

# AFRICA REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON MIDTERM REVIEW - WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## CONCEPT NOTE

### 1. Background

In December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution [“International Decade \(2018–2028\) for Action – Water for Sustainable Development”](#) to help put a greater focus on water during the ten years ahead.

Emphasizing that water is critical for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger, UN Member States expressed deep concern over the lack of access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and over water related disasters, scarcity and pollution being exacerbated by urbanization, population growth, desertification, drought and climate change.

*Deeply concerned that lack of access to a safe drinking water source, basic sanitation and sound hygiene, water-related disasters, water scarcity and water pollution will be further exacerbated by urbanization, population growth, desertification, drought and other extreme weather events and climate change, as well as by the lack of capacity to ensure integrated water resource management*

The Decade focuses on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives and on the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects. It is also to scale up cooperation and partnership at all levels in order to help to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is important as the water crisis is classified as one of the top 3 of global risks for the third consecutive year by the World Economic Forum. . Failing to respond effectively to these challenges will have devastating global effects.

The United Nations General Assembly, in its [resolution 73/226](#), decided to convene, in New York, from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the “*Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Sustainable Development’, 2018–2028*” (United Nations 2023 Water Conference). This Conference in 2023 is to be preceded by Regional Consultations to review progress and challenges faced at the midpoint of the Decade. The outcomes of the Regional Consultations will feed into the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) held in July 2022.

The Africa Regional Consultations is planned to take place from 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and will provide a platform for African countries, the international community and UN agencies to take stock and reaffirm their commitment to solving Africa’s water crisis and to collectively implement the actions envisaged in the African Water Vision, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) on water (SDG 6) and the AU Agenda 2063. It will also harmonize a common approach to the Mid-Term Review Conference and set out a Road Map for effective preparations. The Meeting will be convened by

the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union Commission AUC, the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) as co-chairs.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) targets on water, sanitation and hygiene in Africa requires a dramatic acceleration in the current rates of progress, according to a UNICEF/WHO special report focused on Africa, launched at the World Water Forum in Dakar, Senegal in March 2022. This special report calls for urgent action to be taken on a continent where water scarcity and weak sanitation and hygiene services can threaten peace and development.

Between 2000 and 2020, Africa's population increased from 800 million to 1.3 billion people. About 500 million people gained access to basic drinking water and 290 million to basic sanitation services, according to a report of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), launched during a session of the World Water Forum hosted by the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) and UNICEF. On the continent, however, 418 million people still lack even a basic level of drinking water service, 779 million lack basic sanitation services (including 208 million who still practice open defecation) and 839 million still lack basic hygiene services (UNICEF, Africa needs to Drastically Accelerate Progress on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene – Report, World Water Forum, Dakar, March 22).

## 2. Theme of Regional Consultations

The main theme of the regional consultations reflect the main theme of the Mid-Term Decade, 2023 Conference, which are:

*"a greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives, the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects, as well as on the furtherance of cooperation and partnerships at all levels, in order to help achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". (A/RES/73/226, OP4)*

*The African regional activities is to consider also the overarching needs of water in Africa as postulated in the Africa Water Vision 2025 and Agenda 2063.*

*Member States, relevant United Nations bodies, the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other relevant partners, including the private sector, to contribute to the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028, Encourage building on the momentum gained during the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005 —2015, in order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018—2028, UNGA, A/RES/71/222, New York, 2017)*

The experience of UNECA (UN Water/Africa), AUC/AMCOW and AfDB acquired in organizing Pan African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water (PANAFCON), convened by the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) and the

UN Water/Africa which was held at UNCC at Addis Ababa from December 8-13, 2003 will serve as a guide to the Regional Consultations.

### **3. Objectives of Regional Consultative Meeting**

The specific objectives of the Regional Consultations are:

- a) To assess the midterm progress made by various African countries towards achievement of the targets and goals of the water related Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 6
- b) To determine options for building and strengthening partnership to accelerate implementation of objectives of Decade of Action for Water.
- c) To develop a Plan of Action to support countries lagging behind targets to redouble their efforts to catch up in the second half of the decade.
- d) To ensure that a harmonized approach is adopted in presenting Africa's inputs to the Mid-Term Review of International Water Decade; "Water for Sustainable Development" in March 2023.

### **4. Sub Themes of Mid Term Review**

The thematic sessions will be dedicated to the challenge areas defined in the African Water Vision 2025, including: water supply, sanitation and hygiene, human settlements; water and food security; protecting ecosystems and livelihoods; water and climate; financing water infrastructure; integrated water resources management (IWRM); water allocation; water wisdom; and water governance.

Specific themes reflecting the three dimensions of sustainable development, as referred to in the UN General Assembly resolution [A/RES/73/22](#) - social, economic and environmental, will include the following:

#### **A. Social Dimension**

##### **1) Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**

Multiple stakeholder involvement in WASH programmes and projects cover all African countries and must therefore be given prominence during the conference in order to exchange best practices across the continent. The issue of affordability becomes the more important if public private partnerships can be promoted to manage such projects sustainably.

##### **2) Inclusion, equity and education**

Interactive dialogues to address inclusion and equity with regard to water resources. Additionally, the challenges faced by women, and socially vulnerable to access water should be featured in the Conference's debates. It is widely agreed that indigenous knowledge on water and climate must be integrated into decision and policy-making processes on water and environment. Interactive dialogue sessions can also cover strengthening inclusive, equitable water policies as well as education and awareness to conserve water resources.

##### **3) Water and gender**

It is generally accepted that water and gender are inextricably linked and features at all important water meetings such as the UN 2023 Water Conference and closing the gender gap in water, sanitation and hygiene is therefore critical.

#### 4) **Clean water as a basic development component**

The level of water resources development with its corresponding access to clean water is an indicator of the level of socioeconomic development of a society. As part of the midterm review, all countries must accelerate the legal processes towards declaring water and sanitation as human rights that must be available to all. Water and local action can be an important topic to be addressed during the UN 2023 Water Conference which can take care of corruption and mismanagement connected to water supplies and sanitation services.

*“Corruption in the water and sanitation sector affects the fulfillment of human rights and generates serious environmental impacts such as contamination and over exploitation of water sources.” (Parlamento Mexicano Juvenil pr el Agua, Mexico*

#### 5) **Water and conflict**

Priority must be given to humanitarian issues that arise from physical and economic water scarcity, such as conflicts and migration, with an emphasis on water security

### **B. Economic Dimension**

#### 1) **Water resource management**

Water resources management, in its simplest form, must have the objectives to ensure water use for all purposes in order to achieve harmonious economic, social and environmental goals for a country’s sustainable development as a whole and also for its component regions (AWDR, 2006).

For water management to be effective, it must be dynamic in essence and the planning must be a continuous process that aims to meet the requirements of all sectors of water use as regards water availability, quality and environmental flows. A long-term water resources plan should provide a comprehensive analysis of sectoral inter-relationships, their effect on the national economy and, where appropriate, on international provisions for water use. Such a plan must also recognize regional needs and objectives, and provide a mechanism whereby, and a framework within which, they can be fulfilled on a more decentralized basis with the necessary feedback, which calls for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). The challenge for Africa is to reverse the present trends of rapid natural resources degradation through an integrated approach to land and water resources management within a holistic framework. A prerequisite for successfully addressing the pressing water problems is to, therefore, change from the fragmented approach to an integrated approach to water resources management (AWDR, 2006).

#### 2) **Water and Agriculture**

In many parts of Africa, irregular weather patterns (drought, floods), isolation of agricultural regions and environmental degradation all contribute to significantly reducing the rate of growth of agricultural and food production.

Climate change impacts are exacerbating the existing uncertainties in the prediction of the onset of rainfall seasons with its attendant negative effects on agriculture. One of the key challenges to agricultural production in Africa is the high uncertainty in the prediction of the onset of rainfall seasons.

### 3) **Water and urban settings**

For any metropolitan city, one of the basic and essential services by all standards is efficient service of water supply. Unless and until this demand is efficiently met, the health of the community and development activities will be highly affected. The inefficient organization of many water supply agencies is a serious deficiency. If the organizational structure does not promote or allow efficient operation, then the overall management will function poorly. The key issues contributing to poor performance of water supply facilities were identified as (AWDR, 2006):

- Inadequate data on operation and maintenance.
- Insufficient and inefficient use of funds.
- Poor management of water supply facilities.
- Inappropriate system design.
- Low profile of operation and maintenance.
- Inadequate policies, legal frameworks and overlapping responsibilities; and
- Political interference.

### 4) **Finance, investment and infrastructure**

Generally, most countries of sub-Sahara Africa exploit only up to 5% of their annual internal renewable water resources due to low level of investment in conservation technologies, infrastructure and systems. It is therefore urgent to highlight themes related to financing, investment and infrastructure including innovative and diverse sources of financing for the implementation of SDG 6, sustainable development and climate action

### 5) **Transboundary water cooperation**

River/Aquifer/Lake basins know no boundaries, be they ethnic, regional, national or international. It is within this concept that transboundary river basins must be considered and analyzed from all its various aspects within an integrated framework (Andah, 2002).

Most of the fresh surface water resources of Africa are to be found in a number of major transboundary river/aquifer/lake basins – some shared by as many as ten African countries. The continent has over 80 major transboundary rivers and lakes and 71 transboundary aquifers, some of which are among the largest in the world. About 55 of the world's 200 major international rivers are in Africa - a number greater than in any other continent. Some of these basins are shared by as many as ten or more African countries and ten major river basins are shared by more than four African countries.

The political boundaries of fourteen African countries almost entirely fall within the catchment areas of one or more transboundary river systems. The overriding basic principle of IWRM is the holistic approach to combine water resources management with ecosystem needs, using the river/aquifer/lake basin as the base unit. Integrated development of these transboundary natural resources will therefore not only contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the riparian countries sharing these rivers, aquifers and lakes but they will also promote and enhance peaceful and equitable subregional and regional cooperation for economic integration in Africa. However, integrated development of these resources on the basis of win-win principles needs to be enhanced and concerted cooperation created among the riparian countries sharing these resources (AWDR, 2006).

### **C. Environmental Dimension**

#### **1) Water and climate**

The main climatic mechanism that influences moisture flows into Africa is the movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) over the continent. The distribution of rainfall over Africa therefore exhibits extreme unevenness, both spatially and temporally. Climate change impacts are exacerbating the existing uncertainties in the prediction of seasonal rainfalls, increasing risks in the management of water resources systems.

#### **2) Enhancing Water Resilience**

Decision makers need to have access to high-quality information, consistent data and the capacity to use this information to inform infrastructure planning and management solutions. The long-term goal is to enhance the resilience of infrastructure against the threats of climate change, including using nature-based solutions and hence to ensure that infrastructure development is integrated across different sectors. *This approach can be a key step in supporting efforts to develop resilient infrastructure and related management systems that is aligned with national priorities, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.*

#### **3) Water and Knowledge and Technology**

The prevalent emphasis for integrated water resources management (IWRM) is based on the realization that water is both of an economic and social good and its development and management must be carried out in harmony with the environment. Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) therefore calls for a holistic approach and a process which aims to ensure the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources to optimize economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of environmental systems.

Up to date knowledge bases and modern technologies are needed for:

- the development of an integrated perception of the interconnected processes involved in the hydrological cycle.
- the quantification of the elements of the hydrological cycle at all scales and their interrelations, much needed for the planning, design and operation of water

resources projects and for various applications in agricultural and environmental activities.

- for hydro meteorological data collection, management and network design, and also for the monitoring of processes such as climate change, desertification, freshwater availability, environmental degradation and natural disaster prevention.
- information communication towards enhancing the growing role of the public in water decision making.

An effective water resources development and management framework depends on the sufficiency, quality and management of the data on the various components of the hydrological cycle and the environment. Technologies are still needed to overcome the differences between the temporal and spatial scales of the physical phenomena like rainfall and discharge and the mode of measurement. For example, rainfall is a spatial process while the mode of measurement is at a point, and it is still difficult and expensive to have continuous measurement of discharge in the form of the mostly needed time series. Even though there are software technologies to affect the necessary conversions, the further development of the rather expensive radar and satellite technologies is expected to augment data resolution and coverage. The more innovative modern technologies include:

#### **4) Water-Energy-Food Nexus**

Water, energy and food are key resources to sustain life, and are the fundamental to national, regional and global economies. These three resources are interlinked in multiple ways, and the term “nexus” captures the interconnections. The nexus has been discussed, debated, researched, and advocated widely but the focus is often on the pairings of “water-energy” or “water-food” or “energy-food”. To really benefit from the nexus approach in terms of resource use efficiency it is essential to understand, operationalise and practice the nexus of all three resources. As demand for these resources increases worldwide, using them sustainably is a critical concern for scientists and citizens, governments and policy makers.

### **5. Format of Regional Consultations**

The UN General Assembly, in its [resolution 75/212](#), further decided that the UN 2023 Conference shall comprise an opening and a closing ceremony, six plenary meetings and five interactive dialogues. The interactive dialogues shall be collaborative and multi-stakeholder in nature, with due regard for gender and geographical balance.

The Format of the Regional Consultative Meeting will be hybrid with both in-person and online participation. There will be formal Opening and Closing Ceremonies, with thematic plenaries and work/break-out sessions over a period of 2 days. The thematic working groups will provide a status update for each related SDG Target, propose options for accelerated achievement of the Target and draft key messages to be considered by the Plenary Sessions for the HPLF 2022, Groundwater Summit 2022 and WAD Conference 2023.

The proposed draft programme is attached.

## **6. Expected Outputs**

- a) Synthesis of Regional Progress and Key Constraints
- b) Road Map of Activities to Mid-Term Review
- c) Key Messages for the HLFP and Water for Sustainable Development Conference.

## **7. Expected Outcomes**

The main outcome of the Africa Regional Consultations will be a summary brief of policy actions that will feed into the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLFP) to be held from 5 – 15 July 2022 as well as a Roadmap of Reviews and Activities by African Regional Stakeholders as input into the Groundwater Summit 2022 and the International Decade Mid Term Review Conference 2023.

## **8. Documentation**

- 1) African Water Vision 2025
- 2) UNGA Resolution A/RES/75/212
- 3) The Africa We Want
- 4) SDG 6 Goals and Targets
- 5)

## **9. Participants**

- ***Full List to proposed by participating Organizations.***

## **10. Working Languages**

- a) English
- b) French

**11. Date and Venue:** 13 -14 June 2022 , UN Conference Centre , Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**12. Action Plan to New York Mid-Term review, IDW Conference-2023)**