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Proposal for an
Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development

2015-2025

Ibrahim Abdel Gelil
Professor, Academic Chair, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan
Energy and Environment
Arabian Gulf University

I. PREAMBLE

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro (Rio Earth Summit), produced two landmark documents, the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. Ten years later, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) took place in Johannesburg in 2002. WSSD focused on partnerships among stakeholders and produced the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to expedite the implementation of Agenda 21. In 2012, Rio de Janeiro hosted another global summit on sustainable development (Rio+20) focusing on two key themes: green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

In the Arab region, and since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, major accomplishments have been made towards the achievement of sustainable development, particularly in the areas of education, health and improved standards of living. However, a number of obstacles continue to face the Arab countries in the long-term implementation of sustainable development. Examples are: the absence of peace and security; the continuation of foreign occupation in some Arab lands; poverty; illiteracy; population growth; the debt burden; the arid nature of the region and scarcity of water resources; limited agricultural land aggravating food security; the moderate capabilities of the academic and research institutions; and the relatively limited role of civil society. Additionally, some major challenges have emerged over the last decade, including demographic change and unemployment, the recent Arab political and social changes the financial crisis, energy security, climate change and natural disasters, drought and desertification, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, and migration.[1]

Based on the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Development issued in Cairo on 25 October 2001, the League of Arab States (LAS) adopted a comprehensive regional approach, through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) and other specialized Ministerial Councils and in cooperation with international, regional and Arab organizations. This approach, named the "Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region" (SDIAR) aims at developing a regional program for sustainable development. SDIAR was submitted as a type II initiative to the WSSD.

During preparations for Rio+20, the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Rio+20 reaffirmed political commitment to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region and reiterated commitment to continue the implementation of the SDIAR at the national and regional levels to build on the progress made in its implementation, face current challenges, fill the gaps and update it when needed. This update should be undertaken in light of the emerging and new challenges that the Arab region may face, including climate change and its risks, the global financial crisis and its impacts and the repercussions of political developments in the Arab region.[2]

Thus, responding to those regional and global development challenges, the outcomes of Rio+20, the new set of priorities for the Arab region, and the progress made on the SDIAR including experience gained and lessons learned; the League of Arab States decided to update the SDIAR to address key ongoing and emerging challenges as well as opportunities and priorities for sustainable development in the region across the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

This updated SDIAR, named herein after as "Arab strategic framework for sustainable development"[3] aims at addressing the key challenges faced by the Arab Countries in achieving sustainable development during the period (2105-2025). It asserts the commitment of the Arab countries to

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[1] ESCWA (2011)
[2] LAS (2012)
[3] Change of name was approved by CAMRE at its 25th session in 2013 (resolution #411).

implement Agenda 21 and the development objectives included in the Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals, and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and Rio+20, taking into consideration the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and other principles. The strategic framework seeks to enhance the participation of the Arab countries with the aim of strengthening their efforts to realise sustainable development in light of emerging challenges, as well as finding a mechanism for financing programs for sustainable development.

The strategic framework is considered as a framework for the implementation of programs and activities at the national and regional level using the available resources in the Arab countries, in the relevant Arab regional and international organizations, and in the Arab regional and international financial institutions. It will be implemented through building partnerships with the other regions, groups and international organizations and institutions, as part of the post-2015 international development agenda, and with the involvement of all the stakeholders including civil society and the private sector at the national and regional level. It is envisaged that the strategic framework will need to be supported by an action plan or similar document outlining key policy and capacity building programs at the regional level.

II.   PROPOSED ARAB STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

Previous experience in the implementation of the SDIAR at the national and regional levels has clearly indicated that some regional and global challenges are still hindering efforts to achieve sustainable development in the region. These issues constitute pre-requisites and general enablers for sustainable development, which despite their importance, are outside the scope of action of the current framework. They include:

Peace and Security, Justice and Participation
For decades, peace and security situations in the region have harmed human wellbeing, slowed down economic development and resulted in the degradation of natural resources and ecological habitats. The Gulf War of 1990–1991 resulted in serious environmental damage, especially in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The situation further deteriorated during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As a result, people in the Arab region are still suffering from lack of clean water and poor sanitation, which poses severe risk for public health. During the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 2006, extensive oil pollution that occurred along the country's coast was described as the worst environmental disaster in Lebanon's history. The cumulative impact of decades of Israeli occupation and neglect in the occupied Palestine Territories (OPT) has resulted in serious environmental and socio-economic problems including the degradation of scarce water resources, the disruption of health services, deepened poverty, unemployment, and incapable institutions. Since 2011, the eruption of armed conflicts and on-going instability in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan and Egypt have led to devastating impacts on infrastructure, economic development, and people's daily life. Due to successive wars and insecurity, millions of refugees live in poor socio-economic conditions, with high population densities and inadequate basic infrastructure, adding pressure to fragile environments.

The recent events in the Arab world, have added new challenges to the fragile peace and security situation in the region. The models of development that have been adopted so far in some Arab countries have failed to realize people's ambitions in the contexts of abundant socio-economic potential. In fact, it was poverty and economic inequality as well as political freedom led to the call for changes. There is an urgent need to invest in people-centred development, which fosters integration of human rights, including the right to development, and the principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination, into the development agenda.

To achieve the full potential of this strategic framework, it is believed that the following basic enablers need to be achieved:

- Peace and security in the Arab region, ending occupation, and renouncing the threat of aggression and interference in internal affairs of States guided by legitimate international decisions on a fair basis to enhance sustainable development.
- Basic human rights and human dignity for all.
- Ensure rule of law.
- Protecting the environment and natural resources of people under occupation and aggression according to principle 23 of the Rio Declaration, and rebuilding the socioeconomic infrastructure destroyed by occupation and other acts of aggression.
- Regional cooperation and integration.

Global Stability

The world financial crisis and subsequent recession in the global economy have been affecting the Arab economies. As a result of the slowdown in economic activity and the decline in domestic and foreign investment, the economic growth of some Arab countries declined. A prolonged slowdown in the international economy is likely to cause remittances, job creation, tourism and ODA to decline and unemployment to increase, particularly among the youth. There are also pressing needs to adopt strong global mechanisms to reduce food and energy price volatility and improve risk management strategies for the prevention and management of food crises. Furthermore, developed country should renew their commitment to achieve the 0.7% of GNI target in Official Development Assistance (ODA) within a clear timetable. There is a necessity to go beyond the mere short-term management of the crisis and to implement an efficient regional policy response to enhance the stability of the Arab countries and stimulate economic growth. There is now, more than ever, a need and an opportunity for regional investment and socio-economic reform, which countries in the region should seize to establish mechanisms to promote employment, encourage pro-poor growth, strengthen social protection mechanisms, promote gender equality and non-discrimination, and focus on human development and creating more jobs.

Governance for sustainable development

Governance at the global, regional and national levels is critical for the achievement of sustainable development. It includes strengthening the institutional and legal frameworks, fostering equitable participation in decision-making and promoting effective participation of the civil society and the private sector in the decision making process. Thus, this framework provides an important opportunity for the region to revitalize a governance system for implementing sustainable development. In doing so, it will be important that the region addresses the key gaps and challenges experienced over the past 20 years of implementation. In this context, some key recommendations for enhancing regional institutional arrangements for sustainable development in the Arab region for consideration by Arab governments include:

Enhanced engagement in the international processes:

With the evolution of the global governance system for sustainable development and the establishment of the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) and other key international processes of relevance for sustainable development, in particular the development of a post-2015 agenda that includes a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the regional institutional framework should be reformed to cope with these new developments and advance the regional engagement in international processes.

Enhanced regional implementation of sustainable development:

The region should consider elevating the overall responsibility for sustainable development agenda setting, policymaking and monitoring of progress to the highest political level within LAS. A mechanism for enhanced coordination between current various councils within LAS

with a view to enhancing integration and implementation of sustainable development should be explored. ESCWA, UNEP and other regional organisations should continue to work closely with LAS to support the implementation of sustainable development in the region. The success of any regional institutional mechanism should be accompanied by a commitment of Arab countries to allocate overall responsibility for sustainable development to capable national institutions.

Enhanced national implementation:
Arab governments need to consider reviewing the adequacy of their national institutional arrangements for sustainable development, taking into consideration success stories from the region and internationally. They need to establish effective arrangements for cross-sectoral coordination of sustainable development strategies or policies as well as vertical integration, through for example, a National Council for Sustainable Development or through a high-level inter-ministerial committee. Consideration should be given to the preparation of, or updating of existing, national strategies for sustainable development or green economy, and their mainstreaming into existing national economic development strategies.

B. EMERGING PRIORITIES

After more than ten years of implementation of the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region (SDIAR), there was a need to update it to reflect on the ongoing and emerging economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities for the Arab region, including the need to maintain economic growth and stability in the face of high unemployment, political and social instability, worsening environmental problems (such as climate change, water scarcity and desertification), food and energy price volatility and insecurity, oil dependence and other issues. In additions, Rio+20 set a new global agenda for sustainable development and includes a number of key outcomes with implications for the Arab region, including: the establishment of a high-level political forum (HLPF) for sustainable development and recommendations relating to regional and national institutions for sustainable development; a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals and provide a new framework for the post-2015 development agenda; the adoption of green economy as an important tool for governments to achieve sustainable development; and new commitments relating to the means of implementation for sustainable development. It was envisioned that updating SDIAR would address the ongoing and emerging challenges for sustainable development in the Arab region as well as the new global framework and priorities for sustainable development as agreed to at Rio+20. This updated strategic framework focuses on the following specific issues in order to:

- Building a regional platform for more effective coordination, integration, dialogue and action;
- Accelerating national implementation of sustainable development in Arab countries;
- Enhancing the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development at the regional and national levels.

The Water-Energy-Food Nexus as a Framework for Planning and Monitoring
Water security, energy security and food security are inextricably linked in the Arab region, perhaps more than any other region in the world. Actions in one area have strong impacts on the others. Hence, a nexus approach that integrates management and governance across these three sectors can improve management of these security issues, and in same time, support the transition to a green economy, which aims at resource efficiency and policy coherence. A proper understanding of that nexus will allow developing appropriate policies, and strategies to secure synergies, and to identify trade-offs among the development goals related to water, energy and food security. Moreover, a nexus perspective increases the understanding of the interdependencies across these three sectors and influences policies in other areas of concern such as climate change and environmental protection. This updated strategic framework is:

- Promoting the nexus approach to water-energy-food sustainability in the Arab region
- Encouraging the transition towards a green economy to address the interdependencies between water, energy and food to make the nexus work for the poor.

Water Security

Water challenges can and must be addressed if the Arab region is to attain shared prosperity, and reach a future of sustainable human development. Addressing water challenges now can also help strengthen resilience by managing the risk of potential crises that could result from inaction: such as unplanned migration, economic collapse, or regional conflict. Water scarcity threatens the livelihoods of many people in the Arab region, particularly in rural and poor communities. Remote areas with inadequate water and sanitation are especially vulnerable. Twelve Arab countries have average per capita water availability rates below the World Health Organization threshold for severe scarcity. Urbanization, population growth and climate change exacerbate the region's natural water scarcity and widen the gap between supply and demand. This strategic framework is:

- Encouraging the integrated management of shared water resources, including river basins and water catchments, on the basis of international law and existing agreements.
- Encouraging the implementation of integrated water resources management policies and practices in the Arab countries.
- Protecting water resources, including groundwater and wetlands, from pollution, including supporting efforts to develop alternative water resources and developing new technology for water desalination, rainwater harvesting and the recycling and reuse of water.
- Supporting the implementation of the Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region.[4]
- Supporting the implementation of water policies within the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).[5]

Energy Security

The Arab energy sector is playing and will continue to play a vital role in socioeconomic development in the Arab countries, especially; those endowed with vast hydrocarbon resources. These hydrocarbon resources have been, for decades, fuelling, as well, the global economy. In addition, many Arab countries are blessed with huge potential of renewable energy resources such as solar and wind that have not been fully utilized yet. Though, there are nearly 35 million Arabs with no access to modern energy services. Renewable energy resources could play a major role in improving energy access and eradicating poverty particularly in rural and remote areas. Furthermore, the energy sector plays a major role in meeting water and food needs in Arab countries. Fossil fuel-based combined heat and power thermal plants are commonly used for seawater desalination in the region, which hosts nearly 50% of the world's desalination capacity, and electricity from fossil-fuel power plants is used as the primary energy source to pump and distribute groundwater. With 98% of the energy needs of the Arab region being met by oil and gas, the region will be challenged in the long run if no actions are taken 'now' to shift its energy dependency to more sustainable resources. This framework is:

- Supporting the implementation of the Arab guideline to improve electricity efficiency and its rationalization at the end user.[6]
- Encouraging Arab countries to diversify energy sources including cleaner fossil fuel technologies, new and renewable energy and nuclear energy to achieve sustainable development.
- Supporting energy access in a reliable, affordable, economically viable and socially and environmentally acceptable manner as part of strategies for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

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[4] Adopted by the Arab Ministerial Council for Water in 2011.
[5] Adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in November 2010
[6] Adopted on 23 November 2010 by the Executive Bureau of the Arab Ministerial Electricity Council of the League of Arab States.

- Encouraging Arab countries to adopt, as nationally appropriate, energy policies to achieve sustainable development as included in the Arab regional strategies on sustainable consumption and production (SCP).
- Encouraging Arab countries to make use of the services provided by pertinent regional institutions such as the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE) and others.
- Supporting the implementation of the Arab Strategy for the Development of Renewable Energies (2010-2030).[7]

Agriculture, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security

Agriculture is an important sector for many Arab countries. It is seeking to achieve food self-sufficiency and food security and provides important contributions to national income, employment, exports and industry. Arab agriculture productivity has improved during the last decade. Though exports have increased in the same period, increase of imports has been larger leading to a continuous trade deficit in agriculture commodities trade. The agriculture development in the Arab region is facing a set of challenges including inefficient use of natural resources especially land and water, unwise selection of crops, unplanned urban expansion, deforestation, and intensive use of agrochemicals leading to pollution and land degradation. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the development and implementation of national and regional policies and programs in the field of agricultural research, in particular heat and drought tolerant crops.
- Encouraging a collaborative regional approach and improved transparency and information exchange to support food security in the region.
- Supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy for the Next Two Decades[8] to achieve food security.
- Supporting the implementation of Agriculture and rural development policies within the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).
- Promoting the provision of green microfinance services and social investment to rural populations.
- Supporting programmes to address the issues of food losses (from agricultural production through processing and final consumption).

Climate Change

The Arab countries will be directly impacted by climate change. If sea levels rise, coastal areas with their economic and natural assets would be threatened. In addition, water scarcity will be worsened; and land degradation and biodiversity will be adversely impacted. The social impact will be severe, as many workers will lose their jobs in agriculture, fishing, and some oil industries as a result of a world shift toward renewable energy sources. The economic impact in the oil producing countries will be more severe, as they mainly depend on revenues from oil and gas exports. If the world shifts soon to other renewable sources of energy, those countries will suffer seriously. This strategic framework aims to:

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to implement the Arab Framework of Action on Climate Change.[9]
- Encouraging Arab countries to mainstream adaptation to climate change, as a priority, in development policies, strategies, and programs.
- Supporting Arab countries to pursue a low-carbon, climate resilient, green development path by integrating these objectives into national development strategies.
- Encouraging Arab countries to develop their "Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions" (NAMAs) in preparation for the post-2020 global climate regime.

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[7] Adopted at the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Riyadh in 2013.
[8] Approved at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh in 2007 by resolution #393.
[9] Adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, resolution #355, on 4 October 2012.

Green Economy
Green economy was one of the major themes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development organized in Rio de Janeiro in mid-2012, figuring prominently in the conference outcome document 'The Future We Want' and later on in the post-2015 development agenda. Green Economy has no globally accepted definition but is most commonly understood as an economy that results in 'improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.[10] This strategic framework aims to:

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to undertake a gradual transition towards green economy in line with national sustainable development objectives and priorities.
- Promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the Arab region, foster innovation and provide opportunities, benefits and empowerment for all, and respect for all human rights.
- Encouraging Arab countries to consider the development and implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

C. PERSISTING AND ON-GOING CHALLENGES

Based on the progress of implementation of the SDIAR, it is evident that the following issues are still on-going challenges in the Arab region that needs continuously to be addressed:

Poverty Alleviation, Employment and Inequalities
In many Arab countries, social and economic development, including alleviation of poverty, depend heavily on the proper use and effective management of natural resources and related ecosystems. These are also often the same countries that are most threatened by the degradation of the national, regional and global environment. Global environmental issues, especially climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification – are therefore fundamentally linked to the poverty reduction objective. In the last decade, great progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs in the region. As a result, the poverty reduction target has been met in some countries and extreme poverty continues to decline in some other Arab countries. Additionally, unemployment represents major challenges in the Arab countries, including the GCC countries, which are considered labor-importing countries. This may be attributed to high population growth rates and the inability of the domestic market in creating additional work opportunities for the newcomers to the labor market, particularly youth, young graduates and women. Low-level education and inappropriate training make it even more difficult for a newcomer to engage in productive employment that demands skilled manpower.

Furthermore, inequalities between countries, and within countries between rich and poor, men and women, rural and urban, are preventing the achievement of social cohesion. Three fundamental challenges – poverty, unemployment and social integration provide a strong framework for addressing the socio-economic dynamics influencing sustainable development in the region. Thus, this strategic framework aims to continue efforts of the region to eradicate poverty and address the challenge of unemployment, especially to:

- Foster intra regional and international trade and foreign direct investment to contribute to job creation and economic security.
- Invest in health, education, rural development, water and sanitation while safeguarding human rights and empowering women, youth, the vulnerable and the poor.
- Support all efforts seeking to establish a balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) in order to eradicate poverty, increase investments to create more job opportunities for youth, enhance social integration, and

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[10] UNEP, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication (UNEP 2011),

empower Arab women to undertake an effective role in all aspects of political, economic and social life.

- Support programs on the local, national, and regional levels, particularly through financing small-sized projects and through technical and institutional cooperation, with the aim of alleviating poverty while giving the role of women due consideration.
- Support efforts of Arab countries to address the challenge of youth and women unemployment and under-employment by developing and implementing policies and strategies that provide access to decent and productive work, ensure sustainable and inclusive development and reduce poverty, including opportunities for 'green jobs'.
- Support efforts of Arab countries for job creation by adopting macroeconomic policies that promote sustainable development and lead to sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, including green economy policies.
- Support efforts of Arab countries to provide social protection to all members of society, fostering growth, resilience, and social justice.
- Support efforts of Arab countries to reduce inequalities, notably gender inequalities.

Population and Health

The population of the Arab Region continues to increase at a fast rate from 219 million in 1990 to 380 million in 2010. This level is expected to reach 454 million by 2025 assuming an average rate of 2.4 percent growth per year, which is high above the world average of 1.5 percent. The growing population strains natural resources and the assimilative capacity of the environment. It increases the demands on food, water, services, urban space etc… and it also increases waste, which places pressure on the environment. Additionally, the health services in the Arab Region have significantly improved over the last few decades. The average percentage of the population receiving health services in the region exceeded 80 percent, the highest among developing countries. However, noticeable disparities among different Arab states exist. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the development of integrated population policies and improving primary healthcare services and enhancing programs of awareness for family planning and motherhood and childcare.
- Supporting efforts for the development of population health through the provision of clean water, clean air, safe food, sanitary services and the control of chemical hazards and all forms of pollution through a transition towards green economy.
- Supporting multi-sectoral national policies and plans to strengthen healthcare systems towards the provision of equitable, universal coverage and promote affordable access to prevention, treatment, care and support related to different diseases.
- Encouraging the proper allocation of budgetary financial resources to upgrade healthcare systems in the Arab countries.
- Promoting sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles to protect public health.

Education, Illiteracy Eradication, and Public Awareness

Most countries in the region had adopted policies and taken measures to improve educational standards. Progress has been significant throughout the region, with GCC countries witnessing the highest levels of school enrolment for girls at all levels of education. In other countries the gender gap persists in favour of males. The average illiteracy percentage in the population of the Arab countries aging 15 and above has dropped, however it remains the highest among the world regions. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the development of strategies and national programs for education and illiteracy elimination as a part of the strategy for poverty eradication, giving special attention to improve the quality of education, and bridge the gender disparity in education.
- Promoting education for sustainable development and integrating sustainable development more actively into education systems and providing students with the relevant skills-set to support sustainable development actions in their subsequent work place.

- Supporting the implementation of the Strategic Plan to Develop Education in the Arab World.[11]
- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to build capacity of civil society in order to play a more active role in raising public awareness on sustainable development.

Scientific Research & Technology Development and Transfer

Science and technology is an important instrument in the search for sustainable development and poverty reduction. It is an essential ingredient in the industrialization and sustainable development of countries. Its importance has become more evident in the face of globalization, trade liberalization and the emergence of knowledge-based industries. Globalization has brought with it a more intense competitive environment and new requirements for sustained competitiveness. This new competitive environment has fuelled the growth of knowledge-intensive production by increasing scientific and technological interactions and the need for innovation. The current weak capacity of S&T in the Arab region can be attributed to several main factors. One is an overall underfunding of science and technology development, second is the deterioration of education systems. These factors, along with the inadequate infrastructure and R&D support systems, create an environment that is not conducive to research and development. This strategic framework is:

- Encouraging policy reforms of science and technology in the Arab countries to address the regional priority issues towards achieving sustainable development.
- Encouraging the allocation of increased shares of gross domestic product (GDP) of the Arab countries in scientific research and development.
- Encouraging the strengthening of the science-policy interface at the national and regional level to maximize the return on investments in research and development.
- Encouraging the transfer and adaptation of appropriate technologies in the Arab region and developing Arab capacities to engage in the available international technology cooperation platforms such as the technology network of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Drought and Desertification

A particularly pressing concern for much of the Arab region is the high degree of aridity and the associated increased vulnerability of lands to climate change as well as water scarcity and variability. In particular, the land resources of the Arab region face three main challenges: aridity, recurrent drought, and desertification. What is extremely important is to recognize that desertification is essentially a man-made phenomenon which is exacerbated by climate change. Meaningful measures are needed in every Arab country to reduce the human role in expanding desertification. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the regional and sub-regional implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), particularly the revised Sub-Regional Action Programme on Desertification (SRAP).
- Supporting the implementation of the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of UNCCD (2008–2018).[12]

Urban Planning and Sustainable Cities

Cities are the largest consumers of natural resources and the biggest sources of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in the region. On the same time, cities are the focal points and drivers of societal development. They are centres of innovation and can advance clean energy systems, sustainable transportation and waste management solutions to reduce greenhouse gases emissions. In addition, with access to up to date climate science, cities can also design and implement effective adaptation strategies to respond to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The region is known to have one of the highest urbanization levels in the world. Large scale developments and massive urban

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[11] Adopted by the Arab League Summit in Damascus in 2008.
[12] UNCCD (2007)

sprawl such as what is happening in GCC cities are significantly changing the original face of those gulf cities. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to cope with the deterioration of air quality in many Arab cities, including better urban planning strategies, land use planning, programs for the control of air emissions and the establishment of regional and sub-regional systems and networks for sustainable transport.
- Encouraging Arab countries' efforts to provide for affordable housing and infrastructure and prioritize slum upgrading and urban regeneration, in order to improve quality of human settlements.
- Encouraging Arab countries to provide more basic services and infrastructure such as water, sanitation, health and education for poverty eradication in view of the recent demographic changes and unprecedented rate of urbanization.
- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to enhance the climate resilience of Arab cities, especially those in coastal areas.

Management of wastes and Chemicals

There is a need for sound management systems of different chemicals and waste streams to control risk of exposure to those chemicals and wastes. In many Arab countries, the capacity and the infrastructure for environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes is lacking. Waste generation continues to grow and may overwhelm countries' capacity to manage waste materials properly. This framework is:

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to meet the internationally agreed goal to produce and use chemicals in ways that minimize significant adverse impacts on human health and the environment by 2020, through, inter alia, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).
- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to establish national/regional databases for chemicals and national and regional strategies for sound management of chemicals and waste.
- Encouraging Arab countries to support the efforts of the Basel Convention Regional and Coordinating Centre (BCRC) in Cairo.
- Encouraging Arab countries to develop national and regional strategies for sound management of e-waste.

Sustainable Consumption and Production

The global multi-stakeholder initiative, so-called Marrakech Process, was launched in 2003 to promote progress on the implementation of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and the elaboration of a 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP). The Arab 10YFP SCP aims to promote the concept of sustainable consumption and production in the Arab region through encouraging the utilization of products and services that ensure environmental protection conserve water and energy as well as other natural resources, while contributing to poverty eradication and sustainable lifestyle. This strategic framework will support Arab countries to promote the concepts, policies, and practices of sustainable consumption and production and in the implementation of programmes and projects under the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP SCP).[13] It also supports Arab countries to implement the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production.[14]

Disasters Management

Climate change increases the risk of disasters. Investment in disaster risk management can save human lives, as well as minimize or even prevent economic, social and environmental damage and losses. The increase in the number of extreme weather events is one of the problems that are brought about by climate change and that call for adaptation of vulnerable societies. Even without climate

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[13] As adopted at Rio+20 in June 2012.
[14] adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in November 2010

change, disaster risk management is in itself an important building block of sustainable development. This strategic framework includes:

- Providing technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of Arab countries, including institutional and human capabilities to effectively manage disasters, with a focus on provision of support to vulnerable populations.
- Encouraging Arab countries to implement the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (ASDRR).[15]
- Supporting Arab Countries to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) and engage in developing a post-2015 disaster risk reduction framework (HFA2).

Other Priorities

Biodiversity and Biosafety
The importance of biodiversity in the Arab region cannot be overemphasized. It is important to each country's heritage and economic as well as social well-being. Biodiversity is a vital part of countries' natural resources and is integral to the growing tourism industry. Unfortunately, biodiversity is declining in the region due to habitat degradation and loss, and associated species decline. Formulation of biodiversity strategy and action plan for conservation of habitats and protection of wildlife species is a priority in the region. Thus, this strategic framework aims to:

- Support the efforts of Arab countries to implement the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020.
- In the context of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011–2020), supporting the efforts of Arab countries to achieve the Aichi Targets.
- Encourage Arab countries to ratify or accede to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic
- Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, as a means for sustainable use of biological diversity, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability.
- Encourage Arab countries to develop operational biosafety systems that regulate the release and trade in Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).
- Enhancing efforts of the Arab countries to develop a regional program for the protection of biodiversity, including the establishment of a regional bank for genetic resources and the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention of Biological Diversity.

Coastal Zones and the Marine Environment
Arab countries have over 30,000 kilometres of coastal line, 18,000 kilometres of which are populated areas. The fragile marine and coastal environment of the Arab region is threatened by pollution, over-fishing, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and other problems. Within the Arab region, three major marine regions can be identified: the Mediterranean, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Gulf. Uncontrolled tourism and extensive urban development are the main contributors to the environmental degradation of coastal and marine environments, and this finding is applicable to all the three regions.[16] This strategic framework is:

- Encouraging Arab countries to support efforts of sub-regional organizations in protection of the marine environment, including the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA),

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[15] Adopted by CAMRE, resolution #345, at its 22nd session held at the League of Arab States 19-20 December 2010.
[16] Tolba, M and Saab, N., Arab Environment Future challenges , AFED report (2008)

Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), and the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan for the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP).

o Supporting the efforts of the Arab countries to implement strategies for the integrated management of coastal zones, taking into consideration protecting biodiversity and the marine environment and addressing the impacts of climate change.

o Supporting efforts for regional implementation of the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities.

o Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to address the challenges of sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and protection of coral reefs, mangroves, and other highly productive coastal habitats.

Information and Communication Technologies

It is common understanding that ICTs are important drivers of the region's productivity and competitiveness and that the Information Society and Knowledge Economy are mutually dependent and will progress hand-in-hand. Most Arab countries have not adequately responded to the new realities of the ICT revolution and as such there has been uneven distribution of the benefits and the access to information it provides. This has generated "digital divides" globally, between countries of the region, and among different segments of the Arab population. Improved public access to local and global information and services provided by the Internet can help the Arab Region experience a smooth transition into a knowledge based society that can more easily support sustainable development. The strategic framework is:

o Supporting the establishment of regional sustainable development data and information networks to support informed policy-making for sustainable development.

o Encouraging initiatives to enhance national and regional capacities in the field of environmental information, such as the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI).

o Supporting improved access to information and communications technology including social media as a means to enhance public participation, improve public education, and bridge the digital divide amongst Arab countries.

o Supporting access to environmental information and environmental justice in line with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.

Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Management of Mountains and Forests

Tourism accounts for around 10% of the world's economic activity and has become one of the main generators of employment. The WTTC expects the tourism sector to provide 10.5 million job opportunities (10.1 percent of total workforce) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries in 2009. There is also an increasing appreciation of the potential role of tourism in addressing world poverty, by bringing sources of income to the heart of some of the poorest communities. In some local communities, tourism is almost universally the leading source of economic growth and job creation. Tourism can contribute significantly to rural development and social empowerment, particularly for women. As tourism plays an increasingly vital role in some Arab economies, and as tourism has been growing in the region at more than the global rate, it was selected as one of the regional priority areas for sustainable consumption and production. This strategic framework aims to:

o Supporting the efforts of the Arab countries towards conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity.

o Supporting the efforts of the Arab countries to build capacity in forest management, reforestation, conservation of biodiversity, and development of eco-tourism.

o Supporting the implementation of the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production as related to sustainable tourism.

D. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

According to the outcome of Rio+20, means of implementation identified in Agenda 21, the Programme for the further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development is indispensable for achieving the full and effective translation of sustainable development commitments into tangible sustainable development outcomes. Due to disparities in level of development in the region, international cooperation and regional integration are inevitable to implement this Arab strategic framework. Means of implementation include:

Finance

International, regional and national financial mechanisms are all important to the implementation of sustainable development programmes. Arab-Arab cooperation in providing finance, especially for least developed Arab countries is crucial for achieving their aspiration and prosperity. This strategic framework is:

- Calling upon developed countries to meet their commitments to achieve the target of 0.7 percent of gross national product for development assistance to developing countries by 2015.
- Supporting efforts to build Arab capacity to benefit from the existing financial mechanisms (e.g. the Global Environment Facility, Clean Development Mechanism, and Green Climate Fund) towards the transition to green economy and low-carbon development.
- Encouraging Arab countries to mobilize funding for green projects, including through the operationalization of the Arab Environment Facility (**AEF**).
- Encouraging Arab countries to develop national policies to foster participation of the private sector, and to facilitate entrepreneurship and innovation, including among women, and the poor.

Trade and Investment

International trade is an engine for development and sustained economic growth. The Arab region's share in world trade is small and is almost unchanged for decades. The GCC sub-region holds by far the biggest share of region's world trade due to the large volume of oil exports. By contrast, the Arab LDCs account for only 3 per cent of the region's total trade volume. As such, the distribution of trade in the region reflects its composition, namely, that primary products and low value added goods, mainly fuels, dominate Arab exports. This strategic framework is:

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to effectively participate in the work programme of the World Trade Organization, working on removing trade barriers in developed countries, and fully realize trade opportunities.
- Stressing the importance of facilitating the flow of goods and services in developing countries according to the Doha round of trade negotiations.
- Supporting Arab efforts to improve inter-Arab trade through strengthening and supporting the Pan-Arab Free Trade Area.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of Arab products and services to improve access to international markets.
- Encouraging Arab countries to create enabling environments that facilitate public and private sector investment in relevant programmes to create jobs and achieve sustainable development.
- Encouraging Arab countries to create an enabling environment that is conducive to attract inflow of foreign direct investments, including through the development of a regional investment roadmap for the transition towards a green economy.[17]

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[17] As requested by CAMRE at its meeting in Baghdad in December 2012.

Monitoring and follow-up

- To follow-up on the implementation of this framework, and within the post-2015 global agenda, Arab countries will be requested to report on the implementation of the sustainable development goals.
- Arab countries are encouraged to identify regionally- and nationally- appropriate goals, targets and indicators, based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which fully respect all of the Rio Principles, taking into account regional circumstances, capacities and priorities.
- Encouraging Arab countries to build upon the existing experience on MDGs and sustainable development indicators.
- Encouraging Arab countries to build national capacity to report periodically on sustainable development goals.

Capacity Building and cooperation

There is a need for enhanced capacity-building for sustainable development in order to bridge the capacity gaps in the region. This framework is:

- Emphasizing the need for strengthening of technical and scientific cooperation, including North-South, and South-South cooperation.
- Fostering the importance of human resource and institutional capacity building including planning, management and monitoring capacities.
- Encouraging Arab countries to maximize the use of capacity building opportunities available through bilateral and multilateral ODA programmes.
- Encouraging Arab countries to maximize the use of capacity building opportunities available through their ratifications of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).
- Encouraging a stronger regional collaboration between government agencies, research institutions, and universities to promote wide dissemination of knowledge.
- Calling for regional and international organization working in the region to mainstream capacity building activities into their work plans, especially for priority areas.

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