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Update on the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture

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I. Background

1. The Committee on Agriculture (COAG) at its 26th Session (1-5 October 2018) and during subsequent Sessions (COAG 27 and COAG 28), requested FAO to provide technical and policy assistance to countries, including through South-South Cooperation and innovative approaches, to enhance their involvement in activities of the *Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG)*. The Committee also requested FAO to report to COAG periodically on the progress of the WASAG.
2. While the understanding of water scarcity tends primarily to be limited to physical water scarcity associated with drier and arid climates where competition for water is greater because of the limited supply, countries with wetter climates are increasingly being subjected to unpredictable rainfall patterns due to the irregularity of formerly predictable rainy seasons. In addition, extreme events, including droughts and mostly floods disrupt conventional water resources planning, causing at times significant economic losses. Water scarcity affects particularly the sustainable management of agriculture, including livestock. The poor, and especially women and youth, are likely to be the most affected by increasing water scarcity.
3. Considering that the world population will reach around 10 billion in 2050, water scarcity constitutes a real threat to food security since more food will have to be grown with limited water resources. Water scarcity in agriculture, in its different facets, is rapidly becoming a widespread concern worldwide, especially given the interdependence among countries for their food security.
4. This highlights the need for all countries to collaborate to address water scarcity in agriculture. Under the patronage of the Government of the Republic of Cabo Verde and with the support of the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG), WASAG hosted its Second International Forum in Praia, Cabo Verde from 2 to 7 February 2023, with the participation of 300 delegates who attended in person, and 1500 virtually from 80 countries.
5. The Forum adopted the Praia Call for Action¹ which invited FAO Members to become partners of WASAG, with a Member Nation designated to chair WASAG, starting with Cabo Verde. Moreover, the Call requested FAO to convene, every two years at its headquarters in Rome, a Water Dialogue on WASAG with all FAO Members and WASAG partners, aimed at reporting on progress, receiving further guidance, and mobilizing the required support.

II. WASAG's recent work

6. Since the establishment of the six WASAG Working Groups (Water and Migration, Drought Preparedness, Financing Mechanisms, Water and Nutrition, Sustainable Agriculture Water Use, and Saline Agriculture), from 2018 to date, the partnership has produced, through voluntary technical and in-kind contributions, several knowledge products² consisting of white papers, guidelines, and policy briefs covering topics such as water productivity, droughts, financing mechanisms, and saline agriculture. These are being gradually used by countries, including for capacity development.
7. WASAG's visibility and the expectations regarding its role were increased significantly thanks to participation in major international fora. It has been selected as a 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator. FAO organized, with WASAG partners, an event at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York in March 2023, where it shared the Praia Call for Action and solutions to water scarcity developed by the WASAG Working Groups. Furthermore, FAO submitted WASAG as one of its contributions to the Water Action Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Actions Platform, a global registry of voluntary policies, commitments, multi-stakeholder partnerships and

¹ FAO.WASAG. *The Praia Call for Action*. <https://www.fao.org/wasag/news/2nd-wasag-forum/prai-call-for-action/en/>

² See full list of publications of WASAG at <https://www.fao.org/wasag/resources/publications/en/>

other initiatives taken by governments, the UN system and a broad range of stakeholders to support acceleration of SDGs.³

8. Moreover, WASAG knowledge products have been used by the FAO Value Added Impact Area (VAIA) *Addressing Water Scarcity for Agriculture and the environment (AWSAME)* to provide field training on saline agriculture and halophytes to farmers, agriculture extension officers, and researchers, starting in Cabo Verde and Uzbekistan. Similarly, AWSAME is promoting indigenous drought resilient and nutritious crops which are currently being piloted in Cabo Verde, Malawi, Morocco, and South Sudan.

III. Emerging perspectives

9. Following the recommendation of the Praia Call for Action adopted during the Second WASAG International Forum, the event *Towards a High-Level Dialogue on the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG) - Technical Preparatory Meeting*⁴ was held in a hybrid modality at FAO headquarters and online from 29 to 30 April 2024. The two-day event hosted approximately 80 in-person participants and more than 500 online participants. In total, 82 countries were represented onsite and online. The Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United States of America organized side events on saline agriculture and ecosystems-based solutions.

10. During the meeting, the proposed new operational mechanisms were discussed. These included modalities for Members to become partners of WASAG, and of a Steering Committee led by Members, a Technical Advisory Committee (with the same composition as the current Steering Committee), a Plenary Assembly (to be held every second year in Rome) and an International Forum (to be hosted by Members from different regions on a rotational basis). Building on these discussions, a draft *Rome Declaration on Water Scarcity in Agriculture*⁵ was shared with participants for a first round of comments. The revised version of the Declaration is foreseen to be circulated among Members and other WASAG partners for additional inputs before the planned High-Level Dialogue on WASAG, that will take place on 17 October 2024 (in the afternoon) during the World Food Forum.⁶

11. In summary, the momentum is high for all Members to cooperate in developing the required actions for addressing decisively water scarcity in agriculture, in the face of climate change. The proposed new WASAG operating mechanisms aim to offer a much needed and timely interface between technical expertise and policy, for accelerated collaborative solutions towards more resilient and sustainable agrifood systems and for a greater impact, at all levels.

³ UNDESA. *Addressing water scarcity in agriculture through partnership and innovation* <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/addressing-water-scarcity-agriculture-through-partnerships-and-innovation> (SDG Action 50673) and UNDESA. *The Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG)* <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/global-framework-water-scarcity-agriculture-wasag> (SDG Action 46035)

⁴ FAO. WASAG. 2024 Technical Preparatory Meeting <https://www.fao.org/wasag/news/towards-high-level-dialogue/en/>

⁵ Draft Rome Declaration on Water Scarcity in Agriculture. 2024

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jeyLh0fwtoH67ECDSIO5y9ZerWZr0u4f/edit>

⁶ See also: COAG/2024/7 *Integrated water resources management and governance of tenure of water resources for food and agriculture*.