

Food and water security tightly linked

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At World Water Week in Stockholm, IFAD to explore solutions to water scarcity

Water scarcity affects one in three people on every continent of the globe. The situation is getting worse as needs for water rise along with population growth, urbanization and increases in household and industrial uses. The International Fund for Agricultural Development - IFAD, will join experts from the scientific, business, policy and civic communities in Stockholm from 26-31 August to address how to reverse this impending problem while ensuring the world's food security.

Organized by the Stockholm International Institute, the annual World Water Week will focus on water and food security this year. The theme comes at a time when the global food security situation is unstable. Fluctuating energy prices, poor harvests, and rising demand from a growing population, have all increased food prices. In the past few months, severe droughts have been reported from the United States to the Sahel region in Africa. These droughts further exacerbate the problem as they reduce global food supply due to reductions in irrigated agricultural production, which represents 40% of the world's food demand.

Nowhere is the link between food and water security more evident than in the Near East and North Africa region, which is home to 5% of the world's population, but only 1% of the global available freshwater resources. Limited water resources restrict the potential for domestic food production in the region, where irrigated agriculture represents 85% of total freshwater withdrawal.

"Along with other stressors including demographic and land use changes, climate change will exacerbate the already precarious high water deficit in the Arab region, and will negatively impact its rainfed agricultural productivity," said Khalida Bouzar, Director of the Near East, North Africa and Europe Division at IFAD. "Water scarcity will become the main constraint to socio-economic development in the region, which is why it is crucial to work on integrated adaptation strategies that incorporate water issues in all sectors including agriculture, industry, urban development, trade, and tourism. Strategies should also contribute to reducing exposure to market volatility through investments in critical infrastructure such as grain storages and water harvesting."

As the region's population is estimated to double over the next 40 years, per capita water availability is expected to fall by more than 50%. In order to meet future water demands, IFAD is exploring non-conventional water resources in the region such as wastewater reuse, recycling of agricultural drainage water and desalination. For example, in Jordan, Syria and Tunisia, incorporating alternative water resources such as brackish water and treated wastewater is being undertaken in forage production. This is being coupled with environmental impact assessments on farms and guidelines for the safe use of marginal water.

During World Water Week, IFAD will be organizing six events to explore ways to scale up simple technologies such as these, which small farmers worldwide can use to enhance food security. In addition, the events will look at how best to support small farmers to contribute to climate change adaptation by fostering models of efficient water use, and empower neglected or disempowered groups such as marginal farmers and women.

World Water Week Events - IFAD