

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Executive Committee  
Fourth meeting  
Beirut, 13-14 December 2017



Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Regional and global issues****Proposal for establishing an Arab centre for climate policies****Summary**

At its third meeting, the Executive Committee requested a concept note on establishing an Arab climate change centre tasked with building upon the experience gained by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in implementing regional initiatives and projects and capacity development workshops for Arab countries on climate change negotiation, assessment, adaptation and sustainable energy.

The centre's work will focus on five pillars, namely, delivering technical assistance and advisory services for climate action; building capacity for institutional strengthening and policymaking; strengthening regional platforms for exchange coordination, consensus building and provision of tailored climate services; promoting integrated responses and management of climate-related challenges through improved planning and inclusive implementation mechanism; and providing access to regional knowledge products, data and information. The centre will be located at and managed by ESCWA. Its proposed components and funding mechanism are set out in the present document for consideration by the Executive Committee.

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## Introduction

1. The third meeting of the Executive Committee was held in Rabat on 6 and 7 May 2017. The Committee requested the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to prepare a comprehensive vision on establishing an Arab climate change centre within the secretariat, similarly to other regional commissions, covering the desired goals of the centre, funding sources and potential activities, to be presented at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

2. The Executive Committee welcomed activities implemented by ESCWA to build the capacity of Arab negotiators in the climate change field, and urged their continuation to ensure effective Arab participation in negotiations and efforts under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with special focus on providing training on preparing funding proposals for submission to international climate funds. Committee members also requested the secretariat to provide technical inputs to support countries in operationalizing the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, and took note of the common nature of climate change, water and energy management challenges in the Arab region and the need to pursue regional solutions. It was suggested that the Arab climate change centre at ESCWA should develop models and tools, and facilitate the exchange of successful experiences.

## I. BACKGROUND

3. In formulating a proposal for the establishment of an Arab climate change centre, ESCWA drew upon the experience and assistance it had delivered to Arab countries since the adoption of the first Arab Declaration on Climate Change, issued by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in December 2007. ESCWA assistance to Arab countries has focused on four themes, namely, climate change assessment, adaptation, sustainable energy and negotiations, all of which support regional cooperation, coherence and follow-up on the climate change challenges facing the Arab region.

4. The Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR) was launched in 2010 to provide a scientific basis for informing climate change policy and priority-setting in the Arab region. RICCAR is coordinated by ESCWA and implemented in partnership with 10 regional and international organizations, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

5. RICCAR launched the *Arab Climate Change Assessment Report* in September 2017, comprising a report and technical annex that present regional climate modelling and hydrological modelling projections for the Arab region, and a vulnerability assessment of key sectors until the end of the century through a region-specific geospatial integrated assessment methodology. The report is complemented by a series of technical notes, reports and a manual that provide more detail on the models, tools and findings presented in the report. RICCAR is also implemented through a capacity-building and institutional strengthening pillar, which has trained hundreds of Arab stakeholders on the integrated assessment methodology and the development of disaster loss databases. RICCAR also supports the Arab Climate Outlook Forum, established within the framework of the Arab Permanent Committee on Meteorology. A regional knowledge hub is being established under the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) to facilitate access to modelling tools, datasets and outputs, and to channel additional training and assistance to Arab countries.

6. The Sida project on water and food security in the Arab region draws upon the tools and methods developed under RICCAR to provide technical training to Arab countries in agricultural sectors, thus contributing to the preparation of more detailed case studies on specific areas and crops of interest to Arab countries. This, in turn, supports the national and subnational application of RICCAR-related assessment tools and datasets. Such efforts are complemented by training programmes requested through the ESCWA regular

programme for technical cooperation to provide country-level training on ways to access datasets and develop smaller-scale assessments of climate change impacts and vulnerabilities in Arab countries.

7. The United Nations Development Account project on Developing the Capacities of the Arab Countries for Climate Change Adaptation by Applying Integrated Water Resources Management Tools resulted in the issuance of a regional training manual comprising five modules that built upon the RICCAR integrated assessment findings. The manual was tested through a series of regional workshops in 2016, which provided technical training to regional stakeholders in the environmental, agricultural, health, human settlement and economic sectors. This project and RICCAR were supported by the Adaptation to Climate Change in the Water Sector in the MENA Region project, led by GIZ and implemented in partnership with the League of Arab States, the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) and ESCWA.

8. Since 2013, ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other partners, has convened nine regional workshops to develop the capacity of Arab climate change negotiators. Those regular workshops are convened twice a year, and promote regional understanding, exchange and dialogue on issues presented for negotiation and action under UNFCCC. This has recently included discussions on the Paris Agreement and its various components related to adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology, capacity-building and transparency.

9. Those workshops have assisted Arab countries in preparing their nationally determined contributions, have provided them with a regional platform to engage with the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Technology Centre and Network, and have helped them translate their conditional commitments into several projects proposed for investments. They have also strengthened the work of the Arab group of climate change negotiators by providing a common venue for discussion prior to global negotiation sessions, which has helped with information exchange and positions on key issues of concern to Arab countries.

10. In this context, ESCWA, in collaboration with the National Oil and Gas Authority of Bahrain, organized an expert workshop on the use, transfer and storage of carbon technology in the Arab region. The event addressed challenges and opportunities for the deployment of carbon capture, utilization and storage, and the need for further scientific research in that area to identify the economic and environmental benefits and costs of this technology. ESCWA is also part of the Policy Group of the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum, and takes part in its various technical and policy stakeholder meetings in support of Arab countries.

11. ESCWA has implemented a series of regional and interregional United Nations Development Account projects aimed at building the capacity of Arab countries on climate change mitigation for poverty alleviation and sustainable development through renewable energy investments; promoting energy efficiency for climate change mitigation and sustainable development through the formulation of energy efficiency investment projects; and examining the water-energy-food security nexus within the context of climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

12. Complementary assistance has also been provided to CAMRE, AMWC, the Arab Permanent Committee on Meteorology and Arab countries on strategies, action plans and policies related to climate change assessment, adaptation, sustainable energy, finance, technology, capacity development and disaster risk reduction.

## **II. EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER REGIONS**

13. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa established the African Climate Policy Centre in 2010, which became operational in 2011. The Centre is supported by the ClimDev-Africa programme, a 10-year initiative to promote the integration of climate change into development on the African continent. A first phase of funding was secured until 2016, with contributions from the European Union, France, Norway, Sweden, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the Nordic Development Fund and the United States Agency for International Development. According to the Centre's Programme Strategy

2017-2021, the Centre is currently refocusing its programme in line with emerging global and regional development frameworks affecting climate governance, so as to make Africa's development sustainable, inclusive and climate-resilient.

14. The Centre's Programme Strategy 2017-2021 comprises the following five focus areas: research and analysis for climate-smart investments; advisory services and technical assistance; human and institutional capacity development for climate-smart investment; fostering science, policy and practice dialogues to catalyse common positions; and generating and managing knowledge products on climate information services and solutions.

15. Funding for the Centre is secured through strategic partnerships and resource mobilization from various sources and modalities, including efforts to secure funding from multilateral sources (for example, the Global Environment Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Green Climate Fund); regional sources (such as the European Union and the United Nations); bilateral sources (including the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom and Sida); and other sources (the private sector and non-governmental organizations).

16. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific provides an intergovernmental platform for member States to address natural disaster challenges, and supports related work on disaster risk reduction, environment and development. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe addresses climate change within the context of transboundary water basins, enhancing resilience to disasters, the transport sector, and climate-related statistics. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean focuses on the economics of climate change from an adaptation and mitigation perspective to achieve egalitarian, low-carbon economic growth.

17. All the United Nations regional commissions support efforts to represent their regions in global climate negotiations pursued under UNFCCC and its associated Paris Agreement. However, only the Economic Commission for Africa maintains a regional centre dedicated to climate change.

### **III. VISION**

18. The Arab climate change centre aims to strengthen the capacity of Arab countries to better understand and address the implications of climate change for sustainable development in the Arab region, by supporting science-based regional platforms, capacity development for institutional strengthening, and providing technical and advisory services to Arab countries and stakeholders in an integrated, multisectoral manner, while taking into account national priorities within the context of regional challenges and global development goals.

### **IV. SCOPE OF WORK**

19. The Arab climate change centre will serve Arab countries. It will focus on the following five pillars of work.

20. Pillar 1 will deliver technical assistance and advisory services to Arab countries based on collective or country-level requests, including support in the areas of development planning, adaptation policies, climate change assessment, disaster risk reduction, project preparation for the financing of nationally determined contributions, and meeting of mitigation targets. Support will also be provided in the national and subnational applications of regional methodologies, models and toolkits. This will be delivered through a minimum of five missions per year to respond to Arab countries' requests.

21. Pillar 2 will build the capacity of Arab countries and regional stakeholders through institutional strengthening and policymaking. This includes providing technical training in the form of regional or national workshops on models, tools and financial instruments that support climate change negotiations, assessments, access to finance and technology transfer, together with providing regular updates to climate change negotiators and actors in Arab countries on new and emerging developments in the climate change arena.

Under this pillar, governmental and non-governmental researchers will be trained on how to draw upon regional knowledge resources and publish in internationally peer-reviewed journals to better highlight the concerns and challenges facing Arab countries in international forums, including the global assessment reports produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This will entail conducting at least two regional workshops per year in preparation for global negotiations on climate change.

22. Pillar 3 will seek to strengthen regional platforms for exchange, coordination and consensus building, to support regional platforms, such as the Arab Group, in their preparations for global climate change negotiations; to promote Arab dialogue supporting Arab positioning with respect to climate change dimensions of global agreements (such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development); and support the work of the Arab Climate Outlook Forum in delivering regional consensus outputs on common climate trends, seasonal forecasts, and tailored climate services for various national and local stakeholder groups. This will involve conducting at least one regional meeting per year on the intersection between climate change policymaking and the pursuit of SDGs.

23. Pillar 4 will promote integrated responses to and management of climate-related challenges affecting water, energy and food security and the livelihoods of vulnerable groups. This will be pursued by examining and advancing the means of implementation available to support the integrated management of natural resources and gender-sensitive policy and programme interventions, including scientific assessments, technology, finance, capacity-building, and partnerships. This will entail the organization of at least five national workshops per year to assist national stakeholders in drawing upon regional and global experiences to inform climate action across sectors, and to benefit various stakeholder groups.

24. Pillar 5 will provide access to regional knowledge products, data and information through the expansion of the RICCAR regional knowledge hub to incorporate additional resources and technical tools for informing climate change assessment, adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction, financing and technology transfer into key sectors in the Arab region. This will include the further development of geospatial information tools and applications that can assist Arab countries and stakeholders to better understand the implication of climate change across subnational and national boundaries. Requests for assistance and services could be funnelled through the regional knowledge hub via intergovernmental mechanisms or stakeholder requests to provide continual access to information and best practices, and support the generation of new scientific research and analysis.

25. The Arab climate change centre will also assist Arab countries in pursuing climate change action through global agreements that relate to the 2030 Agenda, the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and financing for development, and regional Arab strategies and action plans related to climate change, disaster risk reduction, water security, agricultural development, energy and sustainable development.

## V. COMPONENTS

26. The Arab climate change centre will be based at ESCWA, and consist of a technical bureau and an online platform that builds upon the RICCAR regional knowledge hub.

27. The technical bureau will include at least two full-time technical officers with advanced experience in climate change in the Arab region, one programme officer, and part-time administrative support. At least one technical officer will have advanced expertise in geospatial information tools and climate change modelling. The second technical officer will be more versed in climate change negotiations and means of implementation. The bureau will be supported by senior ESCWA staff within the Sustainable Development Policies Division and from other divisions. It will also be supported by a bilingual programme officer responsible for monitoring and reporting, coordinating communications with member States, and overseeing the preparation and dissemination of knowledge products.

28. The online platform will disseminate knowledge resources. It will be established as part of the RICCAR regional knowledge hub, and consist of a website for providing access to technical materials (managed by ESCWA) and a data portal for providing access to geospatial data resources and maps (managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations). Regular reporting on the RICCAR regional knowledge hub will be submitted to the AMWC Technical Scientific Advisory Committee of the by ESCWA and ACSAD, which will jointly serve as the hub's secretariat.

## **VI. MODALITIES OF WORK**

29. The centre will operate based on a biannual programme of work approved by member States. Consultations on the preparation of the programme of work will involve a range of stakeholders representing ministries of foreign affairs, planning, water, energy, agriculture, human settlements, social development, and the environment, which will engage through ESCWA and League of Arab States intergovernmental processes and which will also be beneficiaries of the services provided by the centre. The programme of work will be implemented through the technical bureau, with support from substantive, programmatic and administrative staff at ESCWA.

30. In addition to drawing upon the technical expertise available at ESCWA, the centre's work will be pursued through bilateral agreements and multilateral partnerships, with focus on building upon existing ESCWA collaboration with the League of Arab States on climate change negotiations, assessment and action. In doing so, the centre will draw upon the strong relationships between ESCWA and regional organizations serving Arab countries, and international agencies within and outside the United Nations and League of Arab States systems.

31. ESCWA already maintains a strong network of partners at the League of Arab States and its specialized agencies (including ACSAD and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development), and with United Nations sister agencies serving the Arab Region, (such as FAO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN-Environment, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)), international climate research centres (including the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute and the Cyprus Institute). ESCWA also engages regularly with institutional counterparts on finance, including the Green Climate Fund, and on technology, including the Climate Technology Centre and Network. ESCWA is able to bridge and add value to the work of those global institutions that work across various climate change areas by placing this work in an Arab context and pursuing dialogue and exchange among Arab countries.

32. The centre is therefore expected to build and expand upon the regional scientific knowledge base, knowledge platforms, and institutional networks and mechanisms fostered to support Arab countries in climate change policy formulation and action. This will consolidate various ESCWA programmes of work on climate change, and improve regional coordination and coherence with programmes supporting Arab countries in the area of climate change assessment, adaptation, mitigation and negotiations. It will also facilitate the quick establishment of the centre at ESCWA.

## **VII. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

33. Human and financial resources will need to be secured for the establishment of the Arab climate change centre. An estimated budget of \$6 million will be needed to render the centre operational for a six-year period. This budget is estimated based on the provision of technical assistance to Arab countries over a six-year period through at least three regional meetings per year (two per year dedicated to climate change negotiations preparations), and five national capacity-building workshops per year on climate assessment, adaptation planning, or means of implementation. Outputs will include at least one regional report per year (six in total) and two briefing notes per year (twelve in total) drawing on scientific analysis to inform regional exchange and policy discussion on pressing climate change topics for negotiation and action, which will be made available in Arabic and English and disseminated via the regional knowledge hub. Those outputs and services

will be delivered through the technical bureau with support from ESCWA staff and at least five institutional partners with demonstrated and advanced experience in climate change that complements the regional knowledge base available at ESCWA.

34. To deliver this programme of work, the centre will need technical and programmatic staff (\$1.8 million); partnerships (\$1.2 million); equipment (\$50,000); meetings, missions and travel (\$1.98 million); contractual services for printing, translation and other services (\$280,000); and programme support costs (\$690,000) if funds are secured through extrabudgetary processes. Based on the estimated budget of \$6 million, this allocates 30 per cent to staffing; 20 per cent to partnerships; 1 per cent for equipment; 33 per cent for meetings, missions and travel; 5 per cent for contractual services; and 13 per cent for programme support costs.

35. ESCWA has experience leading, coordinating and implementing climate change projects to support Arab countries. Climate change programming at ESCWA over the past seven years has included RICCAR (\$4.1 million); the Adaptation to Climate Change in the Water Sector in the MENA Region Programme (\$470,500 plus in-kind support from GIZ); and approximately \$500,000 for each of the following six United Nations Development Account projects implemented over the last five years: capacity-building on climate change mitigation for poverty alleviation in Western Asia (2011-2013); promoting energy efficiency investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development (led by the Economic Commission for Europe and implemented in partnership with the five regional commissions) (2012-2014); Developing the Capacities of the Arab Countries for Climate Change Adaptation by Applying Integrated Water Resources Management Tools (2014-2017); Developing the Capacity of ESCWA Member Countries to Address the Water and Energy Nexus for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (2014-2017); Promoting Renewable Energy Investments for Climate Change Mitigation and Sustainable Development (led by ESCWA and implemented with the Economic Commission for Europe) (2015-2017); and a forthcoming project on upscaling energy efficiency in the residential and services sectors in the Arab region (2018-2020).

36. Preliminary discussions have already been held with Sida on continuing regional collaboration on climate change and water in the Arab region, with expressed interest for RICCAR follow-up activities. New regional projects are also coming online with Sida financial support and through the United Nations Development Account, which could contribute to the centre's activities. Additional project funding for capacity development activities can be requested from the United Nations Development Account and through the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation, which could provide support for advisory services and specific support for demand-driven requests from countries.

37. Pending the consideration of the present preliminary document, start-up funds for elaborating a project document and plan of work could be allocated from existing extrabudgetary resources following discussions with counterparts.

## VIII. NEXT STEPS

38. ESCWA invites the Executive Committee to provide guidance on the centre's requested scope of work, to help determine the financial resources needed for its establishment. Partnerships will then be forged to support the centre, based on the successful partnerships pursued by ESCWA in its past and current climate change initiatives supporting Arab countries. Following feedback, a detailed project proposal will be prepared, and funding solicited from potential partners and donors.

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