



Op-Ed | The Path to Stability and Shared Prosperity: How Food and Water Security Can Transform Regional Cooperation in Middle East and North Africa

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Article originally published by Food Tank.



Introduction

In the parched plains of Morocco and the drying valleys of Jordan, farmers are already living the future of climate change. Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), fifteen of the world's twenty most water-stressed nations face a common reality: how to feed growing populations with shrinking resources. Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a



present reality reshaping livelihoods, economies, and security dynamics across MENA.

The Food-Water-Energy Nexus

At the heart of this challenge lies the food-water-energy nexus. Water scarcity is already crippling agriculture, which consumes over 80 percent of freshwater resources, even as climate patterns become increasingly erratic. Food systems, heavily dependent on imports (up to 85 percent in some countries), remain vulnerable to global shocks. These intertwined pressures deepen inequalities and strain political systems. Yet within this crisis lies a chance to build something profoundly different, a region bound by cooperation rather than competition.

MENA2050 Retreat

These urgent circumstances carried out a recent focused working retreat organized by MENA2050, bringing together experts and practitioners from across the region and beyond. The goal: to craft practical pathways for regional resilience through food and water security. While the discussions were frank and solutions-focused, convenings like this reflect a growing realization: climate action in MENA cannot succeed in isolation.

Core Messages

Three core messages emerged from the retreat:

1. Regional Cooperation is Essential

The retreat reaffirmed what many already know but few act upon—MENA cannot tackle climate change in silos. Water sources and energy grids are transboundary. Food supply chains are interdependent. Fragmentation only magnifies vulnerability. Shared aquifers, regional trade routes, and integrated energy systems must become platforms for collaboration, not conflict, because in today's MENA, cooperation is no longer optional; it is the only path forward.

2. Innovation Must be Scaled and Democratized

Across the region, inspiring solutions are already emerging. In the Gulf, large-scale desalination powered by renewables is easing water scarcity. North African farmers are adopting biodynamic methods that improve soils and generate carbon credits. Food-rescue networks are turning surplus into sustenance for millions. Together, these examples demonstrate that technology and creativity can unlock resilience, provided innovation is



shared, scaled, and sustained through investment and political commitment.

3. Governance and Finance Will Make or Break Progress

Technology alone will not solve the problem. Progress depends on strong governance and fair access to finance. Experts emphasized the need for a shared regional climate framework, one that aligns national policies, sets mutual targets, and fosters cross-border research and development. A collaborative research platform linking universities, private innovators, and local communities could ensure that solutions are designed for the region's unique realities, not imported wholesale. Coordinated climate-finance mechanisms, including funds for nature-based solutions, can help turn small pilot projects into regional transformations. This approach would move the region from fragmented efforts to shared strategies, transforming food and water from vulnerabilities into engines of growth, stability, and cooperation.

Narrative Shift

This narrative shift is vital. For too long, climate adaptation has been framed as a burden. Building sustainable food and water systems can drive job creation, attract capital, and foster peace. When researchers in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates exchange data on drought-resistant crops, and Jordanian and Israeli startups share desalination know-how, resilience itself becomes a driver of cross-border collaboration in trade, research, and innovation.

Foundations for Cooperation

Across the MENA region, visionaries are laying the foundations for cooperation: scientists sharing data, young entrepreneurs building climate-smart businesses, and communities restoring degraded land. The political climate may remain uncertain, but waiting for perfect conditions is a luxury the region cannot afford. The seeds of collaboration must be planted now, so they can take root when opportunity comes.

Conclusion

The choice before us is clear. We can remain trapped in fragmentation, or we can turn the shared challenges of food and water insecurity into a platform for collaboration. Climate change is indifferent to borders, and our solutions must be too. By uniting around climate action and the food-water-energy nexus, we can turn vulnerability into opportunity and lay the foundation for lasting stability, resilience, and peace.