



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



## Consultative Meeting on the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda: Solutions and Action for SDGs Implementation Amid the Triple Planetary Crisis

### Hybrid Mode, Thursday 2 March 2023

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), organized in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Program - Regional Office for West Asia, a consultative meeting on the “Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda: Solutions and Action for SDGs Implementation Amid the Triple Planetary Crisis<sup>1</sup>”. The meeting was organized on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2023 following the adoption of resolution 619 of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) during its 33<sup>rd</sup> regular session, which was held in October 2022. The meeting aimed at discussing solutions and action to address environmental challenges and vulnerabilities affecting the achievement of SDGs in particular the 2023 HLPF focus SDGs: goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17.

The meeting provided a platform for presenting national and regional initiatives proven successful in enhancing the SDGs implementation while addressing the triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. This discussion allowed to explore potential cooperation and partnerships at regional and national levels and the possible adoption or scaling-up of these actions.

The meeting resulted in this outcome document which includes a set of key messages that reflect regional views on the different needed tracks to accelerate achievement of the SDGs from an environmental lens, in particular the focus SDGs for this year’s HLPF. This document will be submitted to the 2023 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) (14-16 March 2023) and supports regional inputs for the 2023 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) session (10-19 July 2023). Finally, messages and findings will also be presented to the next session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in 2023.

More than 50 participants from 14 Arab states participated in the meeting. They included representatives of governments, academic institutions, regional and international organizations, civil society organizations and representatives of the private sector.

### I. Background: Impact of triple planetary crisis on the Arab region

Three interconnected crises - climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution - are putting our economic and social well-being at risk, while undermining opportunities to reduce poverty, and improve lives and livelihoods<sup>2</sup>. In the Arab region, with temperatures projected to increase by 2.6 degrees Celsius by mid-century under the business-as-usual scenario, the harsh water scarcity is further exacerbated, desertification is expected to expand with increased periods of prolonged droughts, warming of oceans and increased frequency and intensity of flash floods, storms, and cyclones, thus threatening the region’s

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<sup>1</sup> The triple planetary crisis that the humanity is currently facing refers to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

<sup>2</sup> [The United Nations Environment Programme strategy for tackling climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste from 2022—2025.](#)

ecosystems. Rapid and concentrated urbanization combined with limited climate-sensitive planning make Arab cities among the world's most vulnerable cities to climate change.

Biodiversity in the Arab region is in decline. Natural resources are being overexploited and habitats are being destroyed by rapid urbanization, population growth and encroachment into various ecosystems such as forests, wetlands and along coastlines<sup>3&4</sup>. There is an undeniable opportunity offered through ecosystems restoration to recover biodiversity and halt and reverse degradation of ecosystems. In urban settings, biodiversity-inclusive planning provides an opportunity to address poorly planned urbanization, exacerbated in countries in conflict by the influx of internally displaced and migration, and the associated land conversion, a main driver of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss in the Arab region.

The Arab region suffers as well from severe pollution. Five Arab countries are ranked among the top ten polluted countries worldwide and three countries are among the top ten countries with the highest deaths from air pollution. The rate of carbon dioxide pollution from manufacturing in the region<sup>5</sup>, is the worst in the world, at four times the global value. Industrial waste, wastewater pollution, and unregulated use of pesticides and fertilizers are threatening water and soil quality and health in the region. In addition, and despite adopting national renewable energy targets, a heavier use of fossil fuels was noted in the region to meet the rapidly increasing energy demand thus contributing to increasing emissions and air pollution<sup>6</sup>.

## II. Proposed Key Messages

### **Regional Messages for the four HLPF focus SDGs:**

To achieve SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 11, Arab states need to:

- Enhance policies that accelerate the implementation of these SDGs which contribute to addressing the triple planetary crisis “climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution”.
- Prioritize investment in eco-system conservation and restoration programs.
- Enhance cross borders cooperation between upstream and downstream countries to mitigate risks in transboundary and shared ecosystems.
- Scale-up regional youth entrepreneurship initiatives that aim at mitigating and managing the triple planetary crisis risks.
- Promote and incentivize risk-transfer measures and financial inclusion to improve resilience of local communities to climate change in urban and rural ecosystems.
- Mainstream climate change, biodiversity and pollution into sectoral and cross-sectoral public policies in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach/alliances.
- Ensure the preservation of the genetic assets of the Arab region, especially during conflicts.
- Improve development plans in the Arab countries to encourage the establishment of new economic and social policies, rebuilding institutions and investing in people.
- Strengthen CSOs engagement in monitoring natural ecosystems and in overseeing the alignment of national practices with international regulations and conventions, especially during conflict.
- Call upon the international community to support in ending occupation and conflicts in the Arab region which are hampering the SDGs achievement and environment conservation and hindering the access of Arab states to climate funds.
- Enhance regional preparations and develop proper plans to better address the repercussions of earthquakes and emergencies.

### **On SDG 6:**

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<sup>3</sup> ESCWA, 2020. Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020. Available from: <https://asdr.unescwa.org/>

<sup>4</sup> ESCWA, 2022, SDG 15 Background note. Available from: <https://afsd-2022.unescwa.org/sdgs/pdf/documents/3-background-notes/en/22-00068-BackgroundNote-Sdg15-LifeonLand-E-WEB.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> in proportion to the value added of industry

<sup>6</sup> ESCWA, 2020. Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020. Available from: <https://asdr.unescwa.org/>

- Urge countries to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to conserve biodiversity and halt/reverse ecosystems degradation.
- Address the sources of pollution of surface and groundwater resources leading to biodiversity loss and depletion among other impacts.
- Accelerate wastewater treatment and reuse for productive uses and to protect the environment.
- Enact Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies and plans. This will protect aquatic ecosystems serving as a buffer against climate extreme events, and as a source of water supply in the Arab region.
- Adopt water policies and plans based on an adequate demand management and improve water valuation mechanisms and water supply and protect water resources.

**On SDG 7:**

- Accelerate the energy transition for the purpose of addressing climate change impacts and reducing pollution in the region through innovative technologies and the adoption of circular economy to use wasted energy as an input in a supply chain of another sector.
- Integrate biodiversity in energy planning given the dependency and impacts of Renewable Energy (RE) solutions on biodiversity (impacts of windmills on migratory birds' flyways and encroachment of solar farms on existing ecosystems).
- Allocate investments to small scale off-grid RE for women empowerment and gender justice and to alleviate resource depletion-induced-poverty.
- Expand research, development and capacity building in the field of renewable energy and motivate the private sector to invest in this field.

**On SDG 9:**

- Integrate pollution prevention policies into industrial operations and processes to reduce the volume and toxicity of wastes, GHG emissions, ensure proper waste disposal, and recycle and reuse materials.
- Develop and adopt policies that enable the transition from a linear to a circular economy to address the triple planetary crisis.
- Accelerate the digital transformation leading to pollution assessment, prevention and control in industries.
- Support the capacities of the public sector, and the service providers of the industrial sector, and the start-ups, and work to ensure the availability of necessary funds to greening the industries and moving towards a circular economy.
- Promote the adoption of environmental impact assessments for industries and the development of legislations that guarantee good governance and accountability, ensure monitoring and auditing, and involve the citizens in monitoring violations.
- Provide technical and financial support to industries and linking access to finance to them meeting environment standards.
- Standardize measurement methodologies and marketing criteria across Arab states for products having an environmental impact.

**On SDG 11:**

- Address the challenge of inequalities between regions and between rural-peri-urban-urban to slow down the pace of migration and reduce the pressure on resources and ecosystems.
- Promote "social housing" with basic services to prevent pollution through proper waste management thus improving livelihoods in informal urban and peri-urban settlements.
- Accelerate adoption of effective urban governance that enhance cities' resilience and sustainability.
- Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainability in urban planning.
- Develop adequate policies, strategies, and action plans for proper environmental management in the reconstruction of cities in fragile, conflict and post-conflict contexts.
- Develop indicators to assess the sustainability of cities and adopt urban observatories in Arab cities to measure urban indicators and follow up the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, while exchanging examples, challenges and solutions among the cities.

- Develop institutional capacities in preparing the local and national voluntary reports.
- Maximize the role of remote sensing in preventing disasters by making decisions that support early warning and prediction-based financing.

**On SDG 17**

- Strengthen regional cooperation and partnerships through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, the Arab Environmental Forum, and the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, for implementing and scaling-up successful initiatives in achieving SDGs while addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- Engage in regional cooperation to prevent and manage transboundary risks for shared resources and in reducing environmental risks and threats related to the triple planetary crisis.
- Scale-up the implementation of innovative, effective, green, and affordable solutions for addressing the triple planetary crisis.
- Consolidate the emerging trend in alternative finance modalities (such as green bonds, debt-swap, Islamic finance, carbon market) to accelerate the transition to circularity.