

Concept Note

Roundtable on Water Scarcity: Making water flow for people and planet

At the 43rd Session of FAO Conference

Date & timing: 3 July 2023, 09:30-12:00 hours

Venue: Plenary Hall, FAO headquarters

Format: in-person and live stream

Background

Water scarcity has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges of our time, impacting food security, livelihoods, and the well-being of billions of people worldwide. At the same time, global projections indicate that demand for freshwater will increase significantly over the coming decades due to population growth, diversified diets, economic development, and urbanization and climate change.

More than 3 billion ¹people inhabit agricultural areas with high levels of water shortages or scarcity. With over 80 percent of cropland rainfed producing 60 percent of global food originating from rainfed areas, there is a critical need to address the challenges faced by farmers in these regions to address water shortages. In already irrigated agriculture, groundwater depletion, deteriorating water quality, and competition for water resources all pose significant threats. Moreover, inequalities in access to water exacerbate existing social disparities, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as women, small-scale farmers, and Indigenous Peoples.

To achieve the SDGs by 2030, we need to use our limited water resources more sustainably. Agriculture accounts for 70 percent of global freshwater withdrawals, is vulnerable to these water challenges and plays a key role in providing sustainable solutions. The ways that land and soil are managed in the rainfed areas and that surface and groundwater are used for the irrigated agriculture affect not only the productivity of these areas, but also the quantity and availability of water for other sectors and ecosystems in particular those at the downstream areas. On the other hand increasing demand for other sectors risk to further constrain water availability and accessibility for agriculture. By improving water governance and scaling up innovative solutions, and adequate investments we can ensure both the long-term sustainability of water resources and the efficiency, resilience and equity of agrifood systems.

Objectives:

To highlight the significance of this topic, the roundtable on water scarcity will bring together representatives from different regions to prioritize issues, share, discuss and forge innovative

¹ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1447en/online/cb1447en.html>

solutions and foster cooperation and collective action towards sustainable and inclusive water management and agrifood systems.

This roundtable aims to:

- Raise awareness about the critical state of water resources and their impact on food security, and nutrition, livelihoods, the environment, and peace and security.
- Share experiences and good practices from different regions in addressing water scarcity and promoting integrated water resources management (IWRM) and effective water governance.
- Identify key actions and investments required to enhance water productivity, improve governance, and ensure equitable and sustainable water allocation.
- Discuss policy coherence across sectors and explore innovative approaches to transform agrifood systems for long-term sustainability and equity.

Possible Options to address Water Scarcity

Addressing the global water crisis requires concerted efforts and strategic actions. Effectively addressing water scarcity, accounting for the growing competition for water and degradation of its quality, calls for improved governance to ensure sustainable and equitable water allocation, integrated management and efficient use. The following measures are crucial:

a) Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM): Apply IWRM strategies and innovative approaches, to enhance water management practices, soil restoration, and resilience to climate variability and change. These should be supported by robust institutional and legal frameworks, including water tenure, water accounting, regulations, and incentive measures, to drive change and ensure equitable access to water resources.

b) Water Productivity and Efficiency: Improve water productivity in both rainfed and irrigated agriculture by adopting soil water management techniques, water harvesting and conservation practices, and modern irrigation technologies. Investing in sustainable agriculture and empowering small-scale farmers with access to irrigation equipment, modern inputs, and technologies is critical, particularly in regions heavily reliant on rainfed production.

c) Groundwater Management: Develop comprehensive strategies to incorporate groundwater into the water management processes, address depletion, enhance governance, and mitigate pollution risks. This includes regulating intensive groundwater use, analyzing water access arrangements, implementing sustainable groundwater management practices, and investing in data collection and monitoring systems to improve understanding and management of this critical resource.

d) Improve Policy Coherence: Strengthen policy coherence across sectors and domains to ensure the equitable and sustainable allocation of water resources. Improve inter-sectoral coordination, enhance governance mechanisms, and foster cross-sectoral collaboration to

identify and address overlaps, trade-offs, and promote integrated approaches that consider environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

e) Inclusive Water Governance: Foster inclusive and gender-responsive water governance by engaging all stakeholders, including small-scale farmers, women, and Indigenous Peoples. Promote participatory decision-making processes, establish platforms for dialogue and inclusive approaches, and empower local water user organizations to facilitate effective and inclusive water governance at the community level.

Draft Programme

A two-and-a-half-hour roundtable is proposed with a high-level opening followed by a technical presentation and panel discussions by Members.

Moderator: Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO

Time	Intervention
5 mins	Welcome and Introduction by Mr Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO
10 mins	Opening Remarks Mr QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General
5 mins	Technical Presentation to set the scene: Mr Andrea Cattaneo, Senior Economist, ESA
60 mins	Panel 1: National perspectives and strategies High-level Ministerial Panel includes: Netherlands (the kingdom of) Republic of Cabo Verde Republic of Tajikistan The Federative Republic of Brazil The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan The People’s Republic of China United States of America
60 mins	Discussion
10 mins	Wrap up & Closing: by Mr Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO