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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

Special Session Concept Note

Integrating the Environmental Dimensions into the Sustainable Development Goals: The Theory and the Practice – Regional Perspectives



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17-00269

The Special Session on “Integrating the Environmental Dimensions into the Sustainable Development Goals” is jointly organised by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) West Asia Office, the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States.

Background

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, Member States pledged that over the course of this collective journey, no one will be left behind. The “five Ps”—people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership—capture the broad scope of the Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda also recognises that the “interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized. If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better”*.

Session Objectives

The Special Session will address all “five Ps” with particular focus on “Partnerships” and “Planet”, to further draw these priority areas into discussions at the Arab Forum. The Session will underline the importance of partnerships in tackling the many challenges the planet faces, as well as how these partnerships must be integrated across all sectors of work to maximize our efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It will emphasise the role that our planet plays in provisioning and protecting, the importance of a clean and healthy environment for clean and healthy development, keeping in focus that our planet is the resource base upon which our economic and social development depend.

The side event will draw on experience and expertise from within the region that demonstrates effective tools for the integration of the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Proposed Agenda

1. Introduction to side event, its aims and rationales (League of Arab States) (5 mins).
2. Overview of the priority environment-related goals and targets for the region: results of research study (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) (10 mins).



* UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 adopted 25 September 2015, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

3. Outcomes of the Preparatory Meeting for the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development – the environmental dimensions (representative of Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region) (10 mins).
4. Case studies on mainstreaming environment into policy under different sectors (7-10 mins each).

Case study 1: Mainstreaming environmental dimension in National Urban Policy processes – towards more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Cities in the Arab region (UN-Habitat)

With the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda, there is a renewed impetus for action towards the operationalization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda guided by the Sustainable Development Goals. The New Urban Agenda recognizes National Urban Policies as an essential instrument in responding to the challenges of urbanization and to capitalize on the opportunities. The effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda means inclusive, implementable, and participatory urban policies.

UN-Habitat will elaborate regional efforts in addressing sustainable urbanization in the Arab region. In this regard, country case studies will be presented with particular focus on the environmental components of National Urban Policies towards more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements. The presentation will showcase the application of the National Urban Policy Toolkit in the context of a specific Arab country, lessons learnt and the up scaling of these to other countries in the region.

Case Study 2: Transitioning to an Inclusive Green Economy – experiences from the region (UN-Environment)

The Inclusive Green Economy is an approach towards a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive economy, one that is driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

In the region, both the League of Arab States and a number of countries have embraced the approach, with a number of excellent examples of countries embarking on a path towards an Inclusive Green Economy, through a variety of tools. The presentation will describe some of these approaches, the challenges and the successes, and mechanisms used to mainstream the approach into national policy.

Case Study 3: One solution to solve many challenges – a living example of the integrated approach (Mr Khalid Charki, Special Advisor to the High Commissioner for Water, Forestry and Desertification Control, Morocco)

Inhabited by 60,000 people, Ouarzazate is one of Southern Morocco's major tourism hubs. However, its location on a bare plateau in the High Atlas Mountains makes it vulnerable to desertification and desert storms. To mitigate these environmental challenges, Morocco, with support from the UN Environment Programme and Korea Forest Service, is building a greenbelt of trees around Ouarzazate and greening the surrounding drylands using treated wastewater and clean energy for irrigation. So far, 400 hectares of trees have been planted. The project used an innovative approach to involve local population by creating new job opportunities and using their traditional knowledge and experience, providing stable and sustained income to local families and improve their livelihoods. The greenbelt also created recreational spaces for the urban population, providing an innovative way to raise community awareness and encourage public participation in the prevention of land degradation and biodiversity loss.

5. Discussion (35 mins).