

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) and High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

Cairo, 27-28 February 2019

Outcome Document

The Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High Level Political Forum was held from 27 to 28 February 2019 in Cairo, Egypt. This meeting was held in response to resolution # 551 of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) adopted during its 30th regular session which “Calls on the Technical Secretariat of CAMRE, in cooperation and coordination with ESCWA and UN Environment 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 and priorities of environment and natural resources in the Arab region, and calls upon them to organize preparatory meetings to discuss these issues to prepare contributions of CAMRE to the 2019 sessions of AFSD and HLPF, and present a report on the implementation of the resolution to the upcoming CAMRE session.”

The meeting was attended by representatives of 12 Arab countries, as well as representatives of a number of regional and international organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector. The meeting discussed the topic of the 2019 AFSD: “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality in the Arab Region” with a focus on the set of goals to be reviewed under this theme as listed below:

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

A. General Message

Emphasize the importance of intersection between “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” and the environmental dimension through enhancing education for sustainable development and lifelong learning, promoting green jobs and ensuring alignment of economic growth with preservation of natural resources and the environment, while taking into account the repercussions of occupation and armed conflicts and the resulting population displacement and migration with their negative impacts on natural resources and the environment in order to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region.

B. Targeted Messages

First: Environmental Education

- Take advantage of initiatives aiming at promoting environmental education and "education for sustainable development" developed by Arab, regional and international organizations and adapting them to national requirements of Arab States, in order to change behavioral patterns and guide enacting of policies supporting addressing environmental degradation efforts
- Support and build human and institutional capacities to promote environmental education and knowledge about environmental challenges, and enhance necessary knowledge and skills for informed decision making on ways to prevent environmental degradation and address its resulting damage
- Strengthen Arab efforts towards establishing a participatory environment for the development of environmental education in the Arab region, support relevant institutional frameworks, and strengthen legislations directed at the private sector to carry out its social responsibilities towards supporting vital sectors such as education
- Integrate concepts of environmental education into the national educational systems to create a generation that is conscious of environmental problems, to preserve natural resources, and to promote applied education and training
- Build an enabling environment to raise awareness of the importance of innovation and scientific research, and establish supporting institutions while ensuring quality public and private education
- Invest in raising public awareness about the concepts of environment and sustainable development, and support partnership with civil society organizations for achieving sustainable environmental development
- Importance of integrating gender issues in environmental education policies, and of benefiting from potentials of the youth, and acting towards raising their awareness, while emphasizing that access to effective implementation programs regarding environmental education requires the integration of the basic concepts of environmental education, environmental culture and environmental information.

Second: Encouraging Green Jobs Promotion Initiatives

- Ensure that transition to more sustainable and inclusive growth models that provide productive and decent work for all is a way for achieving sustainable development goals through the adoption of necessary local and national policies, plans and initiatives
- Work towards effective solutions that ensure consistency between the steady increase of the young workforce and the sustainable development goals through careful assessment of the future of green jobs in the Arab region, and structural changes in the labor market required by sustainable development plans
- Enhance the role of the green help desks set up by UN organizations and ESCWA in some Arab countries, and publicize them with the aim of raising awareness and understanding about opportunities offered by the various green production sectors, while stressing on integration of the three development pillars: economic, social and environmental
- Enhance the role that science and research for the development of green technologies in key sectors such as renewable energy, water desalination, waste management and agriculture play in the creation of environmentally friendly jobs, with a focus on technology transfer, development and localization
- Educate the business sector about the concepts of green jobs, and integrate green economy concepts and green jobs into the educational process while producing associated training materials
- Identify and develop clear financing mechanisms to meet investment requirements in green jobs, including national and international partnerships and promote Arab environmental investments while harmonizing Arab standards necessary to attract investments.

Third: Decoupling Economic Growth from Environmental Degradation

- Develop ways of improving the efficiency of natural resources use, and adopt sustainable production and consumption patterns in all productive sectors in the Arab region
- Emphasize the importance of coherence between economic growth and environment and natural resources' preservation, and work towards achieving the sustainable development goals through the optimal use of natural resources while adopting transformative industries in a sustainable manner that reduces waste generation and depletion of resources
- Benefit from regional initiatives and programs that reduce the depletion of non-renewable natural resources to guarantee the rights of future generations, and work on exchanging experiences among Arab countries, especially among countries that have achieved positive results in this regard
- Build human and institutional capacities and skills to enhance linkages between policy development and knowledge, science and technology and results of scientific research, in a

way to mitigate environmental degradation and climate change impacts, and to ensure the safety of shared and transboundary waters in the Arab region

- Highlight the importance of developing complementary and integrated national plans across various relevant ministries to ensure sustainable development, and consideration for the environmental dimension in Arab countries
- Support appropriate technology transfer to promote the reuse and recycling of goods and services that can enhance sustainability of economic growth pathways.

Fourth: Conflicts and the Environment

- Emphasize that occupation and protracted armed conflicts adversely affect the environment and access to natural resources in the Arab region, and cause significant damage to the environment and to natural ecosystems and infrastructure
- Need to benefit from legal and operational frameworks and assessments of effects of armed conflicts on the environment and natural resources formulated about Arab countries emerging from conflict, and from other existing national and sectoral assessments
- Importance of taking into account the negative effects on the environment resulting from displacement and migration in receiving countries, particularly in countries neighboring those suffering from conflict
- Develop a strategy to activate the political will and join efforts in order to take advantage of existing achievements and developmental goals, while not only relying on mere relief programs but thriving to include development and sustainability components to those programs
- Update environmental legislations and laws which address the impacts of conflict on the environment at the global level, and put strategies for conducting environmental impact assessments
- Put an immediate end to conflicts and wars in the Arab region while replacing them with proper dialogues, and recognize that achieving sovereignty over land, ending occupation and restoring security and stability in Palestine are a pre-requisite for land autonomy and for pushing sustainable development efforts forward; in addition to supporting Palestine's request to the United Nations Environment General Assembly regarding conducting an assessment of occupation's effects on the environment in Palestine.