the six HLJTC meetings, and documents produced in preparation for the meetings, including technical papers and policy briefs on the discussed selected cross-cutting issues.

The online survey was sent to all individuals who have been involved in the process since its inception. They were in majority mostly participants in the different HLJTC meetings, as well as individuals from organizations involved in the process. In total, the survey was sent to 143 individuals and gathered 48 responses. A summary result of the online questionnaire is presented in Annex 4.

In addition to the online questionnaire, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 20 respondents who had been directly involved in the process to gather their views and ideas for improvements. They included country representatives, consultants in charge of various thematic issues, as well as representatives of organizations directly involved in the process (LAS, AOAD, FAO, ESCWA, ACSAD, etc.).

Expected results

The following are the results expected from this exercise:

- Identification of institutional/organizational challenges, gaps, and opportunities for improving water-food coordination across sectors in the Arab countries.
- Evaluation of progress in addressing key policy coherence and coordination issues and translating recommendations into regional and national actions.

- A Review of progress and challenges encountered in addressing key thematic cross-sectoral issues and identify additional difficulties of cross-sectoral relevance, offering an opportunity for improved policy development and coherence across the water and agriculture sectors.
- A set of actionable recommendations for enhancing institutional coordination mechanisms and governance structures for consideration by the HLJTC and the JMM. These recommendations are meant to:
 - ensure active participation and engagement of member countries, strengthen their ownership of the process, and foster lasting institutional transformation and ensure its sustainability.
 - allow for more systematic integration of the Joint Ministerial Meetings resolutions into national strategies and actions with measurable outcomes.
 - strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships, at the country level, to bridge gaps between policy formulation and implementation.
 - reflect the outputs of the joint intergovernmental process in global processes like the SDGs, Food Systems Summit, Water Action Decade, Climate COPs, etc.
 - develop robust review and monitoring frameworks, complemented by concrete unified reporting tools, to enhance integrated management, synergy, and interconnection between the water and food sectors.
 - Ensure country engagement in implementing resolutions and mechanisms adopted at the ministerial level.

3. Overview of the Intergovernmental Process

The Cairo Declaration and Action Plan

The **Cairo Declaration** was adopted by the Ministers of Water and Agriculture of the Arab Countries at their **First Joint Ministerial Meeting (JMM)** that took place on 4th April 2019. It called upon all Arab governments and partners to:

1. Activate regional coordination mechanisms and mobilization of all stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of new policies and investments
2. Harmonize and integrate policies across the agriculture and water sectors
3. Increase investments in agricultural water management
4. Utilize innovations, data management, analysis, and exchange of expertise

Furthermore, it calls on the Joint Technical Secretariat (technical secretariat of Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD)), with support from FAO and ESCWA, to cooperate with the High Level Joint Technical Committee (HLJTC) to enhance coordination among member states and other stakeholders and align with global goals to ensure effective integration of Arab water security and food security in fulfilment of the to the sustainable development goals.

The declaration provides a series of specific recommendations on how to address the above four points (see Annex 1).

Institutional Framework and stakeholder engagement

Furthermore, at the meeting, the Ministers adopted the following resolutions:

- Called on the Arab countries to follow up on the implementation of the Declaration
- invited donor organizations, funding institutions, and concerned Arab and international organizations to support the Arab countries' efforts to improve and activate coordination between the water and agriculture sectors at the policy, planning, and investment levels to achieve water and food security and environmental sustainability nationally and regionally.
- approved a joint ministerial meetings cycle of two years.
- Established a High-level Joint Technical Committee (HLJTC) as a technical arm supporting the JMMs in following the implementation of the Cairo declaration and setting up a regional cross-sector agenda. The HLJTC consisted of experts and senior officials from ministries concerned with the water and agriculture sectors, and it would meet annually.
- Set up a joint technical secretariat comprising the technical secretariat of the AMWC and the AOAD to facilitate the work of the HLJTC and JMMs, as well as cooperate with regional and international organizations.

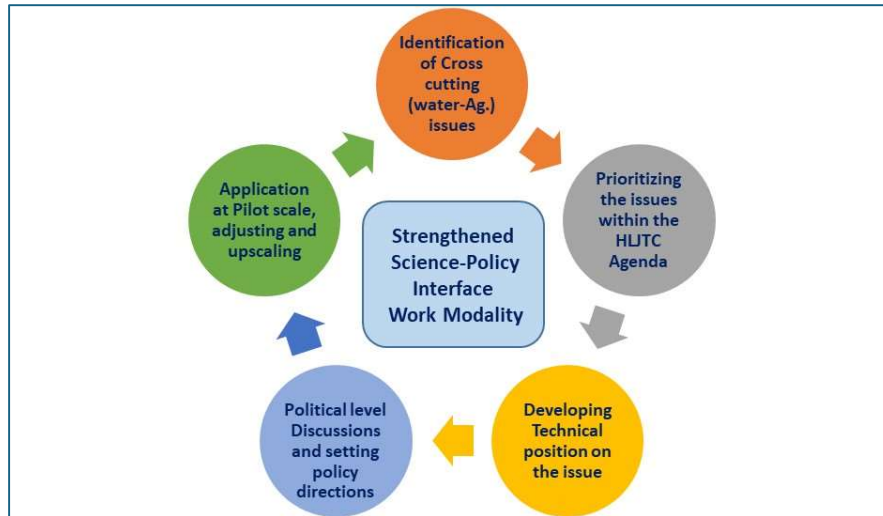
The HLJTC is composed of two representatives from each country (water and agriculture) and supported by the League of Arab States (Arab Ministerial Water Council and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development), FAO and ESCWA, as well as other interested regional specialized organizations.

Conceptual framework and planning

A detailed **Action Plan** was developed for the implementation of the Cairo Declaration and adopted by the Second JMM on 27 January 2022. The Action Plan reflected the ambition of the Cairo Declaration. It provided detailed descriptions of the actions required to achieve the vision behind the Cairo Declaration, including the action itself, the stakeholders involved, the timeframe, the budget, and the monitoring indicators.

The conceptual framework used to implement the Cairo Declaration Process is based on a working modality that focuses on strengthening the science-policy interface, with a particular emphasis on regional-country interactions, as outlined in the cycle presented in Figure 1. Countries agree on a cross-sectoral issue, which is discussed at HLJTC meetings. A technical position is developed on the issue, leading to political discussion and setting policy directions/decisions. Pilots in selected countries are then set up to test the policy decisions, improve on the recommendations of the technical position, and lead to final policy recommendations on how countries should address the issue.

Figure 1: The conceptual framework adopted to implement the process



The HLJTC, in its first meeting, has identified the following cross-cutting issues (issues marked with * had not yet been discussed by 2025):

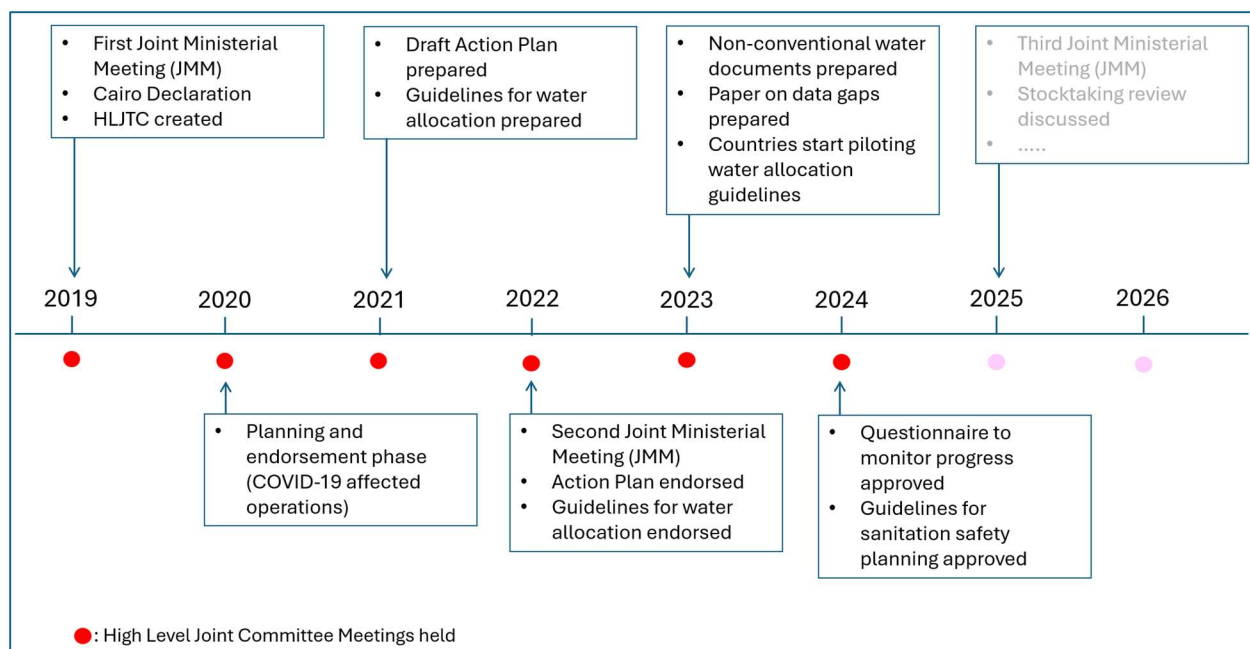
- Water allocation in agriculture
- Use of non-conventional water resources in agriculture
- Water productivity *
- Efficient water usage *
- Water-food- energy nexus *
- Data availability and access
- Climate resilience

4. Achievement and progress

Since the inaugural convening of the HLJTC in 2019, a period of five years has elapsed during which a regional and national process has been underway to foster integration and the water-agricultural nexus, to optimize productivity while ensuring resource sustainability. A structural framework for increased collaboration between the Arab water and agriculture sectors has been developed. Key milestones related to administrative structural frameworks, visions, and roadmaps were established alongside practical implementation efforts and are currently leveraging the expertise of the FAO and ESCWA.

Key milestones achieved during the period 2019 – 2024:

Figure 2: Key milestones during the period 2019-2024



- 2019 served as the base year, during which institutional frameworks and governance bodies were established. The Cairo Declaration was adopted, setting the vision, strategic goals, and framework for implementing the Water-Agriculture Nexus in the Arab Region. The structural foundation was laid, and a formal regional mechanism for collaboration was created by institutionalizing HLJTC for Water and Agriculture, with officially adopted Terms of Reference. Additionally, regular Joint Ministerial Meetings for Water and Agriculture were initiated. A Joint Technical Secretariat, comprising LAS and AOAD, was established to facilitate coordinated actions, leveraging the support and technical expertise of ESCWA and FAO. Furthermore, cross-cutting priority themes for agriculture — such as improved water allocation for agriculture, water productivity/efficiency, non-conventional water use in agriculture, and the WEF (Water-Energy-Food) nexus — were identified. Member States were also invited to designate focal points.
- 2021 and 2022 marked the planning and endorsement phase. The draft "Action Plan for Implementing the 2019 Cairo Declaration" was developed, alongside the launching of the "Water Allocation Guidelines for Agriculture", both of which were opened for countries' feedback. The use of non-conventional water resources in agriculture was introduced to the agenda with a related report commissioned by the Joint Technical Secretariat, FAO, and ESCWA. By 2022, the Joint Ministerial Meeting endorsed the "Implementation Action Plan for the Cairo Declaration" and the "Guidelines for Water Allocation for Agriculture". Ministers mandated the Joint Technical Secretariat and its partners to: report on the progress in implementing the resolutions, engage with Arab funds and donors for resource mobilization, and request a progress report. Concurrently, ministers tasked FAO and ESCWA with preparing

a report on the use of non-conventional water in the Arab region and with supporting the countries interested in voluntarily piloting the guidelines for water allocation.

- 2023 and 2024 marked the beginning of implementation, resource mobilization, and institutionalizing monitoring processes. This phase included pilot-level implementation of the key thematic priorities outlined in the Cairo Declaration Action Plan. FAO commissioned a thematic report on non-conventional water resources and the safe use of sludge. Focus was placed on bridging the data gaps through spatial information and remote sensing, which are crucial for informing decision-making. Benefits of use of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), the Absolute Global Warming Potential (AGWP), and knowledge platforms were highlighted to benefit member countries and show them opportunities for using data systems and the need to collect and populate these systems to ensure reliable information for policy decision. FAO and ESCWA started supporting countries in the preparation of concept notes in improved water allocation for agriculture. FAO began supporting pilot countries in water allocation and the development and implementation of pilot sanitation safety plans. Additionally, the establishment of a Joint Working Group on Financial Resource Mobilization was approved, and related TORs were prepared for adoption. Countries were asked to assess their enabling environment for water-agriculture integration and to prepare progress reports. A template for national reports on water-agriculture coordination was circulated for feedback. The need for continued monitoring of the Cairo Declaration's implementation and for enhancing the resilience of the water and agriculture sectors against climate change impacts was also emphasized during the Joint Ministerial Meeting.

Conclusion

Over the last 6 years, the process to address water-agriculture policy coherence in the Arab countries has had a series of excellent results. The Cairo Declaration and the Joint Ministerial Meetings are outstanding achievements. The initiative has raised awareness among policymakers about the importance and benefits of better coordination between water and agriculture policies, and it has brought together countries to exchange solutions addressing the issue. Overall, the process put in place, including the JMM, the HLJTC, and the conceptual framework used to address cross-sectoral issues, is well-designed to achieve the initiative's goals. Substantial progress has been made at the regional level to strengthen water-agriculture policy coherence in the region.

At the same time, the recommendations developed at the regional level require more rigorous effort from countries to effectively translate them into country-level actions, thus allowing for tangible and measurable results. Country commitment needs to be more dedicated and consistent, and it is necessary to establish a mechanism in each country to ensure country-level implementation. Moreover, the actions taken by specific pilots need to be disseminated to the rest of the countries, and a linkage with policy-level action is necessary for the effective implementation of the JMM resolutions. It is essential to develop a clear programme with expected results and an associated

work plan, as well as establish a monitoring mechanism. The capacities at the regional level to follow up on country action and engagement need to be boosted to multiply the impact of this initiative at the country level.

5. Challenges and Gaps

While the period 2019 to 2024 has seen significant progress in creating cooperative institutional structures, establishing collaborative frameworks, and identifying key thematic areas for action, these efforts must be translated into tangible results on the ground, overcoming challenges such as resource mobilization, data-driven decision-making, and capacity building. Practical guidance is needed to accelerate national implementation, mitigate financial constraints, address limited capacities, break silo mindsets, and streamline coordination and integration – all of which are critical for sustained success. Despite the progress achieved, key challenges and gaps remain:

- **Implementation Lag:** A recurring issue is the ongoing delay in countries providing feedback, submitting reports, and implementing guidelines. This indicates a lag between regional-level agreed policies and national-level action.
- **Data Gaps:** The emphasis on spatial information, remote sensing, and data portals underscores challenges related to collecting, accessing, and utilizing comprehensive data for informed decision-making.
- **Enabling Environment Assessment:** The repeated calls for countries to assess their enabling environment for water-agriculture integration suggest that this assessment is a priority, indicating challenges in coordination and integration.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Seeking to engage national budgets and programmes, Arab funds, regional banks, and donors, highlighting the need for greater financial support to translate plans into concrete projects.

The regional convening mechanism

The **League of Arab States** is the natural convener bringing together all Arab countries around common issues. All Arab countries and partners recognize the convening role of the LAS.

Regional integration among Arab countries faces significant challenges despite a long history of efforts and numerous agreements. While some progress has been made in certain areas, such as trade and climate negotiations, addressing the region's path towards integration remains to be a challenge. Countries need to uphold their commitment and translate it into concrete actions. Sound, institutional frameworks that promote coordination and coherence across sectors are a critical prerequisite. Agreeing on joint approaches to address everyday challenges from a regional standpoint remains the optimum approach.

These region-wide challenges shape how LAS convenes and catalyzes progress; within a voluntary, non-binding framework, the process appropriately emphasizes advocacy, knowledge exchange, capacity development, and consensus-based recommendations. Like in many similar regional organizations, countries' participation in regionally based initiatives and guidance remains on a

purely voluntary/non-binding principle, and this is stipulated in the LAS charter since its creation. Therefore, all regional initiatives and processes focus on advocacy, knowledge exchange and best practices, capacity development, and opportunities to develop recommendations for consideration by countries.

Although the **Joint Ministerial Meetings** currently operate as a high-level joint forum, upgrading its status to a Joint Ministerial Council (subject to consent of the member countries and a decision by the Economic and Social Council) could further amplify political traction and demonstrate a stronger political will for coordination and coherence between water and agriculture. Nevertheless, **Joint Ministerial Meetings** are considered a softer institutional structure adopted within LAS.

At their first joint meeting, the Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Water agreed to set up a **Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS)**. Such a Secretariat is a fundamental condition to ensure the success of the process. LAS hosts the Joint Technical Secretariat, which comprise of the Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD).

The Department of Housing, Water Resources, and Disaster Risk Reduction of LAS hosts the Technical Secretariat of AMWC. It is responsible for following up the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Water Security 2010-2030. The AOAD is a specialized Arab organization operating under the auspices of LAS. The General Assembly of the AOAD, composed of Arab Ministers of Agriculture, acts as its governing body and sets and approves the development plans, work programs, strategy, and policies of the organization. It is responsible for the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture Development 2020-2030. These two institutions share co-responsibility for the JTS of the HLJTC and JMM and are supported by both FAO and ESCWA.

Terms of reference for the JTS were adopted at the first joint meeting. According to the procedures followed by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, after the conclusion of the first meeting, the recommendations were submitted to the Arab Ministerial Water Council, and the Council's report and recommendations were forwarded to the Economic and Social Council for approval. The Economic and Social Council serves as the highest authority for endorsing the decisions of specialized ministerial councils. Therefore, the Joint Technical Secretariat is formally recognized and approved by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States.

While terms of reference have been adopted for the JTS, they were relatively succinct. They need to be revisited for more details and clarity of JTS's roles and responsibilities. Also, this Secretariat must be provided with the resources necessary to achieve its mandate⁵. Resourcing the JTS proportionate to its cross-sector coordination mandate would strengthen delivery and monitoring functions. Furthermore, it is important to establish clear standards for the performance of the

⁵ TOR for both the HLJTC and the joint secretariat were initiated within the AMWC (2018 session) and presented in the first meeting of the HLJTC but were not included in the resolution of the first JMM. Ref: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/towards-integration-water-and-agriculture-policies-enhancing-coordination-between>

Secretariat, which will make its performance review more objective. Based on the desk review and consultation process, it appears that the existing arrangements require a comprehensive review to meet the intended goals and needs of the process.

It is worth noting that the Ministerial Declaration, while emphasizing the role of the Joint Technical Secretariat in cooperating with international and regional organizations, does not mention the importance of maintaining close communication with the countries⁶. Yet, close communication with countries is needed to ensure follow-up on the implementation of adopted decisions and to foster better engagement of countries at both the policy and implementation levels. Country-level policy engagement to date has been uneven; formal focal-point nomination and regular reporting would help systematize uptake of regional initiatives on national policies. This point is discussed in greater detail later in the report.

Institutionally, water and agriculture are addressed differently at the LAS. On water, the AMWC decides on issues of common interest and requests the LAS Secretariat to follow-up on them. On agriculture, the Ministerial General Assembly (Arab Ministers of Agriculture) provides guidance for the work of AOAD, which has its own governance mechanism and budget. The different governance modalities between the two sectors create coordination challenges that the process can address through synchronized agendas, joint KPIs, and shared reporting windows.

FAO's Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) are the two United Nations organizations directly supporting the Joint Technical Secretariat and the whole process. They are supporting this process by virtue of their technical nature. They provide technical, operational, and financial assistance, supporting the Joint Technical Secretariat organize the JMMs and HLJTC meetings, and offering support for implementing activities related to cross-sectoral thematic issues. While these organizations are committed to continue to support the process in the years to come, reduced dependence on the current partners' input will strengthen ownership and sustainability of the JTS. It is, therefore, essential to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders to ensure the efficient and effective management of the process and its long-term sustainability.

The High-Level Joint Technical Committee for Agriculture and Water Sectors

The High-Level Joint Technical Committee (HLJTC) was established to guide the Joint Technical Secretariat in implementing the Cairo Declaration, providing direction, identifying cross-cutting issues, discussing and endorsing technical documents and policy briefs for submission to the JMM. It is also a standing preparatory meeting for the JMM.

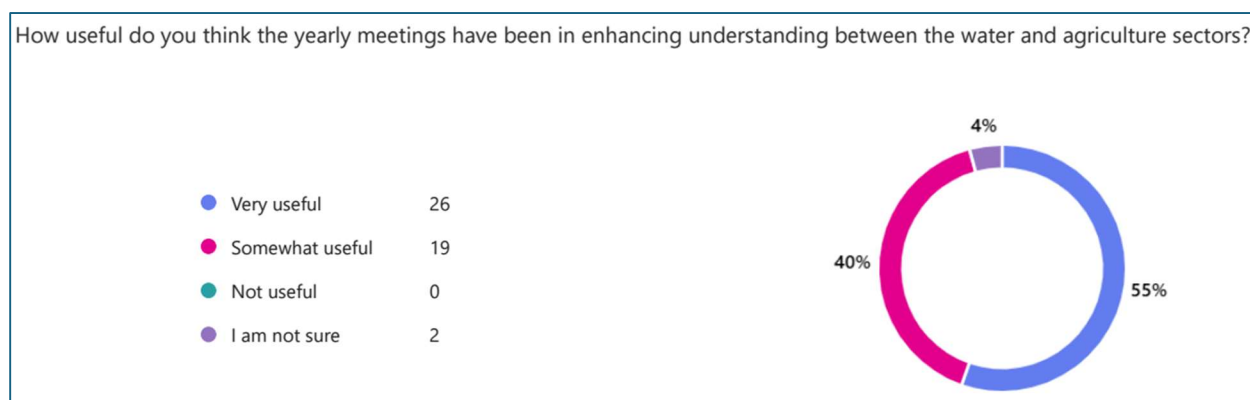
Considering its composition, with one high-level representative from each sector (water and agriculture) from each country, the HLJTC represents the core of the process: it reflects country

⁶ Communication with countries is done through LAS and AOAD official communications channels: the AMWC focal points for LAS and the focal point of the Ministry of Agriculture for AOAD.

perspectives and experiences, while bringing together the perspectives from the two sectors — water and agriculture. The First Meeting of the HLJTC (October 23-24, 2019) adopted brief Terms of Reference for its work.

The extensive consultations with participants that took place as part of the preparation of this report confirm that participants overall appreciate the opportunity offered by the HLJTC to exchange experiences, learn from other countries, and reflect on key cross-cutting issues (see Figure 3). As such, the HLJTC can be considered a highly successful element of the process.

Figure 3: Survey result: Usefulness of the annual HLJTC meetings



Participants have also indicated few shortcomings of the current arrangements related to the HLJTC meetings and highlighted the need to address them to enhance effectiveness of the meeting and intersectoral coordination. These include:

- Turnover of committee members:** Participants have repeatedly lamented the excessive turnover of country representatives, leading to reopening of prior discussions and decisions resulting in inefficient use of time, duplication of efforts and less effective time utilization. The high turnover of the participants' nominations results from the absence of clear directives to member states on the required type of participants and specific terms of reference for nomination. On the contrary, the current nomination process follows the formal LAS procedures, by which Ministries of Water and Agriculture are invited, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to nominate representatives to each HLJTC meeting. With some exceptions, Ministries often nominate participants without being aware of the need to ensure continuity in the process. There is a clear need to ensure continuity of participants with proven experience in the HLJTC areas of work, as their sustained engagement enables effective follow-up on the adopted resolutions. Such participants bring added value to the discussions, contributing effectively to setting the vision and strategic objectives of the HLJTC, as well as developing actionable recommendations that can be implemented.
- Pertinence of the nominated profiles:** Related to the above is the question of the profile of participants. Ideally, as focal points for their Ministry, they should emanate from a unit in charge of planning or programming and be knowledgeable of the issues associated with the

water-agriculture nexus. They should possess broad technical knowledge and be able, on the one hand, to disseminate the findings of the HLJTC and JMM meetings, and on the other hand, to report on the country's situation and progress to the HLJTC. As it is currently organized, the process does not encourage the performance of these tasks. As a result, most of the contributions to the meetings are mostly “reactive”, while what is needed is for participants to take a proactive role in the preparation and holding of the meetings.

- **Follow-up at the country level:** At this stage, based on the available information, there appears to be an opportunity to enhance and better support action at the country level. Addressing this area promptly would help ensure the full achievement of the process's objectives. No information is available on the process by which decisions of the HLJTC are conveyed and transformed into country-level action. The nomination and role of country representatives in the HLJTC, therefore, require scrutiny to ensure that they can play their crucial role as an interface between decisions and their implementation and between regional and national activities.

Planning, monitoring, and reporting

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Cairo Declaration was developed in 2021. It provides a framework for translating a vision and strategy into a set of performance indicators that are balanced across four perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and growth. The Action Plan considered a first period of 2-3 years, referred to as “learning and growth,” necessary to build the capital required to achieve the vision, including institutions, coordination, knowledge, data, and an enabling environment. This phase was to be followed by a second period of 2-3 years, during which capital is utilized to achieve the desired outcomes that lead to the vision (Internal processes). Each action was described in detail, including expected results, actions and process, stakeholders and their role, timeframe, budget, and M&E indicators.

Although the Ministers endorsed the Action Plan at their second meeting, it was not systematically operationalized. The main reasons for this are multiple:

- The action plan was ambitious and perceived as too complex.
- The limited resources available to the Joint Technical Secretariat and its partners limited their ability to consider the action plan as a roadmap and therefore the mechanisms that were needed to implement it were not put in place.

As an initial step, the Action Plan recommended that the JTS establish a “dedicated staff” (two persons) to run an Office of Strategy Management (OSM), coordinating and following up on the proposed guidelines and activities, and ensuring their timely revision and implementation by the countries. Such an Office was not established, and therefore, the planning, monitoring, and management of the initiative was not sufficiently addressed.

Knowledge exchange, awareness raising, advocacy, and capacity building

The online survey, which gathered feedback from 48 individuals who had been involved in the process (mostly in the HLJTC meetings), made it clear that participants appreciated the contribution of this process to awareness raising, knowledge exchange, and capacity building.

In terms of **knowledge exchange**, learning from the experience of other Arab countries is considered extremely important. Such exchanges can occur through regional meetings or, when possible, through study tours. Participants also emphasized the importance of learning from experiences beyond the Arab region, in other countries facing similar water scarcity challenges. While appreciating the opportunity to exchange knowledge, participants also indicated that the meeting agenda did not provide sufficient time for such exchanges, as most of the time was allocated to regional presentations on cross-sectoral topics, with limited opportunity to discuss country-specific situations. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that the agenda of the meetings are approved by members of the committee (representatives of the countries), where no proposals or requests have been raised from countries to incorporate country level presentations within the meetings' agendas.

Awareness raising is considered a fundamental element of such a regional process. The simple fact of gathering high-level civil servants and ministers around the table enhances coherence in water and agriculture policies in the region, indicating the importance of the subject and providing an opportunity to reflect on the country's situation.

Communication is key to raising awareness. A formalized communication strategy would further amplify existing limited outreach; the report recommends consolidating all relevant materials (technical, policy and promotional) under a dedicated process website.

Capacity building was mentioned by many as an important part of the process. It is important to recognize that, in many instances, especially within the piloting of crosscutting issues at country level, the process has stimulated discussions and prompted actions at the national level regarding coherence and complementarity within the water and agriculture sectors. However, the process's ability and available resources to effectively address capacity-building remains limited. It takes place at two levels: institutional and individual. At the institutional level, the lack of formally nominated country focal points and the fact that participants in HLJTC meetings do not always represent the right departments limit the capacity of the process to develop institutional capacities associated with the objective of enhanced water-agriculture coherence.

The same applies at the individual level: enhancing the knowledge and skills of participants may have positive outcomes for individuals. Whether this leads to notable impact depends primarily on the participants' profiles and their responsibilities at the national level. Acquiring knowledge about a subject not directly related to an individual's duties can increase personal understanding but may not significantly influence their job performance.

National-level policy convergence and coordination

Enhancing policy coherence between sectors is a challenge for all countries. In most cases, government plans are organized in a sectoral way, with different departments being responsible for achieving specific targets. Budgets are aligned with such sectoral structures (although there are better opportunities for integration at sub-national levels). At all levels of administration, policymakers and managers are judged by the effectiveness of their actions in achieving specific targets. This situation offers little incentive for dialogue and coordination. Typical tools to help enhance policy coherence and coordinated action include guidance from higher levels of hierarchy, as well as joint funding and joint targets.

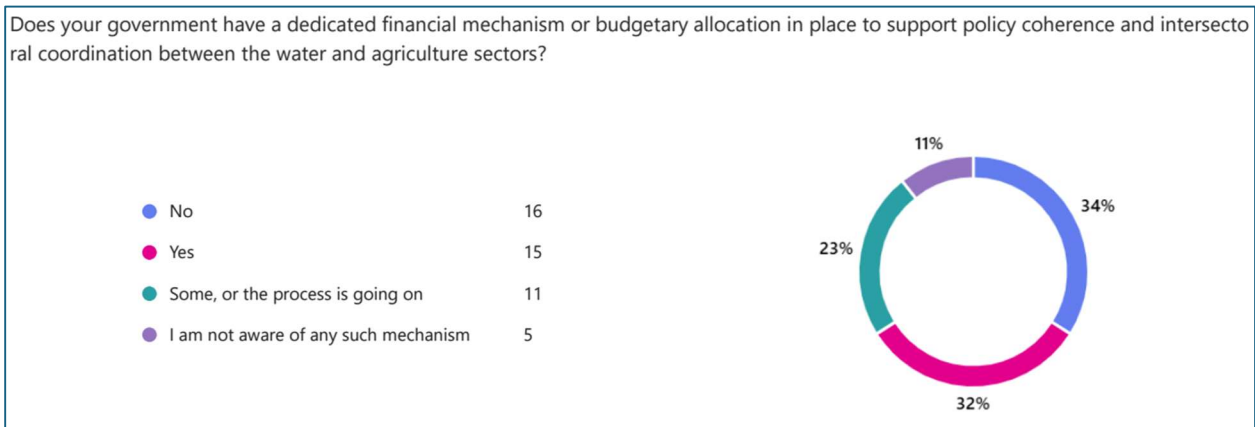
Enhancing the coherence of policies and coordinated action on water and agriculture in the Arab countries is the stated objective of this process. This means that all the actions undertaken as part of the process must have this as the ultimate objective.

To assess progress toward achieving this objective, it is necessary to acknowledge existing national efforts and establish a baseline for comparison. Countries are at different stages of achieving this objective. Some have established coordination mechanisms, others have brought water and agriculture under a single Ministry, others have created independent water agencies, etc. A detailed review of existing mechanisms and their performance would be beneficial to guide future work in this area. It would also contribute to knowledge exchange between countries.

Funding & Investment Coordination

The survey indicates that some progress is being made in countries in terms of finance and investment. Figure 4 shows that one-third of countries suggest that they have a specific budget or financial mechanism allocated to cross-sectoral policy coherence. At the same time, almost a quarter of the respondents indicate that some process is being put in place. In total, more than half of the countries have allocated specific financial resources for enhanced policy coherence. More information is needed to understand these mechanisms, their impact on joint planning and coordination, and to learn from country experience.

Figure 4: Financial mechanisms at the country level for cross-sectoral policy coherence



Handling of cross-cutting issues

The conceptual framework adopted to foster cross-sectoral policy coherence is based on identifying cross-sectoral issues of relevance to member countries, followed by a series of steps aimed at achieving a shared understanding of the issue, discussing potential solutions, and developing policy recommendations. In some cases, direct engagement of countries has also been secured through pilot operations aimed at testing the policy recommendations (see Figure 1). The HLJTC prioritized the following issues that have been submitted for discussion:

- **Water allocation and sustainability:** Developing guiding principles on sustainable water allocation for agriculture.
- **Non-conventional water resources:** Promoting the use of treated wastewater and the potential of desalination for agriculture.
- **Data availability and access:** Addressing data gaps and strengthening data-sharing mechanisms, and the use of information technologies for improved decision-making.
- **Climate resilience:** Addressing sustainable water use under climate change impacts.

These issues have been introduced at various times and are currently at different stages of implementation. Recently, other issues have been proposed for discussion. They include a theme on **unlocking the potential of rainfed agriculture and food systems, as well as climate finance** to enhance resilience.

Selecting themes that are crosscutting in nature is a challenging task. Numerous interconnected issues warrant attention. The way issues are being treated needs to be aligned with the overall purpose of the process, which is to ensure policy coherence. This requires a thorough understanding of the issue and its translation into policy language to provide evidence-based policy decisions. This corresponds well with the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

The **process** through which cross-cutting issues are addressed is primarily top-down: evidence is gathered through desk studies and submitted to the HLJTC for discussion by the countries. However, at the initial stage, there is no direct involvement of the countries. Such an approach may limit the capture of the wealth of experience that countries in the region have acquired in the specific field under consideration.

The **scope** of the issue to be addressed is also essential to ensure that it leads to relevant policy guidance (not excessively broad) while avoiding overly technical matters. For all the issues that have been selected, the subject has been further broken down into more specific topics that were easier to treat.

For instance, the topic of water allocation has been interpreted broadly, encompassing both the allocation of water to agriculture and its use within agricultural systems. This is evident in the selection of pilot activities implemented in various countries, which range from agronomic practices and irrigation technologies to regulatory frameworks, water accounting, reuse, and strategic planning for water allocation. While these aspects all fall under the general category of water allocation, addressing them collectively may result in a less focused examination of the topic and present challenges for formulating specific policy recommendations.

The same applies to the theme of non-conventional water resources, which has been split into desalination for agriculture and wastewater re-use, with a further focus on sanitation safety planning. This raises the question of the right technical level at which discussion should take place in the framework of this process, considering that issues of an excessively technical nature may not be of relevance for ministerial-level decisions.

Of relevance to this discussion is the **engagement and profile of country representatives**. For issues of general strategic relevance, representatives from the two Ministries who have a broad and strategic vision of the problem may be well-positioned to discuss the matter. When discussions become more technical and specific, they may not be in a position to contribute meaningfully to the debate, both in terms of sharing country experiences and in effectively utilizing the information being shared and the decisions being made.

The **quality and type of knowledge products** submitted to HLJTC for discussion (both technical reports and policy briefs) are a critical element of the process. Only well-documented, evidence-based, and comprehensive knowledge, translated into readable policy messages, can support changes in countries. These documents must also acknowledge the diversity of situations in the different Arab countries, as well as the experiences both within the region and beyond. In addressing the above four issues, the products include guidelines and policy briefs.

In some cases, **guidelines** have been produced. These guidelines may be of use to countries. Still, they need to reflect the requirements of the policy process: they must focus on the issues associated with the water-agriculture nexus and discuss implications in terms of policy coordination.

Country-level action

The weak formal commitment by countries in this process has substantially restricted their involvement. Therefore, the linkage between regional actions and actions at the country level remains incomplete or partial. Thus, except for reporting on the results of piloting field work at the country level, there is no formal monitoring and reporting mechanism in place, and no systematic way for countries to share their experiences on specific issues. Consequently, country representatives at the HLJTC meetings do not report on any country-level progress in implementing actions related to the process. The proposed outline of a **First regional report on the level of coordination between water and agriculture**, prepared by ESCWA and discussed at the 6th meeting of the HLJTC in October 2024, is an important step forward in achieving a better understanding of the country's situation and enhancing the country's engagement in the process.

All respondents view country-level piloting as a fundamental element that engages countries concretely on specific issues. It is also an opportunity to link regional discussions with country-level action and provide concrete applications for what, at the regional level, could appear more theoretical than practical. However, country-level action can take various forms, ranging from discussing policies and strategies to reviewing legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as implementing concrete actions at the farm or watershed level. The way these actions are connected to policy-level action differs from one case to another. Country piloting can serve as a model for other countries to follow, and it can encourage them to adopt similar approaches if it proves successful. Conversely, if the pilot is unsuccessful, the opposite is also true.

So far, country-level action has been supported through FAO regional funding for the Water Scarcity Initiative and the ESCWA Project on Climate Resilience through Regional Cooperation for Inclusive Sustainable Development. Considering the limited funding available, it isn't easy to generalize country-level action through this approach, and it will be essential to ensure a better link between the initiative and country-level action.

6. The Way Forward: Recommendations for Strengthening the Process and Ensuring Country-Level Impact

If the proposed actions are implemented, this process can become a regional reference (and a global example) for the water-agriculture nexus. Its overall credibility and authority would be improved, regional coordination capacity and country engagement would be strengthened, and partnerships with relevant stakeholders (financial, private sector, civil society) would enhance the opportunities for concrete results on the ground. The success of the process will need to be measured by concrete changes at the country and regional level, through changes in policies triggered by the Regional Water-Agriculture policy coherence process.

Box: Advantages and limitations of a regional process: This process is regional in nature. It builds on the capacity of the League of Arab States to act as a convenor among Arab countries. As results will ultimately be measured by changes at the country and local levels, it is essential to acknowledge both the limitations and the comparative advantages of a regional process for action at the national and local levels. The focus should therefore be on: knowledge and data exchange, including case studies and good practices; capacity building; advocacy; awareness raising and communication; as well as emulation of change. Country engagement is critical to ensure the best possible results of the regional process.

Reaffirm and strengthen high-level engagement

The results obtained in 2019 through the JMM and the endorsement of the Cairo Declaration are commendable. They demonstrated the political will of the Arab countries to support the process. The efforts made since 2019, through the cycles of HLJTC meetings and work on cross-cutting issues (including pilot activities), have helped maintain awareness about the process at the national level. Such awareness needs to be strengthened, and country engagement and commitment to the process's success need to be renewed and enhanced. This can be achieved through the endorsement of the recommendations, which are presented below and summarized in Annex 5.

Incentivize national engagement

One of the key elements to increase the impact of the process is better engagement of countries so that the efforts to improve policy coherence between water and agriculture are reflected at the country level. The changing of country representatives in the HLJTC meetings, inadequate reporting modalities, and limited opportunities for countries to compare their approaches and learn from one

another have hindered country engagement in the process. The following actions are recommended to strengthen country engagement in the process:

- **Countries should adopt a Country Engagement Protocol** describing the structure, action and reporting mechanisms for country engagement in the process.
- A resolution should be adopted requesting countries **establish a national team and nominate focal points** (from the two Ministries), ensuring that they have the right profile for active engagement in the works of the HLJTC. Focal points should originate from units responsible for strategy and/or planning in the two ministries. In countries where coordination mechanisms are in place, focal points should also be involved in such mechanisms. Terms of reference should be prepared and shared with countries to ensure that the profile of nominees reflects the needs of the process.
- Establish a **community of practices** through a joint email list gathering all participants in HLJTC, and keep them regularly informed about the process of implementing the plan of action.
- Focal points should be responsible for the **overall coordination of country action and periodic reporting on progress**. For this, they should be directly involved in country pilot initiatives, both in terms of their selection, monitoring, and implementation, and report back to the HLJTC meeting on progress and achievements at the country level.
- For countries with limited resources (least developed countries), opportunities should be sought to provide **financial support** to country focal points to facilitate country-level action (national dialogues, pilot actions, coordination).
- **Leverage existing country-level action:** countries should review their own portfolio of actions of relevance to specific cross-sectoral issues and ensure that they are associated with the process. Some funding could be allocated to these programmes to support their involvement in the process and their participation in knowledge exchange events.

Accelerate capacity building, knowledge exchange, and advocacy

Advocacy, knowledge and data exchange, and capacity building are the core of the regional process. Substantial progress has been made since 2019 in raising awareness and advocating for enhanced cross-sectoral policy coordination. HLJTC meetings have offered opportunities for knowledge exchange and capacity building. Such efforts should be continued and reinforced. In particular, the process should:

- **Facilitate technical exchanges on specific cross-sectoral issues** by establishing communities of practice for each relevant theme, bringing together national experts to promote knowledge sharing. These communities can utilize platforms such as the Inter-regional Platform on Water Scarcity (iRTP-WS) for storing and exchanging good practices. In-person meetings or study tours may also be organized for these experts, where feasible. The composition of these expert groups varies depending on the issue and differs from country to country.

- **Establish a knowledge hub** for technical reports and data to encompass all information emanating from the process for the benefit of countries. Such a knowledge hub should be part of a dedicated website for this process.

Strengthen the regional coordination mechanism

The stocktaking exercise has demonstrated that the coordination for this process needs strengthening. To achieve this, the following actions are recommended:

- **Strengthening the Joint Technical Secretariat** (the LAS Department of Housing, Water, and Disaster Risk Reduction and AOAD) to enable it to support strategy development, implementation, and monitoring of the process, as well as coordinating and overseeing its activities and ensuring smooth implementation of the agreed Action Plan. Both organizations should allocate sufficient resources to provide the highest coordination of this process. It is suggested that the process nominates at least one coordinator and one M&E expert. Partner organizations (ESCWA, FAO) may consider seconding staff to support the process.
- **The JTS should fulfil the following tasks associated with the process:**
 - Promote and coordinate stronger engagement of non-state actors in the HLJTC and Joint Ministers' meetings.
 - Follow-up, monitor and report on recommendations and decisions of HLJT and JMM meetings and on progress in implementing the planned activities.
 - Ensure the smooth implementation of the activities planned under the work plan and propose remedial action when needed
 - Maintain regular communication with all stakeholders involved in the process to ensure their active participation. These include policymakers, country focal points, technical experts, specialized institutions, development partners, the private sector and civil society, among others.
 - Maintain a dedicated website for the process, including meeting reports, knowledge material, and practical information.
- **The existing Terms of Reference need to be updated** to improve the structure of the process and clarify roles and responsibilities and should be endorsed by HLJTC. This includes the Joint Technical Secretariat, the supporting agencies (FAO, ESCWA, others), the Country Focal Points, and the HLJTC itself.

Establish, monitor and report on yearly programme of work with time-bound deliverables

This intergovernmental process is an open-ended process with no established timeframe or deadline. As a result, it isn't easy to monitor progress. To provide momentum and help focus on results, it is suggested to establish time-bound objectives and targets.

Considering that 2030 is the target year of the Arab Strategy for Water Security and the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture Development, and the end year for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the following actions are recommended:

- **Agree on a programme of work and time frame for implementing the Action Plan. A 5-year time frame, 2025-2030, is proposed.** Focus should be put on actions that can be achieved within the proposed timeframe and with available resources. The 5-year work plan will be revised and adjusted at each HLJTC meeting.
- **Review recent developments** in areas like climate change, digitalization, and artificial intelligence, technological progress in renewable energy, as well as progress made by countries in these areas, and report to the HLJTC on policy implications.

One of the main limitations of the process so far is the absence of a monitoring and reporting system. This impacts the overall effectiveness of the process, the capacity to monitor progress, the opportunities for countries to engage actively in the process, and their accountability in relation to the process. The following actions should be considered:

- **Establish a baseline:** countries are at diverse stages in adopting measures to ensure cross-sectoral policy coherence. The momentum initiated by the Cairo Declaration has influenced policymaking in countries, even if, due to the lack of monitoring, it is not possible to quantify such progress. It is therefore recommended that a survey be initiated immediately among Arab countries to gain a clearer picture of the current situation. It is therefore important to accelerate efforts aimed at producing the **first regional report on cross/sectoral policy coordination**, the structure of which was approved by the HLJTC in October 2024. This report would provide a baseline to measure progress over the forthcoming years. Countries are encouraged to engage in the provision of accurate and timely information in the framework of this survey.
- Subsequently, country focal points should be requested to provide **yearly country reports**. The Joint Technical Secretariat would be charged with further developing the template and monitoring guidelines as necessary in support of national monitoring. The template approved at the 2024 HLJTC meeting is an excellent starting point for such an exercise.
- In preparation for the HLJTC meetings, the Joint Technical Secretariat should gather country reports and establish an annual **regional report**. Presentation and discussion of this report should be a standing agenda item during the HLJTC meetings.

Address cross-sectoral issues strategically

The cross-sectoral issues that warrant discussion at the HLJTC meetings are numerous. Experience since 2019 has shown that the topics to be discussed are of a different nature, with some being addressed at a strategic level and others being more technical in nature. The following recommendations are meant to ensure that the issues are selected and discussed strategically:

- **Issues for consideration at HLJTC meetings should be selected in a way that they are neither too broad nor too technical and are discussed in terms of their policy**

implications. Broad issues are challenging to translate into meaningful and implementable policy decisions. On the other hand, matters of a very technical nature may not warrant decisions at the policy level. A list of possible topics for discussion is offered for consideration in Annex 2.

- The selection of issues to be addressed should **consider their relevance to most countries** and address the urgency of the issue, also considering issues of global concern.
- The following **cycle** is proposed to address cross-sectoral issues:
 - Selection of 1-3 issues reflecting countries' interest at each HLJTC meeting (year 1)
 - Identification of relevant national civil servants in Arab countries to act as focal points for each cross-sectoral issue, and forming an expert group on the specific topic
 - Desk study including state-of-the-art knowledge about the issue, a review of the situation in all Arab countries (with the involvement of country focal points), and experience outside the region.
 - Expert consultation gathering country experts, exchange of experience between countries, endorsement of the technical report, and drafting of policy brief.
 - Submission of policy brief to HLJTC meeting (year 2) for endorsement.
 - Submission of policy brief for discussion at JMM and communication of results across the region.
 - Monitoring progress in countries and reporting at subsequent HLJTC meetings (years 3 and 4.)
- This approach implies that, for each cross-cutting issue, countries designate a **representative with the right level of expertise and relevant responsibilities** to be able to contribute meaningfully to the preparation of the reports and benefit from knowledge exchange between countries. These experts are typically distinct from the HLJTC focal points, who may not be specialized in all areas to be discussed.
- There is a general agreement among interviewees and from the survey that, in order to ensure the best results, two elements should be considered: 1. Gathering and **exchanging knowledge between Arab countries** about the issue, and 2. **Learning from experience outside the region.**
- It is essential to ensure the **highest quality of technical and policy reports** by securing support from recognized experts in these areas. Regional technical organizations such as FAO, ESCWA, AOAD, ACSAD, and others have an important responsibility in ensuring the highest quality of the products under discussion.
- **Countries in need could be supported financially by the Secretariat (upon availability of resources), or by joint mobilization of resources through innovative fundraising approaches to set up policy processes directly related to specific cross-cutting issues.** These processes could include cross-sectoral dialogues, the development or revision of relevant policies and/or strategies, or changes in the legal, regulatory, or institutional framework related to the issue. Such processes are currently being considered and implemented through the piloting of cross-sector issues, like in Sanitation Safety Planning and Water Allocation for Agriculture, at country level.

Align Financial and Investment Strategies

Most of the fundraising, financing and investments are mostly taking place at the country's level, whether as part of national programmes or programmes supported by funding partners. Influencing these programmes to integrate the water-agriculture nexus better implies work at the level of national policies and strategies, as well as through engagement with funding partners. The following actions should be considered:

- **Engaging national programmes.** In many Arab countries, the budget allocated for water and agriculture sectors is significant. Ministries in charge of water and of agriculture should ensure that they allocate sufficient resources for this process as part of their national programmes, and that their national programmes are designed in a way to enhance coordination between water and agriculture.
- **Engaging development partners** as part of the dialogues at the regional and national levels. At the regional level, representatives of funding partners should be invited to contribute to the discussions of the HLJTC meetings, share their views, and learn from the progress in countries. At the national level, donors should be encouraged to contribute to the water-agriculture dialogue and seek to integrate a more coordinated approach into the programs they support.
- **Engaging the private sector** as part of the dialogue at regional and national levels. While the private sector has its own objectives based on the pursuit of profit, it is increasingly aware of the importance of developing approaches, policies, and associated legal and regulatory frameworks that ensure long-term sustainability and address trade-offs and conflicts. Providing the proper framework for private sector investment has the potential to address some of the key challenges associated with water and agriculture coordination.

Ensure stronger engagement of non-state actors in the process

As it stands, the HLJTC is a technical body within an intergovernmental process. Effective involvement of non-governmental stakeholders may enrich the discussion and establish linkages that have the potential to scale up cross-sectoral integration at regional and country levels. Table 1 provides a list of stakeholders and recommendations on how to engage them more effectively in the process.

- **Enhancing stakeholder engagement and broadening participation.** This would include the involvement of representatives of civil society, producer organizations (representing various categories of producers), youth, women, and the private sector as observers in the process. The modalities of their engagement should be worked out in a way that contributes positively to the process. Many examples exist of such mechanisms, Where for instance, virtual meetings could be organized to discuss HLJTC Agenda items before their meetings, offering the opportunity to convey their views on the items submitted for discussion. Their contribution would ensure that HLJTC decisions consider the concerns of stakeholders and make the best use of opportunities offered by collaboration with the civil society and the private sector. It would also increase the visibility of the process.

- Engage and **involve the finance and donor community** in the discussions of the HLJTC, including World Bank, Regional Development Funds/Banks, SIDA, GIZ, GCF, and GEF, to seek alignment between efforts done in the framework of the process and their action at the regional and national level. This should be done within a structured strategy.
- To ensure meaningful discussions, **the duration and agenda of the HLJTC meetings should be reviewed and expanded**. Interviews clearly indicated that the HLJTC meetings were too short to achieve their objectives.

Table 1: Stakeholder map with engagement strategy

Stakeholder	Role/ Position	Influence Level	Expectations	Potential Impact	Engagement Strategy
1. STAKEHOLDERS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS					
Ministers from Arab countries	Policy makers	High	Politically acceptable solutions	Critical to the success of the process	Regular updates, communication through High-Level Officials
LAS Secretary General	Facilitator at the Ministerial level	High	Raising the LAS profile as a regional broker	Critical to the success of the process	Seek more engagement and commitment through Senior Officials (FAO, ESCWA)
LAS Economic Affairs (Dept of Housing, WR, DRR)	Host of technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC)	High, considering its role in drafting and following up on resolutions	Successful implementation of the process	Structural to the success of the process	Engage in designing the process, address limitations and lack of resources, support through additional workforce and expertise, and seek commitment to jointly manage the JTS.
AOAD	Regional convenor for Ministers of Agriculture	High	Position AOAD as the leading partner in the process, and benefit from new coordination opportunities.	Necessary for the success of the process	Keep engaged through active participation in the JTS, maintenance of the process' website and regular communication. .
FAORNE, ESCWA, LAS and AOAD Leads	Link with policy makers, and support the process	High	Successful implementation of the process with recognition of their role by countries	Critical to the success of the process	Seek joint commitment to support the process operationally and financially, and to secure sufficient resources.
FAORNE, ESCWA Technical teams	Support the process operation	High	Successful implementation of the process with	Key to the success of the process:	Maintain their role as pillars of the process, with more focus on supporting the Joint

Stakeholder	Role/ Position	Influence Level	Expectations	Potential Impact	Engagement Strategy
	ally and financiall y, and provide technical content.		measurable results in countries		Technical Secretariat and less on direct involvement.
Regional Technical Organizations	Providing technical content in specific areas	Low	Position themselves as part of the process, be offered opportunities to contribute, and receive funding.	Moderate/low	Keep engaged through participation in HLJTC and obtain commitment through specific technical actions.
Participants in HLJTC – Country representatives	Focal points from their respective ministries	High (depending on nomination process)	Ensure that their country benefits from the process in the best possible way.	Critical to ensure impact at the country level	Seek formal nomination as official representative, ensure continuous engagement from one meeting to another, keep regularly informed, and engage through regular exchanges, including country-level monitoring.

2. STAKEHOLDERS NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS SO FAR

Financial institutions (World Bank, IsDB, GCF, GEF, SIDA, GIZ, others)	Funding the process or funding actions of relevance to the process in countries	High/moderate.	To be investigated (not involved so far).	High, especially in terms of results on the ground.	Engage through initial consultation, participation in HLJTC, and joint Ministerial Meetings.
Civil Society Organizations	Advocacy	Moderate	Influence the process to ensure their priorities are taken into consideration.	Moderate, high at the national level (social, environmental, technical)	Invite to participate in the process and report to HLJTC and Ministerial Meetings. Invite to contribute to national-level dialogues.
Private sector, producers' organizations	Directly involved in agricultural water management	High	Ensuring that they can do business in a stable and sustainable way	High if they represent an important share of water users in agriculture.	Invite to participate in the process and report to HLJTC and Joint Ministerial Meetings. Invite to contribute to national-level dialogues.
National civil servants in charge of	Responsible for country-level	Low, locally high	Knowledge exchange, learn from other countries, and	High at the national level, if given	Ensure participation in specific thematic discussions and country

Stakeholder	Role/ Position	Influence Level	Expectations	Potential Impact	Engagement Strategy
specific issues	implementation		capacity development	the opportunity	pilots, and participation in thematic meetings.
Experts, Technical institutions (from within or outside the region)	Provide state-of-the-art knowledge on specific thematic issues	Potentially high	Contribute to knowledge dissemination in their area of expertise and raise personal or institutional profile in the region.	High	Seek to secure contributions from the best experts in developing thematic discussions and policy papers.

Review the organization and agenda of the HLJTC meetings

The HLJTC meetings are the backbone of the process. The way they are organized and their attendance play a central role in the successful implementation of the process. The above recommendations have implications for the organization of the HLJTC meetings, which are reflected below:

- The Agenda of the HLJTC meetings should include a standing agenda item on **progress in implementing the Action Plan**. Reporting on this agenda item will be the responsibility of the JTS, based on the annual report prepared on the basis of the country reports
- The agenda of the HLJTC meeting should include a standing agenda item reporting the **views and recommendations from non-state actors**, based on meetings organized before the HLJTC meeting.
- The agenda should allocate **more space for countries to report and exchange on their experience and progress** in cross-sectoral policy development and implementation. Systematic reporting from each country should be avoided. Instead, selected countries, on a rotating basis, should be asked to make presentations on specific themes, where sufficient time should be allocated for technical discussions on these topics.
- As a result, **the duration of the HLJTC meetings should be reviewed and expanded**, considering the possibility of a 2-day meeting. Countries should consider progressively contributing to the increased cost of these meetings.

Ensure sustainability of the process

To ensure a long-term impact and sustainability, the period from 2025 to 2030 should be used to mainstream cross-sectoral policy coherence and coordination within regional programmes. In particular, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **A standing agenda item for “Follow/up of the JMM resolutions” should be put on the agenda of both the AMWC Meeting and the AOAD General Assembly** and conveyed to ECOSOC for endorsement.

- Both the **Arab Strategy for Water Security and the Sustainable Agriculture Development Strategy** have a target year of 2030. In the coming years, these initiatives need to be implemented in an integrated manner, parallel to a similar time frame, with **a cross-checking process, and the integration of the nexus concept**. To achieve this, the Joint Technical Secretariat will need to work out the modalities for this joint exercise, and a roadmap should be established.

Addressing risks

Table 2 presents the risks to be considered in implementing the Cairo Declaration and the proposed actions needed to minimize the impact of such risks. The above recommendations aim to ensure that the appropriate mitigation measures are implemented to reduce the effects of these risks.

Table 2: Major risks related to the implementation of the Cairo Declaration and action to mitigate them.

Risk Type	Steps to be taken to mitigate the risk
Implementation Environment-Related	
Absence of political will for cooperation by some countries	To ensure the commitment at the highest political level in LAS and the countries through proper documentation, for example, by signing MOUs at the level of the AMWC and General Assembly of AOAD.
Loss of ownership by the countries and dwindling commitments	To engage countries at an early stage, nominate representative members from the two Ministries to participate in the HLJTC and ensure that countries see the benefits of supporting country-level action, knowledge exchange, and capacity building.
Resources-Related	
Lack of funds	To diversify national governments' funding resources and donors. Donors to obtain a buy-in of the action plan should be invited to the HLJTC meetings and the commissioning of the action plan. Additionally, seek to influence donors' actions in countries through their active engagement in water-agriculture dialogues.
Human-Related	
Regular change of national representatives in HLJTC meetings	Institutionalize the process of communication and reporting with the country representatives. Furthermore, representatives should have nominated teams working with them. Additionally, maintain records for each country's communication in a well-organized manner.
Process-Related	
Weak coordination of the JTS with the countries	Strengthen the JTS to ensure that it can deliver on the coordination of the process and its monitoring in close coordination with country focal points.

Source: Adapted from the Action Plan for the implementation of the Cairo Declaration (2022)

7. Annexes

Annex 1: The Cairo Declaration

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

We are concerned about the exacerbation of these challenges due to 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 a decrease in employment opportunities and an increase in youth migration from rural areas and movement from agriculture to other, more productive sectors.

We recognize the need to develop and activate coordination mechanisms between the water and agriculture sectors in areas such as policy development, investment planning, and the implementation of programs and projects, to ensure food security and water security while promoting the 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 those related to agriculture and social protection, 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, especially 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.
4. It is essential that agricultural water policies holistically deal with food security, 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: An increase in 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 utilization of innovations, data management and analysis, and the 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 provide an appropriate, guided incentive and funding environment to improve the performance of research institutions, especially in the areas of arid lands, marginal lands, and rain-fed agriculture.

3. Develop and update mechanisms for the 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 invite 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 freshwater 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 Joint 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 to ensure effective integration of Arab water security and food security into the sustainable development strategies.

Annex 2: Emerging issues of relevance to the water-agriculture nexus

The list of topics to be discussed at the HLJTCs is established based on priorities expressed by HLJTC participants. As part of the review process leading to this report, participants were asked to suggest themes of relevance to the subject, both through the online survey and one-to-one interviews. The list below is the result of this process. It highlights the diversity of issues that both sectors should address.

1. STRATEGIC ISSUES

Strategic issues encompass questions that imply societal choices and development strategies, as well as the governance, institutional, and legal frameworks necessary to achieve them. Addressing these questions requires a good understanding of the implications of these choices.

- **Achieving food security and economic development in a water-scarce environment**

Most Arab countries don't have the capacity to produce sufficient food to satisfy internal demand. This is due to a combination of causes, starting with a limited natural resource endowment (in particular, water), low agricultural water productivity, as well as waste and losses in the food chain. As a result, the region depends heavily on the international market for its food security. The question of whether limited available water resources should be used to produce strategic staples to reduce food deficits or higher-value crops (including those for export) is central to the water-food security debate. It involves not only the water and agriculture sectors but also the food supply, trade, and procurement departments.

- **Legal dimension of water-agriculture coordination**

To be implemented, policies must be translated into action and supported by an enabling legal framework. In Arab countries, sectoral laws may not always be established with a complete understanding of their impact on other sectors. Conflicts often arise between water and agriculture communities based on apparently conflicting legal frameworks. A review of the current situation in countries regarding the alignment between water and agriculture legal frameworks, along with examples of best practices, may trigger changes in country legislation to support the better integration of food and agriculture policies.

- **Enforcing the law in agricultural water management**

Legal frameworks for agricultural water use are often in place, but enforcement remains a persistent challenge across the Arab region. Weak institutional capacity, limited monitoring, and a lack of political will usually hinder the effective implementation of water laws and regulations. This leads to inefficient water use, illegal abstraction, and inequitable access. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms—through capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and improved

transparency—can enhance compliance and support more sustainable agricultural practices, contributing directly to improved water security and resilience in the food system.

- **Water, food, and the circular economy: saving water through reduced food waste and losses**

A circular economy approach to agri-food systems promotes resource efficiency by minimizing food waste and losses. In the Arab region, significant water is lost not only through irrigation but also due to losses and waste along the value chain. By addressing inefficiencies from farm to fork—through better agricultural practices, storage, processing, and distribution—countries can indirectly save substantial volumes of water. Embracing circular practices presents an opportunity to reduce environmental pressure while simultaneously enhancing food and water security. An understanding of the potential offered by food loss and waste reduction in Arab countries is an essential element in the water-food policy dialogue.

- **Groundwater governance**

Groundwater plays a critical role in sustaining agriculture across the Arab region, particularly in rural and arid areas where surface water is scarce or unreliable. However, overextraction and weak governance have led to declining water tables and degradation of aquifers. Effective groundwater governance is essential for the long-term sustainability of aquifers and the multiple uses that depend on them. Exploring existing models, including community-based management and regulatory frameworks, can provide valuable insights into more sustainable and equitable groundwater use, particularly in areas where informal or unregulated abstraction is prevalent.

- **Social equity and poverty reduction: the role of water in agriculture**

Agricultural water access is closely linked to livelihoods, especially in rural and marginalized communities across the Arab region. Unequal access to water exacerbates poverty and food insecurity, while inclusive water governance can be a powerful tool for social equity and development. Targeting investments and policies to support smallholder farmers, women, and vulnerable groups in accessing water for productive use can enhance both economic empowerment and food availability. Equity considerations must be integrated into water-agriculture strategies to ensure that no one is left behind.

- **Linking water tenure and land tenure for more productive and sustainable water management in agriculture**

Water and land tenure are often managed separately in the Arab region, resulting in inefficiencies and conflicts. Secure and transparent rights to both land and water are essential for incentivizing sustainable agricultural investments and responsible resource use. When farmers have tenure security, they are more likely to adopt conservation practices and efficient irrigation. Aligning water and land tenure approaches can strengthen governance, reduce disputes, and enhance agricultural water management.

- **Managing extreme climatic conditions: disaster risk management**

Climate variability and extreme weather events—such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves—are becoming more frequent and intense in the Arab region, threatening both water availability and food production. Integrating disaster risk management (DRM) into agricultural and water planning is crucial for building resilience against such shocks. Early warning systems, drought contingency plans, and climate-resilient infrastructure and management can reduce vulnerabilities and protect livelihoods. A coordinated approach to DRM, linking water and agriculture strategies, will be key to ensuring food and water security in an increasingly volatile climate.

- **International law and transboundary water management**

Many Arab countries share surface and groundwater resources with neighboring countries, making transboundary water cooperation essential for regional stability and water security. International legal frameworks—such as the UN Watercourses Convention—offer principles for equitable and reasonable use, but implementation remains uneven. Strengthening institutional mechanisms for dialogue, data sharing, and joint planning can help prevent conflicts and ensure sustainable use of transboundary water resources. For agriculture, which depends on reliable water access, cooperative transboundary management is vital to protect ecosystems and support regional food production.

2. TECHNICAL ISSUES

Several additional technical issues are relevant to the policy dialogue on water and food security. Understanding their potential contribution to more effective and sustainable water use in agriculture, as well as the conditions for their successful application, is crucial to meaningful policy discussions.

- **Successful approaches to agricultural water management**

Innovative approaches to agricultural water management are needed to address the complex challenges of water scarcity and food insecurity. In the Arab region, where governments often bear the full burden of irrigation management, involving other stakeholders can promote shared responsibility and improve outcomes. Models such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), Water Users Associations (WUAs), and private sector engagement have been tested with mixed results. To enhance efficiency, accountability, and investment in water infrastructure and services, management modalities must be adapted to local contexts, ensuring sustainability, ownership, and cost-effectiveness in agricultural water use.

- **Tools to control and regulate water use for agriculture**

In a region where agriculture consumes most available water resources, managing demand and controlling water use are crucial levers for ensuring sustainable water management. Demand management approaches, such as deficit irrigation or drip irrigation, can reduce unnecessary

consumption and promote more productive use of water; however, they are insufficient to ensure sustainable use of the resource. Tools such as establishing quotas, volumetric control, water pricing, or water trading, combined with robust monitoring and enforcement systems, have proven effective in controlling water abstraction. When adequately designed and socially equitable, these measures can maintain agricultural productivity while easing pressure on overstretched water systems.

- **The potential of groundwater recharge**

Given the overexploitation of groundwater in the Arab region, artificial and managed aquifer recharge has emerged as a strategic response to enhance water security. Techniques such as recharge basins, check dams, and infiltration of treated wastewater can help restore depleted aquifers and improve water availability for agriculture and other uses. In arid environments, however, such approaches must be considered within the broader framework of territorial water balance to ensure that they do not contribute to reducing water availability elsewhere. Integrating recharge into water resource planning requires technical, institutional, and financial coordination.

- **The potential of digitalization and artificial intelligence for agricultural water management**

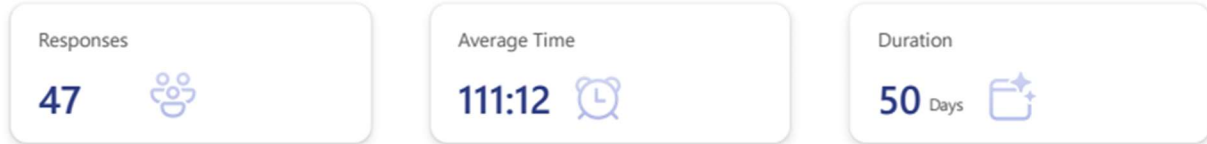
Digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming agricultural water management by enabling more precise, efficient, and data-driven decisions. Tools such as remote sensing, smart irrigation systems, and predictive analytics can help optimize water use, reduce losses, and improve yields. In the Arab region, where small-scale and labor-intensive practices dominate the agricultural landscape, digital solutions offer a leapfrogging opportunity to modernize agriculture. Investing in digital infrastructure and making digital solutions accessible to all producers, regardless of their size, gives opportunities for a more productive and sustainable use of water. However, this requires capacity building and targeted policies.

Annex 3: List of interviewees

Name	Country/Institution	Technical contribution
Fahad Tolefat	Qatar	Participation in all HLJTC meetings
Hammou Lamrani	ESCWA	Former support for LAS on water-agriculture policy coherence
Hazem Elnasser	Jordan	Former Minister of Water Resources
Hichem Charieg	FAORNE	Water allocation
Hussein AlAtfy	Arab Water Council	Guidelines on brackish water
Ibarhim Mohamed Soltan	Saudi Arabia	Chair of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (2023) and co-chair of the HLJTC (2024)
Ihab Jnad	ACSAD	Glossary of terminologies in water and agriculture
Imed Khelif	Palestine	Water Allocation and Sanitation Safety Planning
Jamal Djaballah	Former LAS	Joint Technical Secretariat (Water)
Kamel Amer	AOAD	Joint Technical Secretariat (Agriculture)
Maha Halalsheh	FAO consultant	Sanitation Safety Planning
Mahmoud Fathallah	LAS, Arab Ministerial Water Council	Joint Technical Secretariat (Water)
Manal Tantawy	Egypt	water allocation
Mohamed Abdallah	FAORNE	Addressing data gaps and strengthening data sharing mechanisms
Mohamed Al Hamdi	FAORNE	Water Scarcity Initiative
Mouley Aziz Al Idrissi	Morocco	Participation in all HLJTC meetings
Nasser Mohammed Nasser Al-Yazidi	Yemen	Minister's Advisor for Water Resources, Programs, and Policies
Ridha Gabbouj	Tunisia	Water Allocation
Salem Alkhanbashi	Oman	Participation in all HLJTC meetings
Salem Darouish	Lebanon	Participation in all HLJTC meetings
Tahani Sileet CHECK	Egypt	Head of the Central Administration for External Cooperation and Member of the Technical Scientific Advisory Committee of the Council of Arab Ministers
Walid Zubary	Former FAO consultant	Cairo Declaration and Action Plan

Annex 4: Summary results of the online survey

Responses Overview Active

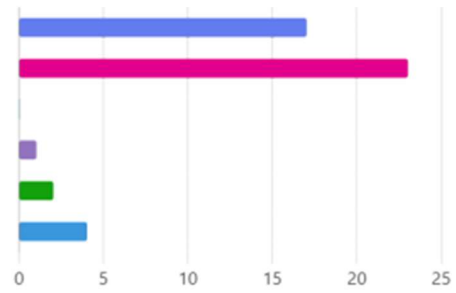


1. Where are you from?



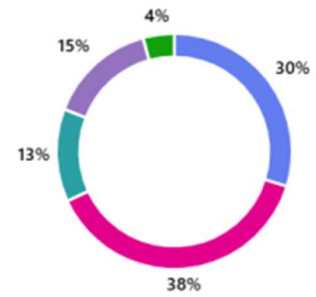
2. Which Ministry or Institution do you represent?

● Agriculture	17
● Water	23
● Environment	0
● Other national institution	1
● International or regional organization	2
● Other	4



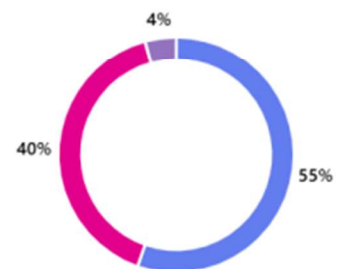
3. How many of the annual High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee meetings did you attend?

● 1	14
● 2-3	18
● 4-5	6
● All	7
● None (I have been involved in a different way)	2



4. How useful do you think the yearly meetings have been in enhancing understanding between the water and agriculture sectors?

● Very useful	26
● Somewhat useful	19
● Not useful	0
● I am not sure	2



5. How effectively were the recommendations from the meetings communicated at the national level?



6. Have the recommendations from the meetings led to any noticeable changes or actions in your country's policies or coordination mechanisms?



7. Please explain your answer and give a brief example if yes

19
Responses

Latest Responses

"...بحث هناك اجتماعات دورية لبحث التسيير المعقلن للمصادر المائية خاصة السطحية منها"

...

5 respondents (26%) answered coordination for this question.

recommendations from meetings

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à في

les projets

water allocation

water and food

une pour

policies

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countries

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8. Does your government have a dedicated financial mechanism or budgetary allocation in place to support policy coherence and intersectoral coordination between the water and agriculture sectors?



9. The following cross-cutting topics have been discussed at the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee (HLJTC) meetings. Please indicate to what extent the recommendations from these discussions have been useful for your country/work

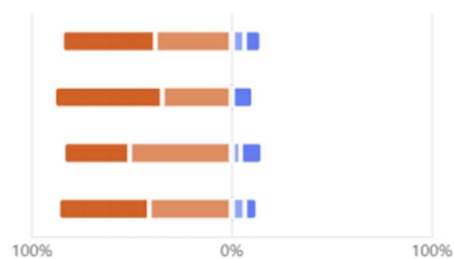
● Very useful
 ● Somewhat useful
 ● Not useful/not relevant
 ● I don't know

Guidelines for water allocation

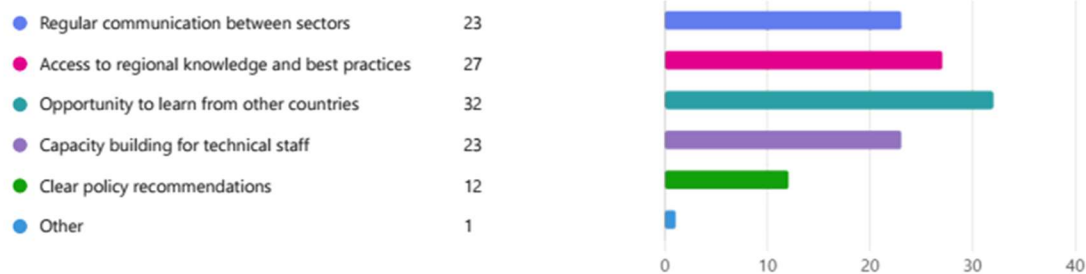
Promoting the use of non-conventional water resources

Addressing data gaps and strengthening data sharing mechanisms

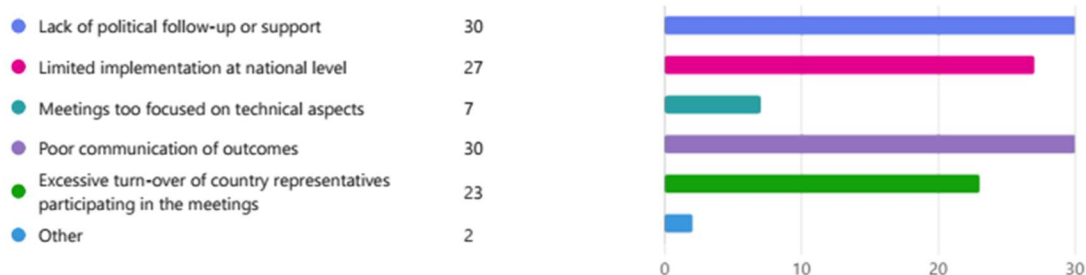
Sustainable water use under climate resilience



10. In your view, what are the main strengths of this process so far? (Select up to 3)



11. What are the main limitations or challenges you observed? (Select up to 3)



Annex 5: List of actionable recommendations

Definitions: CFP: Country Focal Point; JTS: Joint Technical Secretariat (LAS, AOAD), NJC: National Joint Committee; Partners: FAO and ESCWA.

RECOMMENDATION	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
For immediate action			
Establish a National Joint Committee including two focal points respectively from the Ministries/ Departments in charge of water and agriculture to drive country-level action. Focal points should originate from units responsible for strategy and/or planning at the ministerial level. In countries where coordination mechanisms are in place, focal points should also be involved in such mechanisms.	CFP, Ministers	JTS	Immediate
Coordination country action and periodic reporting on progress , including a 2-page country brief prior to each HLJTC meeting and 10-minutes country spotlight at HLJTC meetings.	CFP	JTS, Partners	Immediate
Establish or update the Terms of Reference of the HLJTC, Joint Technical Secretariat, supporting organizations, Joint National Committees and country focal points stating scope and deliverables to improve the structure of the process and clarify roles and responsibilities.	JTS	Partners	Immediate
Formalize nomination of representatives from LAS and AOAD to the JTS and allocate sufficient staff time and resources to fulfill its coordination task.	LAS, AOAD		Immediate
Accelerate the production of the first regional report on cross/sectoral policy coordination based on country reporting to be used as baseline to measure progress, the structure of which was approved by the HLJTC in October 2024.	JTS	Partners	Immediate
Review and expand the duration of the HLJTC meetings considering the possibility for a 2-days meeting, with countries progressively countries contributing to the increased cost.	JTS	Partners	Immediate
Include a standing item on progress in implementing the Action Plan in the agenda of the HLJTC meetings , to be presented by the JTS	JTS	Partners	Immediate
Include a standing item on views and recommendations from non-state actors in the agenda of the HLJTC meetings , to be presented by the a representative of the NSA	JTS	Partners	Immediate
The agenda of HLJTC meetings should leave space for countries, on a rotating basis, to report and exchange on their experience and progress in cross-sectoral policy implementation.	JTS	Partners	Immediate
Within 6 months			

RECOMMENDATION	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
Adopt a Country Engagement Protocol describing structure, action and reporting mechanisms for country engagement into the process.	NJC, CFP	JTS	6-month
Introduce a Country Implementation Package (CIP) with 3–5 actions, milestones, and costs—tied to JMM decisions.	NJC	CFP, JTS, Partners	6-month
Ensure technical, operational and financial support for the implementation of the process, including possibly seconding of staff to strengthen JTS capacity.	Partners		6-month
Establish a 5-year programme of work and time frame backed by partners secondment for progressive implementation of the Action Plan, and a shared annual workplan including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be submitted to HLJTC on a yearly basis.	JTS	Partners	6-month
Establish selection criteria for thematic issues to be addressed , ensuring relevance to a majority of countries, policy relevance, cross-sectoral impact and actionability. Split excessively broad themes into manageable/actionable sub-topics to keep guidance focused.	JTS, Partners		6-month
Insert a standing item for “Follow/up of the JMM resolutions” on the agenda of both the AMWC Meeting and AOAD General Assembly and conveyed to ECOSOC for endorsement.	LAS, AOAD		6-month
Within 1 year			
Develop and maintain a website for the process , including meeting reports, knowledge material, and practical information, with dedicated country and thematic pages.	JTS		1 year
Establish a regional community of practice through a joint email list gathering all participants in HLJTC and a knowledge hub and keep them informed on a quarterly basis about the progress in implementing the plan of action, both at regional and national levels.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Facilitate technical exchanges on specific cross-sectoral issues by establishing communities of practice for each relevant theme, bringing together national experts to promote knowledge sharing.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Organize in-person meetings or study tours for exchanges between experts on specific cross-sectoral issues.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Establish a knowledge hub for technical reports and data to encompass all information emanating from the process for the benefit of countries. Such a knowledge hub should be part of a dedicated website for this process.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Develop and implement a communication strategy for advocacy and to maintain regular communication with all stakeholders to ensure their active participation.	JTS		1 year

RECOMMENDATION	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
Review domestic portfolio of actions of relevance to specific cross-sectoral issues and ensure that they are associated with the process. Prepare a 2–3 page Country Finance Brief.	NJC	CFP	1 year
Provide performance-based financial support (grants) to country focal points in least developed countries to facilitate country-level action (national dialogues, pilot actions, coordination). Tie financing to country engagement packages with costed actions and milestones.	JTS	NJC	1 year
Support the coordination between water and agriculture in the design and implementation of national programmes and report on progress	NJC	CFP	1 year
Invite development partners to contribute to the discussions of the HLJTC meetings	JTS		1 year
Invite development partners at the national level through attendance in national dialogues	NJC	CFP	1 year
Organize virtual meetings on a yearly basis for representatives of civil society, producer organizations, youth, women, and the private sector ahead of the HLJTC meeting, and invite a representative to report at HLJTC meetings and JMMs.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Commission report(s) exploring linkages of water and agriculture with: 1. climate, 2. environment, 3. energy, and 4. Health, with actionable recommendations for policy linkages. Submit reports for discussion at HLJTC meetings and JMM and decision.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Review recent developments in areas like digitalization, and artificial intelligence, technological progress in renewable energy, as well as progress made by countries in these areas, and report to the HLJTC on policy implications.	JTS	Partners	1 year
Develop, with the Secretariats of the AMWC and AOAD, the modalities to ensure that the next review of the Arab Strategy for Water Security and the Sustainable Agriculture Development Strategy be drafted in an integrated manner , with similar time frame, a cross-checking process, and the integration of the nexus concept.	LAS, AOAD		1 year
Other timeframe			
Monitor progress against KPIs and report to HLJTC meeting on an annual basis	JTS	Partners	Yearly
Establish yearly country reports ahead of the HLJTC meetings.	NJC, CFP		Yearly
Nominate relevant national civil servants in Arab countries to act as country representatives for each cross-sectoral issue and forming an expert group on the specific topic. Establish communities of practices to promote knowledge sharing.	NJC, Ministers		Aligned with thematic issue's implementation cycle

RECOMMENDATION	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
Organize expert consultations gathering country experts, exchange of experience between countries, endorsement of the technical report, and drafting of policy brief.	JTS, Partners		
For each cross-sectoral issue, perform a desk study including state-of-the-art knowledge about the issue, a review of the situation in all Arab countries (with the involvement of country focal points), and experience outside the region. Preparation of report and policy brief. Submission to HLJTC for endorsement.	Partners	CFP	
Allocate grants for countries to pilot domestic policy processes based on agreed workplan and KPI, monitoring progress in countries and reporting at subsequent HLJTC meetings (funding by the Secretariat upon availability of resources or by joint mobilization of resources).	JTS, Partners		