



THE WATER LEADERS FORUM
FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE ARAB WORLD WATER ISSUES

July 11, 2010
Abu Dhabi, UAE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Summary

In celebration of the 2nd Anniversary of the Arab Water Academy (AWA) launched in July 2008 in Abu Dhabi, the Academy hosted a Water Leaders Forum on 11 July, 2010. The purpose of the Forum was to provide a platform to call for solutions to the Arab World's water problems and emphasize that resolving issues goes beyond technical solutions and must include politics and strategic communications.

In line with the objective of the Academy to invest in the human capital of senior decision makers working in the water sector, the Forum invited water Ministers from the Arab region, as well as global water leaders to participate in the thought provoking event, encouraging open dialogue on how to secure water for the future of the region. It remains the focus of the Academy to strengthen the knowledge and skills of Middle East and North African decision makers to address change and effectively manage the region's water challenges.

Contributors in the Leaders Forum were **H.E. Dr. Abdullatif Jamal Rashid**, Minister of Water Resources, Iraq; **H.E. Eng. Abdul Rahman Fadhl Al-Eryani**, Minister of Water and Environment, Yemen; **H.E. Eng. Kamal Ali Mohammed**, Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources, Sudan; **H.E. Dr. Mohammed Al-Saud**, Deputy Minister for Water, Ministry of Water and Electricity, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; **H.E. Majid Al Mansouri**, Secretary General of Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Arab Water Academy; **Mr. Loic Fauchon**, President of the World Water Council; **Mr. Hedi Larbi**, The World Bank Director for Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran and Iraq; **Prof. Andras Szollosi-Nagy**, Rector of UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education; **Mrs. Chahra Ksia**, President of the Arab League Center for Arab Water Security; **Mr. Atem Ramsundersingh**, CEO of STB Technologies Singapore; **Prof. Gary Jones**, CEO eWater-

Cooperative Research Centre, Australia; **Dr. Adil Bushnak**, Chairman of the Bushnak Group, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; **Dr. Shawki Barghouti**, Director General of the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture and **Prof. Asma El Kasmi**, Director General of the Arab Water Academy.

Pre-Forum Working Session:

Benefiting from the presence of a number of global water leaders and specialists, Prof. Asma El Kasmi, invited Prof. Andras Szollosi-Nagy, Prof. Gary Jones, and Mr. Atem Ramsundersingh, to a working group session on July 10 to brainstorm possible future interventions of the Academy.

As Rector of UNESCO-IHE, Prof. Szollosi-Nagy identified the necessity of expanding educational centers for water to all regions including the MENA region. He suggested that AWA is in a good position to take the lead in establishing such a center and offered collaboration with UNESCO-IHE. Prof. Gary Jones stated that any institution needs to make a compelling value proposition to the client audience, and promoted the clear identification of the Academy as either a strategic or operational institution in order to properly mobilize resources to achieve objectives. The working session discussed whether there was a potential broker role for the Academy linking decision-makers with the business and private communities abundant in the U.A.E. and the Arabic Gulf. Finally, the experts generally agreed that development of communication capacity in institutions and communication skills in agents of change was absolutely essential toward effective implementation of sector reforms and technology investment by decisions-makers. It was asserted that the Academy could add value beyond capacity building by developing as a regional knowledge broker linking political and technical agents of change.

The Water Leaders Forum:

The Forum welcomed over 60 participants including Ministers, Ambassadors, senior water officials, advisors and managers, global professionals, academicians, representatives of international organizations and regional media. The event began with the reading of an opening statement from **H.E. Mohamed Al Bowardi**, Secretary General of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council and Managing Director of the Environmental Agency of Abu Dhabi, as well as initial remarks by World Bank Director Mr. Hedi Larbi. The Forum was then divided into a format of three distinct successive sessions including panels on ***“Innovative Solutions from the Arab World: Securing Water Futures”*** and ***“Agents of Change in the Arab Water Sector”***, as well as a private leaders working lunch hosted by H.E. Majid Al Mansouri entitled ***“New Horizons, New Partners, New Solutions”***.

Opening Session

After welcoming the Ministers and distinguished participants to Abu Dhabi, H.E. Al Bowardi stated in Opening Ceremony remarks prepared for the Forum that “a broader more regional vision is needed, a comprehensive Arab water security strategy is needed. Since we believe strongly in regional initiatives we are supporting the Arab Water Academy as we need forums to rally more high decision makers to find and bolster solutions to water issues, and where senior water managers in the Arab World can learn about international best practice.”

Mr. Hedi Larbi, The World Bank Director of the Mashreq countries (Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), continued the opening remarks by strongly welcoming the efforts of the Academy stating the “The Academy was thus created to provide MENA’s most senior decision makers with the information, capacity and support needed to catalyze short-term change and high-impact results in the water

sector, both on a national and regional scale... By bolstering Arab expertise with regional and international best-practices, the AWA will build more resilient water institutions. By convening Arab stakeholders, the AWA will expand opportunities for regional cooperation. By succeeding, the AWA truly will have played a key role in ensuring sustainable water management across the Arab world.”

The Key Note address was provided by Mr. Loic Fauchon, President of the World Water Council. Recognizing new, progressive paths of leading countries and institutions such as the Academy, the President of the WWC stated “the way is paved to manage water resources in a more responsible manner and to progressively shift from an unacceptable looting to a more equitable sharing.

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Equitable sharing -by all means- because no one can pretend depriving his neighbour of water he or she naturally needs. No to confiscated water and yes to shared water. Hence we will bring even more attention to the highly sensitive and strategic issue of trans-border basins.”

President Fauchon concluded stating “the connection is obvious, with the initiative taken by the Academy that brings us here today. Reinforcing capacity building, improving governance, facilitating new financing means, fostering the emergence of political and economic water leaders, ministers and managers, engineers and economists, all serving the same cause.”

Session I “Innovative Solutions from the Arab World: Securing Water Futures”

In the opening panel, the Academy welcomed their Excellencies, the Water Ministers from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the host Majid Al Mansouri in discussions Chaired by Mr. Fauchon and facilitated by Mr. Atem Ramsundersingh. The five panelists were

invited to give their perceptions on bringing solutions to their respective countries and the Arab region as a whole. H.E. Dr. Mohammed Al Saud focused on the opportunities offered to countries by the inclusion of the private sector to encourage innovation. In Saudi Arabia, innovation was not solely investment in technologies such as desalination facilities, or initiatives towards improving irrigation efficiency, and utilizing “reclaimed waters”, but importantly economic rationalization of water usage that has led to a policy of importation of wheat from overseas, i.e. importing virtual water, following national audits of water and agriculture.

The Sudanese Minister, H.E. Eng. Kamal Ali Mohammed, identified the importance of a holistic approach to viewing government strategies that require water resources where agriculture, energy, environment policies should benefit from an integrated water resource management approach. Further, Minister Ali Mohammed positively commented on cooperative mechanisms with neighbors regarding shared surface and ground waters, e.g. the Nile Basin Initiative.

The Minister of Water Resources of Iraq H.E. Dr. Jamal Rashid emphasized the support at the international level of laws and regulations for better water sharing, and encouraged all states to sign international conventions and promote compliance with such legal standards. In parallel, regional arrangements need to be advanced that ensure consultation and encourage dialogue in order to avoid water shocks experienced when there is no effective cooperation. At a third level, national institutions must be strengthened to improve water management and equitable distribution.

H.E. Eng. Fadhl Al-Eryani stressed the enormous challenges faced by Yemen. Minister Al-Eryani recalled those new technologies that allow personal independence

and undermine the traditional system based on long standing community cooperation practices. There is a need to revitalize traditions and reinstate communal water management. He called for a national conference in Yemen to re-empower communities noting that government doesn't have the resources or the political strength alone to encourage revitalization of community practices. What is required is that such an initiative is effectively communicated leading to societal understanding that radical changes of behavior are needed to meet the water requirements of the people including possibly relocation of much of the population from mountain areas to coast areas where there is more water availability.

H.E. Majid Al Mansouri outlined the national benefits of “Green Growth” and technology to reduce water utilization, e.g. root irrigation and water efficient housing, and overall better system-wide water management, as being advanced by Abu Dhabi.

The panel of Ministers then engaged with participants in the audience on a number of questions and comments including:

- Opportunities of saline agriculture and the possibility of promoting a workshop that develops a common definition of “water security” (Dr. Adil Bushnak);
- The changing notion of food security with increased foreign investment in agriculture production to secure food supply, and can the region afford agriculture water (Dr. Laamrani, IDRC);
- Discussions on the importance of water and energy coupling (Dr. Walid Saleh, UNU-INWEH); and
- Comments on the cooperation with the private sector leading to improvements of availability at the tap (Mr. Gerald Velter, General Manager of Azaliya, a Veolia and Mubadalla Company).

Session II “Agents of Change in the Arab Water Sector”

The second session was introduced by presentations from both Prof. Andras Szollosi-Nagy and Prof. Asma El-Kasmi. The Rector of the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education provided an expansive discussion on the importance of increasing knowledge and skills in the overall context of water. A new generation of leaders must be prepared to shape responses for the current and foreseeable challenges. Despite advances in technology or the availability of finances, human resources must be enhanced to implement the policies and projects. Multi-disciplinary water education is essential as the demand for knowledgeable water professionals far exceeds available supply. For example, centers of knowledge like UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education are turning away 9 out of every 10 applicants and it is clear that if global demand for water professionals is to be met there are needs for expansion of water education through regional centers. He proposed that the Arab Water Academy was well positioned to lead efforts at the establishment of such an Arab region institute of water education. Finally, Prof. Szollosi-Nagy reminded the assembled Ministers and global water leaders that we must always be advocates that water does not divide, but instead connects people.

A final presentation on “Building Capacity and Multidimensional Bridges for Arab Water Security and Sustainable Development” was offered by the Academy Director to commemorate the 2nd anniversary of the Academy. Prof. El Kasmi began by thanking the key note speaker and the dignitaries for the opening remarks. She expressed appreciation to their Excellencies for participation in the opening panel of the Forum, and welcomed Prof. Szollosi-Nagy’s offer of collaboration between UNESCO-IHE and the Academy.

Prof. El Kasmi stated “sharing and managing this scarce resource in the region, while ensuring social equity and financial and environmental sustainability, demands skills that go beyond traditional engineering training to include economy, politics, ecology, diplomacy and democracy.” She continued emphasizing that “we need to recognize that decisions on reforms to the water systems are inherently political. Rather than trying to separate the technical from the political process they need to be looked at together. This means understanding what drives the political dynamics of reform and that reforms will need political and technical champions.”

The purpose of the Academy is to be an Agent of Change and to encourage, promote and empower “reformers” throughout the water sector. The Academy must ambitiously seek to fill the gaps that currently exist in vision, knowledge and capacity.

The Academy focuses on three areas: (1) informed and visionary leadership to champion the strategies for change, (2) management in possession of the latest knowledge and skills, and (3) a public aware of the issues and engaged in finding solutions to water challenges.

The Water Leaders Forum highlights the need for events that allow political decision makers the freedom to speak out, to make commitments that they will live up to and help secure the water future in their respective countries as well as the region as a whole.

The presentations by Prof. Szollosi-Nagy and Prof. El Kasmi were followed by a second panel discussion which welcomed additional participants with a variety of water expertise in the MENA region, and was facilitated by Mr. Atem Ramsundersingh. The panelists were initially invited to opine on what they would like to learn themselves as Agents of Change. After expressing his appreciation of the frank comments of the preceding panel of Ministers, Director Hedi Larbi of the World Bank was

first to reflect on this concern of “Agents of Change” and conveyed that there are no international best practices to be generally applied, but instead asserted that best solutions are homegrown and those which are likely to be implemented by the reformers. Moreover, it is important not to simply find and support individual reformers, but to institutionalize the changes to make sustainable the efforts providing continuity after individuals have moved on. Lastly, the realization that the soft sciences of water, i.e. economics, sociology, law, are critical, but more than any other discipline the need for communications to sell the reforms to the politically conservative and skeptical capitals.

Following a career of looking for solutions and drivers of change, Dr. Shawki Barghouti wanted to share with participants the “concept of relevance” in that we build institutions that are able to respond to the challenges in a relevant way. Change needs to be realistic. Further, he looked to the Academy to help challenge the other regional centers and institutes to perform, and encourage partnerships among the many regional institutions focused on water related research and training to find and implement solutions.

One such regional partner was represented by Mrs. Chahra Ksia, Director of the Center of Water Security in Damascus, who focused her comments on the evolution of new institutions and platforms such as the new Water Ministerial Council under the League of Arab States. She encouraged the Academy to support the call for actions emerging from the Council such as an Arab Water Security Strategy to comprehensively assess all problems. The Water Ministers from around the Arab region must benefit from the Academy’s programs to enable them to become Agents of Change, and the League of Arab States supports this approach.

Having personal experience as an educator and empowering change through the establishment

of the Bushnak Academy and the Saudi Water and Energy Forum, Dr. Adil Bushnak focused his remarks on triggering creativity and internalizing it into the institutions based on experience primarily with business community.

The panelists were then invited to receive thoughts and comments from the other participants of the Forum such as:

- Whether critical thinking emerging from a regional center of excellence or institutions was likely to be absorbed and internalized by government agencies (Dr. Walid Saleh);
- In addressing the challenge of human resources deficiency through education and regional centers have we given sufficient thought to retaining the talented professionals in the region once we have empowered them with education (Dr. Hammou Laamrani); and
- To empower Agents of Change, advocacy and public awareness are critical to allow for broad base support which enables implementation of reforms (Mrs. Elissar Sarrouh, UNDP Resident Representative).

In wrapping up the panel, Mr. Ramsundersingh invited the panelists to deliver one final key message that they would like other participants to take away from the Forum. Director Ksia asserted that change must be pursued at all levels. Seeking wisdom and knowledge in the work of the Academy and broader Arab water sector was the advice of Dr. Adil Bushnak. Mr. Larbi encouraged all panelists and participants that collectively we must advocate and sell the reforms necessary to address the numerous challenges faced in Arab water sector. Dr. Shawki Barghouti identified focus of purpose and focus of objectives for government, the Academy and other regional institutions in delivering solutions. The President of UNESCO-IHE identified bridging the gap between the development of technical knowledge and the political will required to devise and implement ambitious reforms.

Private Leaders Lunch “New Horizons, New Partners, New Solutions”

Following an interactive lunch discussion, a private working session began with a comparative experience presentation entitled **“Managing water under scarcity: the Australian Experience”** provided by Prof. Gary Jones, Chief Executive of eWater CRC based in Canberra, Australia. Identifying Australia as the driest inhabited continent with the highest per capita water use, Prof. Jones illustrated the existing constraints (e.g. population centers and established irrigation practices) and detrimental trends (e.g. increasing rainfall variability with notable deficiency in most populated regions) challenging Australia. In response, the island continent has witnessed a revolution in awareness that enabled a variety of water policy and management initiatives including: (1) water rights and water trading; (2) dealing with over-allocation in Murray-Darling Basin – the Basin Plan; (3) buy-back of water for the environment; (4) improved urban demand management; and (5) better data, information & prediction. Prof. Jones emphasized “ultimately, water reform in Australia is about building sustainability and ‘resilience’ in integrated water resources management”

The Ministers and other attendees opened a broad based discussion on the Australia experience with a number of questions: what transboundary agreements exist between the Federal states (H.E. Dr. Jamal Rashid); whether policy interventions were formulated at the national or state level (Mr. Larbi); how are water rights defined and how this entitlement system is not linked to land ownership (H.E. Eng. Fadhl Al-Eryani); inquiries on water pricing (H.E. Dr. Al-Saud); who in Australia pays for environmental flows (Dr. Laamrani); and how are Australian stakeholders addressing the high salinity issues (Dr. Barghouti).

A second presentation entitled **“Political Risk and Communication in Water Sector Reforms”** was offered to the Ministers and global water leaders by recently retired World Bank Senior Communications Specialist, Mr. Paul Mitchell. At the outset, Mr. Mitchell reaffirmed the presence of difficult water issues in the regional media through a number of recent articles and news stories. Each noted problems or challenges which required easy to identify solutions, such as investment, new partnerships, behavior changes, political change, etc. Any of these solutions means “change” which cannot happen without communication and looking at political risk. One can be sure that there are very high costs of reform initiatives without appropriate strategic communications which he defined as “the development of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to achieve management objectives.” Reformers and Agents of Change must be aware of the political risk and initiate measures to manage these risks in order to allow for the successful implementation of reforms. Citing experience in both the Arab world and beyond, Mr. Mitchell provided a number of lessons learned, but clearly highlighted “the social, cultural, political aspects of a major water reform rival its technical challenges”

The issue of political risk in water reforms was widely understood by the audience, but many comments followed on the link between securing political support and communication: commenting on the mapping of support and opposition to reforms and approaches through formal and informal relationship building (Mr. Larbi); importance of visiting key stakeholders on the ground to understand perceptions, provide confidence, and tailor government responses (Mr. Ramsundersingh); noting communications is not simply a good message, but opportunistic timing (Dr. Laamrani); sequencing of any communications efforts to secure political support from opinion leaders and then down to

end consumers (Dr. Barghouti); proper analysis of the stakeholders with influence – not always government and water institution officials, but also religious and tribal leaders (H.E. Dr. Jamal Rashid); similarly, proper identification of stakeholders' biggest concerns – not always price, but more often quality and quantity (Dr. Bushnak).

A critical question was posed by Mr. Ramsundersingh inquiring why is the obvious necessary communications not happening in the Arab world with regard to vital water issues? In response, the Minister of Water and Environment of Yemen stated that we lack the knowledge of how communications effectively manage expectations and assuage political risk. To this Dr. Laamrani added that there is limited expertise in communications in the region let alone that with experience in water reforms.

In the final moments of the working session and to close dramatically the Water Leaders Forum **all the Ministers and global water leaders received a special audience with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.**

Recommendations

A variety of ideas and suggestions were introduced and discussed among the ministers, global water leaders, and participants, but the following persistent recommendations can be taken by the Academy moving forward:

Building capacity and skills in communication: Most panelists emphasized the critical importance of building capacity and skills in the field of communications for the effective implementation of sector reforms and technology investments. Whether communications is used to build support among water professionals; or whether communications is required to coordinate initiatives or define responsibility among institutions in the sector; or whether strategic communications is critical for building

consensus across sectors from a variety of stakeholders; or lastly where regional water problems necessitate cooperation among governments; it was clear that communications capacity needs to be developed if reformers and agents of change are to achieve their objectives.

Integrating Water and Energy: The Forum participants raised the issue of the water-energy nexus in the region. Policy makers in the water sector should not look at water in isolation but instead, in a more comprehensive and integrated manner since policies in other sectors such as energy and agriculture have huge impacts on water outcomes. Therefore, the Academy was advised to continue to play a critical role in building capacity and coaching decision-makers in the water sector but look at water in a more comprehensive and sustainable way, stressing the links between water and energy, and raising awareness and capacity with regard to new opportunities such as the use of renewable energies in desalination.

Focusing on Water and Agriculture: Water for food was also in the forefront agenda in the Forum and the participants suggested different ways to confront this challenge. The Academy should engage in informing senior water leaders and decision-makers on the opportunities of saline agriculture that benefits the region. The participants also underlined the huge investments flowing to agricultural sector for securing food supply, and raised the concern of whether the region can afford irrigated agriculture. Recommendation was made for the Academy to go beyond the concept of improving irrigation efficiency and reflect on whether the region affords irrigated agriculture or alternative effective solutions/policies are needed.

In these areas the Academy could play a brokering role, developing the capacities of new leadership and extending bridges of cooperation and coordination with regional and international bodies.