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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019
Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-Level Political Forum
Beirut, 21-22 March 2019

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

The Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) and the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) was held on 21 and 22 March 2019 at the United Nations House in Beirut. The meeting was jointly organized by the League of Arab States and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and was attended by more than 120 officials from Arab States and senior representatives from national, regional and international institutions and civil society organizations representing a range of sectors and stakeholders in the region.

The meeting highlighted the importance of the climate-related and climate-dependent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also highlighted the importance of pursuing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in an indivisible, integrated and inclusive manner through a rights-based approach to achieving water, energy and food security in light of climate change.

The outcome document consolidates regional views on climate change priorities through the exchange of experiences at the national and regional levels to advance climate action within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The meeting resulted in the development of the following set of key messages to be conveyed to the 2019 sessions of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

KEY MESSAGES

A. GENERAL MESSAGES

- Evidence shows that air and sea temperatures in the Arab region are increasing and are expected to continue to increase through the end of the century and maybe beyond. This is negatively impacting rainfall patterns in terms of intra- and inter-annual variability, increasing water scarcity, raising sea levels and affecting the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The region is also facing and is projected to face an increase in the number of hot days, very hot days and longer dry periods.*
- The Arab region is vulnerable to climate change impacts, with predicted vulnerability assessed as moderate to high across the region. Areas with the highest vulnerability in the region are in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the south-western Arabian Peninsula. The Nile Delta of Egypt, the Levant and coastal areas are being affected by rising sea levels and extreme climate events. This is affecting coastal communities and has major implications for small farmers, indigenous communities and pastoralists

* The average temperature in the Arab region is projected to increase by 1.9°C by end-century compared to the reference period (1986-2005), which reflects a 2.6°C increase compared to the pre-industrial period, under the moderate emissions scenario (RCP 4.5), and by 4.5°C by the end of the century under the high emissions scenario (RCP 8.5), according to projections generated under the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR).

who are already striving to cope with a degraded natural resource base. Adaptive capacity must be built to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate change.

- Although the Arab region contributes only about 5 per cent of the total global CO₂ emission, it is one of the regions most affected by climate change due to its impact on natural resources and livelihoods.
- The Arab region demonstrates that progress on SDG7 related to energy can no longer be separated from other development goals and is a primary condition for sustainably powering progress. Addressing energy vulnerability in the Arab region is a development priority that is integral to the success of the 2030 Agenda.
- The 2030 Agenda is complemented by the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. These three agendas should be pursued in tandem at all levels. Governments, in collaboration with other stakeholders, must ensure a coherent implementation of the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement, which are necessary to achieve the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.
- Responding to climate change impacts at the city scale has been recognized and must now focus on adaptation actions to build resilience and decrease vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change. Enhancing climate governance at the city scale matters, as climate change affects the provision of water, energy, food and urban services. The integrated management of water, energy, food and related services is essential to adapt and mitigate climate change impacts at the local level.
- Climate change is a complex phenomenon that has security implications. Conflict risk analysis needs to consider the implications of vulnerability and adaptive capacity.
- Climate risk analysis is transboundary in nature and should be considered in a regional context. Integrated planning is needed and should be based on a clear understanding of climate risks.
- Climate-related policies should mainstream poverty eradication and employment objectives and take into consideration the needs of women, rural livelihoods and disaster risk reduction.
- Youth should be given the opportunity to participate in climate change decision-making and be engaged as a development partner in climate action. Addressing climate change can serve as unifying point.

B. REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience actions in the Arab region should be pursued in an integrated manner at the local, national, regional and inter-State levels through work on the following priorities.

1. *Climate change impacts and implications of response measures for enhancing resilience*

- Develop informed climate change adaptation responses based on a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of climate change on key sectors (water, agriculture, environment, health, energy, biodiversity, transport) that takes into consideration national context.
- More research and actions are needed on the impact of climate change on sustainable urban development and to fill the knowledge gap, including on the effects of climate change on water supply, sanitation and wastewater treatment. This will inform climate change planning and action at the city level.
- Further research on the climate change vulnerability of key stakeholders and sectors is needed to inform adaptation measures.
- Climate change poses serious, yet preventable, effects on human health and exacerbates morbidity and mortality, especially among vulnerable populations (the poor, the elderly, children, women and outdoor workers), so it is important that health-care systems consider climate risks during the planning and provision of services.

- Countries should enhance climate-smart decision-making that is based on technological advances, climate information and data which responds to the needs of climate-sensitive sectors. Doing so enhances preparedness and reduces the loss of lives and property from hydro-meteorological extremes.
- Seasonal and subseasonal climate predictions are important inputs for short- and medium-term planning, disaster risk reduction and decision-making in climate-sensitive sectors. Arab countries should thus sustain and strengthen the work of regional climate outlook forums and are encouraged to establish institutional platforms for improved interaction between climate information services providers and climate-sensitive sectors.
- Arab States should optimize the use of existing environmental indicators and support increased dissemination and reporting on these indicators in order to support climate action.
- National adaptation plans and disaster risk reduction strategies need to pay closer attention to flood management and urban planning, including the building of resilient coastal infrastructure and developing coastal zone protection plans against erosion.
- Develop and implement adaptation measures to support small-scale farmers, farming communities, fishermen and herders through the development of adequate technical, policy and investment conditions to achieve sustainable, resilient and efficient ways to enhance climate resilience across the value chains of food production, sales, distribution and consumption.
- Support vulnerable communities build resilience to climate change shocks, including floods and droughts, and ensure their access to a sufficient quantity, quality and diversity of nutritious foods under changing climate conditions.
- Intensify research and development, extension and financial incentives for farmers to help smooth and gradual transition to climate-adapted agriculture measures.
- Adaptation measures focused on water resources management should be complemented by efforts to improve agricultural water resources availability and consumption by water users, including farmers.
- Enhance research on the effectiveness of organic farming on soil fertility and productivity to formulate more sustainable climate policies and examine the effects of climate changes on groundwater and soil conservation.
- Expand use of social protection mechanisms, including weather index insurance, to strengthen the climate change resilience of socially vulnerable communities. This includes enhancing economic diversification in rural economies, especially in areas impacted by climate change.
- Encourage research on and the use of adaptation monitoring tools and metrics to assess the effectiveness of adaptation interventions that have been implemented and to support reporting on adaptation actions.

2. Policy interlinkages and coherence for climate action

- Climate change actions need to be pursued in an integrated manner across all policy areas.
- Climate action should be people-centric, informed and pursued at the most appropriate scale for engagement and range from the local, national and regional through vertical integration for preparedness, policy formulation and planning and consensus-building.
- Increase attention to synergies between mitigation, adaptation and sustainable development and ensure stakeholder engagement in policy development and implementation.
- Effective enforcement of regulations is critical to policy success and is closely related to incentives for energy and water efficiency policies.

- Adopt stringent context-driven national green building codes to ensure resource-responsible urbanisation and the provision of building demand for population growth within an ecological and cultural preservation framework.
- Promote integrated and sustainable land use planning to avoid urban encroachment on agriculture land, forest, environment heritage and ecosystems.
- Encourage environmentally friendly and sustainable modes of transportation for public, private and industrial transportation within country, between countries and across regions.
- Enhance the implementation of climate-smart agriculture practices that integrate food security adaptation and mitigation objectives.
- Update nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and pursue greater coherence with national development plans.
- Strengthen the interaction between climate change and the water-energy-food nexus to promote innovative sustainable policy approaches, planning and decision-making in climate-sensitive sectors.
- Ensure that climate change considerations and scenarios are well studied and reflected in the development of national disaster risk reduction policies and strategies and national development planning processes.
- Facilitate investments in clean energy, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects and interconnected electricity grids for greater security of supply and access to cleaner energy production.
- Climate change action, be it mitigation and/or adaptation, taken by States and all other actors at all levels, should adhere to ethical principles of equity and justice, solidarity, the prevention of harm and scientific integrity in decision-making and during negotiations processes.
- Greater exchange among the water, food and energy sectors can help enhance mutual understanding and linkages across sectors

3. *Technological innovation*

- Forge impact pathways that allow promising innovations and solutions, which have been technically, economically, socially and environmentally validated, to be produced at a large scale to effect large positive changes.
- Support and promote technological innovations that contribute to achieving all SDGs. Green technologies provide an opportunity to deploy environment-friendly systems that produce more while using less resources and emitting less carbon and heat. They are instrumental to achieve climate change targets and improve prosperity.
- Significant efforts are needed to improve research and innovation in the Arab region to further identify and adapt technologies to the current challenges facing the region, particularly in light of the water-energy-food nexus.
- Enhance research, development and innovation in the field of sustainable energy and environmental technologies and services to reduce costs, given the endowment of the Arab countries in solar and wind renewable energy resources, and thus help Arab States to pursue a low-emission and secure, reliable and affordable supply of energy.
- Increase capacity for technology innovation through dedicated public policies and provide incubation, financing and incentives for entrepreneurs to scale up innovation.
- Promote the diversification of the Arab region's energy mix and which requires capital and management skills and increasing capacity for technology innovation. This can happen through pilot projects, competition, investment in research and development and community-based projects.

- Arab countries should seize opportunities for regional cooperation and public-private partnerships (PPP) by working together to expand markets for investment and trade in cleaner, more efficient technologies, goods and services in key sectors.
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture technologies that can effectively reduce climate change and disaster risks through an integrated approach that reduces the vulnerability of agriculture to climate and disaster risks and promotes the livelihoods and food security of farming communities.
- Invest in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and frontier technologies (cloud, nanotechnologies, drones, mobile, geographic information systems, artificial intelligence, remote sensing, and Internet of things technologies) that bring new horizons for smarter systems that achieve enhanced climate resilience and clean inclusive development.
- Enhance cooperation and partnership with the media for the dissemination of knowledge and information on climate change through the use of ICT and social media.
- Transfer, adopt and localize green technology in the fields of environmental protection, resource conservation and other socioeconomic areas for sustainable development, with special focus on commercialization. This should be pursued through inclusive policies with stakeholders and universities.
- Revisit and harness the valuable heritage offered by indigenous knowledge, local practices and technologies.
- Support natural resource efficiency and waste management by advancing the circular economy and encouraging more sustainable and production processes for climate adaptation and mitigation.

4. *Climate finance*

- Facilitate and simplify access to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other funds, including processing of approvals and disbursements and the approval of small projects.
- Arab States should promote and uphold the international commitment to a just and equitable distribution of financial resources, including grants, as enshrined in the Paris Agreement.
- Arab States should take a portfolio approach to GCF applications, developing a robust pipeline of projects in case not all are approved. In tandem, Arab States should more clearly prioritize needs as a prerequisite to developing funding proposals.
- Climate finance should not be politicized.
- Arab States need support to access international public finance sources for both the public and private sectors to help mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Allocate direct grants to support developing countries in developing bankable/fundable projects, because currently there are not enough in the region. This is a necessary prerequisite to access international funds. A dedicated fund for project preparation will unlock flow from the existing funds.
- Promote exchange of knowledge among Arab States to learn from successful experiences accessing international climate finance.
- Governments should enable innovation in climate financing mechanisms, markets and investment products such as green sukuk, blended finance, insurance and de-risking facilities and other specialized financing products that support domestic and international investment. In parallel, governments should encourage industries to invest in more mitigation and adaptation programmes, including through policy interventions, financial incentives and private sector engagement.
- Partnerships with the private sector are important but cannot replace the need for other sources of finance, including grants, and other types of partnerships, including with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

- Climate change should be mainstreamed into the national strategies, policies and programmes of Arab States to be considered in national budget allocations, promote coordination among institutions and align sustainable development efforts. Arab States should pursue the implementation of national renewable energy strategies, which should be included in national plans and budgets.
- Climate finance should be channelled to inclusive adaptation and mitigation projects. Scaling up adaptation finance is needed to achieve greater parity between mitigation and adaptation.

5. *Capacity-building*

- Design capacity-building programmes as a long-term, demand-driven process, with focus on the engagement of women and youth, and ensure that they are effectively monitored.
- Strengthen the capacity of national decision makers and policymakers for climate action, and their ability to address interlinkages between climate-sensitive sectors.
- Build the capacity of policymakers on climate action, negotiations and ways to access to climate finance.
- Develop the capacity of Arab institutions and professionals to draw upon climate change assessments, adaptation resources and databases available in the region, such as the RICCAR Regional Knowledge Hub and the Regional Knowledge Platform, to inform climate action, assess vulnerability and formulate adaptation measures at the national level.
- Strengthening capacities in national and regional multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk management, through emergency preparedness plans that include public participation.
- Strengthening the capacity of national governments, including national statistical organisations, in accounting for disaster losses and monitoring the indicators adopted by the Sendai Framework Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group. Linkages should be established between national disaster loss databases and the Sendai Framework monitoring system to further understanding of climate risks and resilience efforts in the region.
- Arab meteorological, climatological and hydrological centres should facilitate the free exchange of data to support assessments of climate variability, climate change analysis and research. The capacity of climate service providers and national meteorological offices should be strengthened to improve their delivery of services needed by end users. This includes developing institutional capacity for qualitative and quantitative analysis, monitoring and the open access and dissemination of climate-related data.
- Strengthen agricultural extension services to render them able to mainstream adaptation and mitigation measures and address the new climate challenges facing in the Arab region.
- Enhance educational systems to raise awareness and encourage behavioural change in support of the climate-related policies of Arab States. Strengthen climate change curricula at the tertiary level.
- Capacitate and empower the national climate change committees and continuously strengthen their knowledge base, including through on-the-job training.
- Arab climate centres should be strengthened and better networked to provide climate research and analysis to inform climate action policies
- Indicators should be adapted to the systems of the future, including monitoring and evaluation and the development of new indicators that reflect the interlinkages between water, food and climate, investments in clean energy and other forms of energy that take into consideration the concerns of women.
- Empower and raise the awareness of civil society, NGOs, schools, universities and the media for climate action, including national efforts that support climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Communication campaigns are needed to increase understanding of and access to information about climate change. Scaling up the dissemination of knowledge resources and communication of key messages accessible to the general public enhances climate engagement.