

Executive Summary of the OIC Water Report 2018

Introduction

OIC countries face great water challenges, but these challenges are not insurmountable. As the OIC Water Vision points out, OIC countries are guided by the noble Islamic values of unity, fraternity and solidarity. These values provide an extraordinary opportunity for its member states to work together to ensure a water secure future, sharing varied experiences and learning from what has and has not worked.

Against this backdrop, the 2018 edition of the OIC Water Report prepared and presented by SESRIC to the 4th Session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers Responsible for Water held in the period 14-16 October in Cairo, Egypt came out under the theme "Transforming Risk into Dialogue." The report:

- ❖ Highlights the current state as well as the challenges facing OIC countries in the domain of water.
- ❖ Addresses water security and peace in OIC countries and how to transform risk into opportunities for cooperation
- ❖ Identifies Water related needs & priorities of OIC Countries
- ❖ Evaluates the current state of implementing the OIC Water Vision.
- ❖ Concludes with a policy discussion and implications

Main Findings

OIC Countries, as the report highlights, suffer from limited water availability. As we move forward; non-revenue water, pollution, climate change, hydrologic variability, land use and changing ecosystems will further limit water availability. On the other side, demand for water is on the rise. The rate of population growth in OIC countries outpaces that in other country groups. A growing population requires water not only to drink, but also to meet its increased food, industry, municipal and energy production needs. Rapid urbanization, increased economic activity and rising consumption are driving demand for water further. This in turn is placing unprecedented pressure on water resources. Pressure on water resources in OIC countries is 12.2% and far exceeds the 5.3% observed in non-OIC developing countries and the 9.1% observed in developed countries.

With limited water availability and rising demand, OIC countries face the dreadfulness of water scarcity. Absolute water scarcity is observed in **14** OIC countries; chronic water shortages are observed in **6** OIC countries; and regular water stress is observed in **6** OIC countries. In total, almost half of OIC countries face some level of water scarcity.

Access to water and sanitation services is recognized as a human right and has long been a central aim of international development policies and targets. The analysis in the report shows that despite success recorded in recent years, OIC countries still lag behind other country groups in providing access to safely managed drinking water. As for providing access to safely managed sanitation services, OIC countries have low access rates pointing to limited success and a steep uphill challenge in this area.

Achieving water security lies at the heart of the OIC water Vision. Failing to do so will lead to increased water shortages, health crises, and most probably disputes and conflicts. Already we are witnessing the spectre of increasing conflicts over water. The report reveals a sharply increasing trend of conflicts over fresh water, particularly in the period from 1990 to 2018. Conflicts over fresh water are strongly present in the OIC region, where during the period from 2010 to May 2018 fresh water in the OIC geography was behind more violence than ever constituting 67% of global water conflicts.

In situations of water scarcity, cooperation – instead of conflict – should be the dominant societal response in both domestic and international settings. In this regard, it is heart warming to observe a drastic upsurge in the number of signed international agreements on fresh water after the Second World War. It is also more heart warming to observe that this surge is strongly evident in OIC countries. Whereas only two international agreements on fresh water that include at least one OIC Member State were signed in the decade of the 1950s, the number drastically increased by the end of the 2017 to 111 in total.

The OIC Water Vision which was adopted by the 2nd Islamic Conference of Ministers Responsible for Water held in Istanbul in 2012 is a framework of cooperation among OIC member countries, relevant OIC institutions and international organizations in the water sector to improve availability of water particularly potable water in OIC countries. In 2018, SESRIC and OIC General Secretariat administered a survey on the implementation plan for the OIC Water Vision amongst OIC countries. Results of the survey show some achievements in the implementation of the OIC water Vision. In most of the countries surveyed (93%), the OIC Water Vision document has already been circulated to the relevant departments and the implementation of various recommended actions and activities is in progress.

As for Challenges, ensuring access to water and sanitation services is the greatest challenge to the water security of 87% of the respondents. It is followed by challenges associated with water resource availability (80%), access to finance (53%), balancing water use and food production (40%), transboundary waters (33%), and changing socio-economic climates (20%). At the other end of the scale, changing physical climates is not as big of a challenge for 73% of the respondents. Nonetheless, the survey results reveal that the majority of the respondents have specific policies, strategies and /or action to address the major challenges.

The survey also reveal that there is an increasing level of awareness as well as willingness among the OIC member countries to achieve water security through assistive capacity building, transfer of technology, and funding. A majority (80%) of OIC member countries are willing to assist other OIC member countries with assistive capacity building. Almost half of OIC countries are willing to assist with the transfer of technology. However, assistance in the form of funding and finance is not offered by any OIC member country.

The need to build or upgrade water infrastructure is heavily reliant on the geographical, environmental, and financial conditions in each country. At present, 67% of OIC member countries lack adequate financial means to build or upgrade necessary water infrastructure. In OIC member countries, three main infrastructural needs are evident in the survey responses. These are infrastructural needs associated with irrigation systems, watershed and river systems management, and water supply and sanitation for rural and urban areas.

Policy Implications

The report concludes with a policy discussion. The report points out that the OIC Water Vision is an excellent framework for addressing the major water challenges facing OIC countries. Realizing the OIC Water Vision gained considerable momentum with the establishment of the OIC Water Council which developed an Implementation Plan for the OIC Water Vision. Successfully executing the implementation plan will require the full participation of the member countries and the support of the OIC General Secretariat and the relevant OIC institutions. In this regard, SESRIC, COMSTECH, IDB and ISESCO have a big role to play. The implementation plan is a good plan with defined mechanisms. However, the plan is not without flaws. The most serious weakness is related to resource mobilization. The plan does not identify how OIC countries can cooperate on resource mobilization. It is recommended that the OIC Water Council revisit the issue of resource mobilization and that means of cooperation among member countries be outlined.

Turkey has championed water causes in the OIC including the establishment of the OIC Water Council and the development of the implementation plan for the OIC water vision. So far, great momentum has been achieved. Now chairing the OIC Water Council moves to Egypt and Egypt will definitely build on that momentum and lead the OIC Water Council in the execution of the implementation plan.

SESRIC report was well received by the delegates participating in the 4th Session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers Responsible for Water. The delegates expressed the view that the report is useful in expanding the knowledge in the OIC countries and that the report will contribute the decision-making process through enacting appropriate policies and strategies that will enable the OIC countries to successfully address the water challenges they face.