



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA),
the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**

Consultative Meeting on the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda:
“Solutions and Action for SDGs implementation amid the triple planetary crisis”

Beirut, 2 March 2023

INFORMATION NOTE

1. Background

Within the framework of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has been cooperating with regional partners since 2014 in organizing annual sessions for the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD)¹. This forum is convened yearly to support the regional preparations for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) of the year².

In preparation for the AFSD, a regional consultative meeting is organized on a yearly basis on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) during its 33rd regular session, held in October 2022, adopted resolution 619 requesting from the League of Arab States Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and ESCWA to organize this meeting to inform regional and global processes in preparation for the HLPF³. In the same resolution, CAMRE emphasized the need to focus the main messages of the Arab region arising from this meeting on the topics of energy, water, and related issues.

In this context, and in line with the AFSD 2023 theme “Solutions and Action”, ESCWA, in cooperation with UNEP-ROWA, and LAS are organizing a regional consultative meeting on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and in particular on the SDGs under review at the 2023 HLPF. The meeting is titled “Solutions and Action for SDGs implementation amid the triple planetary crisis⁴”.

This year, the HLPF will be performing an in-depth review of the set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) listed below, noting that Goal 17 is considered every year:

- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all,
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all,
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation,

¹ The 2023 AFSD will be held under the theme “Solutions and Action”, during 14-16 March 2023 <https://afsd-2023.unescwa.org/>

² The 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”, will be held from Monday 10 July to Wednesday 19 July 2023, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council <https://hlpf.un.org/2023>

³ CAMRE Resolution 619 during 33rd regular session “Calls on the Technical Secretariat of CAMRE, in cooperation and coordination with ESCWA and UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, and also in cooperation with relevant Arab and regional organizations and NGOs, to follow-up on the implementation of activities and programs of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, particularly those related to the environment and natural resources priorities in the Arab region, and calls upon them to organize preparatory meetings to discuss these issues and prepare CAMRE’s contributions to AFSD 2023 and 2023 HLPF”.

⁴ The triple planetary crisis that the humanity is currently facing refers to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

2. Objectives and Processes

The consultative meeting is convened in a hybrid mode (participation is possible in person and online). The meeting will discuss regional solutions and actions for SDGs implementation from an environmental lens. The outcome of the meeting will inform AFSD 2023 (14-16 March 2023) and subsequently 2023 HLPF on environmental priorities of the Arab region.

Discussion among relevant stakeholders from both the public sector and major groups will pave the way for suggesting and elaborating needed solutions and concrete actions for achieving progress in protecting the environment and natural resources in the region while implementing SDGs. Urgent action on this front is needed amid the triple planetary crisis, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and following the repercussions of conflicts at global and regional levels.

The meeting will result in an outcome document that will include key messages and recommendations that reflect regional views on how to accelerate the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda with a particular focus on the five SDGs under review during the 2023 HLPF. The document will be presented to the upcoming session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in 2023.

The objectives of the meeting are thus to:

- Discuss actions and solutions to address environmental challenges and vulnerabilities affecting the achievement of SDGs and in particular the 2023 HLPF focus SDGs: goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17;
- Provide a platform for regional cooperation and partnerships to advance implementation of SDGs amid the triple planetary crisis;
- Present national initiatives that can be scaled up for regional implementation.

3. Thematic Areas

The consultative meeting will be structured around two thematic areas supporting achievement of SDGs (6, 7, 9, and 11) and responding to the impacts of the triple planetary crisis. The discussion will cover existing mutual benefits between addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and achieving the 2023 HLPF focus SDGs. The discussed solutions and actions require the collective use of all means of implementation detailed in SDG 17, however, the focus will be on leveraging regional cooperation and partnerships to successfully implement the SDGs.

Theme 1: Solutions for implementing SDGs within the triple planetary crisis.

The consultative meeting will allow for discussions on solutions related to implementing the four SDGs while addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. While there are other relevant SDGs related to the triple planetary crisis (including SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 14 and 15 on marine and land ecosystems and biodiversity), the focus will remain on the below SDGs under review for the 2023 HLPF:

- SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, particularly targets 6.1 and 6.2 on access to water and wastewater services, 6.3 related to improving water quality by reducing pollution, 6.5 on Integrated Water Resources Management and transboundary cooperation, and 6.6 related to protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems;
- SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, particularly targets 7.2 and 7.3 related to substantially increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix and doubling the rate of energy efficiency, respectively, given that renewable energy and energy efficiency are two key solutions to

reducing the highest share of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions contributing to climate change⁵ and local air pollution; and given the dependency and impacts of renewable energy solutions on biodiversity thus the need to integrate biodiversity and circular carbon economy principles in energy planning⁶ to avoid biodiversity loss while reducing pollution;

- SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure concerned with building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation, and particularly target 9.4 directly linked to adopting clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes;
- SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities in particular target 11.4 related to the protection of natural world heritage, , target 11.6 aiming at reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management, target 11.a related to strengthening national and regional development planning to support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas, and target 11.b related to the adoption of national DRR strategies.

Climate change impacts have altered marine, terrestrial, and freshwater ecosystems around the world leading to biodiversity loss, ecosystem restructuring and declines in key ecosystem services, in addition to inflicting economic and livelihood losses⁷. Climate extreme events are predicted to increase in magnitude and frequency with the number of medium to large-scale disasters projected to increase globally by 40% from 2015 to 2030⁸. 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 ecosystems. Cities and settlements, and particularly unplanned settlements with limited adaptive capacity, are as well highly exposed to the risks of climate change. Rapid and concentrated urbanization combined with limited climate-sensitive planning make Arab cities among the world's most vulnerable cities to climate change.

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 region⁹, 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 pollution¹⁰. Poorly managed solid waste treatment arising from dense urban areas in the region leads to random dumping and open burning thus exacerbating soil, air and water pollution.

⁵ 75 per cent of global greenhouse gases emissions and around 90 per cent of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are generated from burning fossil fuel for energy production. United Nations (2022). Renewable energy – powering a safer future. Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy>

⁶ This includes new, innovative approaches including “agrivoltaics” (combining solar in concert with other agricultural land uses) which can further reduce land use while increasing crop yields, depending on the crop choice, and reducing evaporation in water scarce regions. (Bonzi, M and Spengeman, S. 2021. Solar and crop production research shows ‘multi-solving’ climate benefits. Yale Climate connections. Available from: <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2021/12/solar-and-crop-production-research-shows-multi-solving-climate-benefits/>)

⁷ Pörtner, H.-O., D.C. et al. 2022 Technical summary. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 37–118, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.002 Available from: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_TechnicalSummary.pdf

⁸ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2022). Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022: Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future. Geneva. Available from: <https://www.undrr.org/gar2022-our-world-risk#container-downloads>

⁹ in proportion to the value added of industry

¹⁰ ESCWA, 2020. Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020. Available from: <https://asdr.unescwa.org/>

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^{11&12}. Biodiversity is a key indicator for ecosystem health and, reciprocally, ecosystems including forests, mountains, freshwaters, and oceans support and provide habitat to a variety of fauna and flora species. There is thus 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 and associated land conversion, a main driver of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss in the Arab region.

Theme 2: Regional and national actions to enhance implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, and 11.

This thematic area will focus on sharing national and regional initiatives to achieve the SDGs by enhancing synergies and addressing the trade-offs with climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The initiatives include examples on breakthroughs in research, science, technologies, strategies, and policy approaches, among others. The aim is to provide an insight on concrete and implemented actions that were proven successful in enhancing the SDGs implementation while addressing the triple planetary crisis. This will open the floor for exploring potential cooperation and partnerships at regional and national levels and allow adoption or scaling-up of these actions. The discussion can also benefit from experiences of Arab states providing Voluntary National Reports (VNR) this year during HLPF (Comoros, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syrian Arab Republic).

4. Participants

The consultative meeting will gather government experts from the Arab countries, practitioners, and civil society members involved in the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as concerned regional and international organizations and representatives from the private sector and academia.

5. Partnerships and Processes

This consultative meeting is organized in partnership between CAMRE Technical Secretariat, ESCWA and UNEP-ROWA, under the umbrella of CAMRE process, and in implementation of resolution 619, adopted during the Council's 33rd regular session which was held in October 2022.

6. Date and venue

The **consultative meeting** will be held in hybrid format on Thursday 2 March 2023 at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon and online. Registration will commence at 9:00 am and the opening session will convene at 9.30 a.m. The meeting will conclude by 5:30 pm.

Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification on the meeting day and to allow sufficient time to pass through security to collect their identification badge. Access to the United Nations House is provided through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance.

7. Language of the meeting

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation from and into Arabic and English will be provided.

¹¹ ESCWA, 2020. Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020. Available from: <https://asdr.unescwa.org/>

¹² 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>

8. Registration

Invited participants are welcome to submit their registration for the consultative meeting for onsite or virtual participation via Indico at <https://indico.un.org/e/cons-meeting-AFSD2023> by **Monday, 30 January 2023**.

Indico registration instructions

New users

Step 1. Set-up a new user account.

Step 2. You will receive an account activation link by email. Follow the link to activate your account.

Step 3. Fill “Solutions and Action for the triple planetary crisis: accelerating recovery for SDGs implementation” registration form.

Returning users

Step 1. Use your username and password to login.

Step 2. Fill in the “Solutions and Action for the triple planetary crisis: accelerating recovery for SDGs implementation” registration form.

Please make sure to upload a clear personal photo in colour to allow ESCWA to issue your building access badge in case you wish to attend the meeting in person.

Recommended browsers to complete the Indico registration form are Chrome, Firefox and Microsoft Edge.

9. Accommodation and transportation

Participants are requested to arrange their own hotel reservations by directly contacting a hotel of their choice in Beirut. A list of hotels that offer reduced rates will be provided to participants registered for onsite participation in the meeting. Participants are requested to arrange their own local transport between the airport, hotel and the United Nations House. It is recommended to arrange airport pick-up with the selected hotel.

10. Entry visas

Participants are requested to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary.

11. Correspondence

Inquiries and all correspondence should be directed to the following counterparts:

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