



FACT SHEET BLUE REVOLUTION INITIATIVE

2007



Rivers are the lifelines of the Middle East. The Nile River flows through the desert in Aswan, Egypt.

(Photo: USAID/OMEF)

CHAMPIONS AND FUTURE WATER LEADERS

USAID collaborates with, and supports forward-thinking decision makers who endorse a progressive philosophy and the Integrated Water Resource Management principles. USAID also identifies and trains the next generation of water leaders.

Improving efficiency in water use, encouraging recycling and sharing resources means tough choices requiring strong leadership. Without sound management, the billions of dollars already spent on water systems as well as future investments are at risk.

WORKING REGIONALLY AND ENGAGING PARTNERS

USAID's Blue Revolution Initiative is an innovative regional water strategy for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It provides a regional platform for sharing experiences, technical innovations and expertise and for improving cross-border cooperation. It seeks to build an alliance of regional water entities, cooperating governments, local communities, donors, foundations and private companies to address the water challenges in the MENA region.

BACKGROUND

Water touches all aspects of people's lives and plays a central role in every country's development. It affects health, livelihoods and incomes. Its availability and its quality can hinder or facilitate socio-economic development. Water management reflects the strengths and weaknesses of local, national and international governance practices and influences the relationships between neighboring countries.

The MENA region must contend with aridity and a shortage of renewable freshwater resources. Ancient civilizations dealt with water scarcity by building extensive irrigation systems. Today however, population growth and increasing demands for food, housing and jobs place extreme pressures on water resources throughout the region. Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen are overcoming their shortages by tapping deep, nonrenewable groundwater resources or investing in expensive desalination plants. Good water management matters here more than elsewhere as disputes over water may exacerbate political tensions. Mitigating conflict and meeting demands requires using existing renewable resources more efficiently. It requires a transformation of the culture and governance of water in the MENA region.

TRANSFORMING CULTURE & GOVERNANCE OF WATER TRANS-BOUNDARY COOPERATION OVER WATER

All the main rivers in the region cross national borders. Yet, there are few institutional agreements or entities in place to address international disputes and collaboratively manage resources.

To address this, USAID works with national governments and regional organizations to strengthen cooperation. This may include routine and joint monitoring of water quality and quantity to support and improve decision making. It could also mean sharing information among countries on their national management plans, regional priorities and projects for water use. The initial focus will be on the Tigris-Euphrates and Nile river basins.



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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

BLUE REVOLUTION INITIATIVE (CONTINUED)



Engineers are trained on the use of flowmeters. Better water management starts with better monitoring.

(Photo: USAID/OMEP)



A farmer enjoys reliable water supply. There can be no sustainability without the participation of water users.

(Photo: USAID/OMEP)

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IMPROVED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Meeting the growing water demands requires that countries protect the quality of sources and waterways, increase water use efficiency through demand management (using tariffs, technology and incentives), or expand existing water supplies through desalination and reuse of wastewater.

Agriculture remains a significant economic activity in the MENA region, employing a sizeable work force and contributing to national food security. But inadequate or non-existent irrigation delivery fees and the lack of regulation of groundwater use encourage poor water management, and threaten long-term soil productivity and critical aquatic ecosystems.

USAID assists governments to strengthen policies and regulation to:

- Protect the quality of surface and groundwater resources;
- Promote stakeholder participation and joint management at all levels;
- Increase the use of alternative water supplies for agriculture and industrial purposes; and
- Encourage the policy, regulatory and institutional changes needed to use water more efficiently.

ACCESS FOR THE POOR TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Governments and donors have so far focused on expanding water supply and sanitation systems to meet the needs of growing populations. In spite of impressive investments, most utilities still do not adequately serve their entire constituencies and most frequently shun slums and rural areas.

USAID works with national governments, local communities, other donors, the private sector and NGOs to expand access to safe water and basic sanitation across the MENA region. USAID's assistance aims to:

- Improve access to financing for water and sanitation infrastructure;
- Increase the effectiveness of utility operations;
- Promote household hygiene and sanitation; and
- Expand services in rural and underserved areas.

USAID supports water utilities to reach more customers with better quality services while recovering most, if not all of their operation costs.



A boy in Gaza enjoys an unusual shower. Clean water is precious.

(Photo: USAID/OMEP)