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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
and the United Nations Environment Programme

Virtual Regional Consultation on the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda: Within the COVID-19 Pandemic, Can We Still Accelerate Action to Achieve SDG12 in the Arab Region?

Via internet, 10 March 2021, 11:30-13:00 Beirut time

INFORMATION NOTE

I. Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted development including slowing progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within the pandemic impacts, the implementation of the environmental dimension of the SDGs has a key role in shaping recovery as it presents opportunities to build forward better. There are urgent steps required by Arab governments to accelerate progress on this front through devising pertinent national and regional policies and formulating initiatives to ensure that Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) along other SDGs' environmental dimensions are placed at the heart of the recovery from Covid-19.

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) mandated ESCWA and the United Nations Environment Programme - Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA) to organize regional consultations on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda[1]. The consultations inform regional processes including the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) and provide input to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

In 2020, ESCWA, UNEP-ROWA and the League of Arab States organized a meeting on "Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region: Monitoring Progress of SDG 12 and Building Back Better from COVID-19" to review SCP status in the Arab States and actions towards a green economic recovery from COVID-19 and the meeting called for a radical change in current unsustainable developmental trends[2].

This year, the regional consultation will be organized by ESCWA and UNEP-ROWA on March 10, 2021 under the theme "Within the COVID-19 Pandemic, Can We Still Accelerate Action to Achieve SDG12 in the Arab Region", which is strongly interlinked with the themes of the AFSD-20213 and HLPF-20214. The consultation presents an opportunity to take stock of the implementation of SDG 12 in the Arab Region and to look at the scale and pace of transformations needed to achieve the goal and its related targets by 2030. Consultations for this year will consider the region's potential to continue progress given the new challenges posed by Covid-19.

[1] CAMRE adopted resolution 575 during its 31th regular session in October 2019.
[2] https://www.unescwa.org/egm-resource-effiency-arab-region.
[3]AFSD-2021 is convened under the theme "Accelerating Progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID", from 29 to 31 March 2021), https://www.unescwa.org/event/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2021.
[4] HLPF 2021 is convened under the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development", from Tuesday, 6 July, to Thursday, 15 July 2021, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021.

As it stands now, the Arab region has made some progress in selected SCP indicators as evidenced by ESCWA's recent report [5]. However, this progress is not enough, and the region remains off track for delivering many of the SCP related indicators. For example, the Arab region is lagging behind other regions in developing SCP national action plan and policies; on average, across all indicators and all countries, the Arab region received a weighted score of 65/100 or 'Needs Improvement' for its Material Footprint and Domestic Material Consumption. Furthermore, food loss and waste in the region are estimated at roughly 44% and 34%, respectively[6].

The regional consultation builds on the Background Note of AFSD 2021 that was prepared by organizers on SDG 12, and the findings of the SCP assessment report, as well as the report on "Translating data into actions for advancing resource efficiency to build back better"[7]. The implementation of SDG 12 will contribute to meeting the Arab aspirations for a prosperous region and a dignified life for its people.

II. Objectives and Processes

The regional consultation aims to take stock of what is needed for the Arab region to accelerate progress on the achievement of SDG12 within the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aims at exchanging regional views and experiences on building forward better post Covid-19. The discussions will focus on policy solutions and region-specific integrated measures that ensure economic recovery and natural resources conservation while leaving no one behind.

The consultation will result in a set of key messages and recommendations reflecting regional views on the different paths to accelerate implementation of SDG12. The key messages and outcome will be submitted as input to the 2021 AFSD (29-31 March 2021) to inform regional input for the 2021 session of the HLPF (6-15 July 2021) and will be also discussed during a plenary session dedicated to SDG 12. Finally, the outcome will also be presented to the next session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in 2021.

III. Thematic Areas

SDG12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) will be at the core of the regional consultation discussions along with the regional views on building back better post COVID-19 through implementation of SDG 12. The consultation will discuss the following thematic areas:

- Adoption of an integrated approach for economic recovery that leaves no one behind, and addresses sustainable consumption and production, climate change and natural resource degradation to help the region build back better within COVID-19;
- The potential for regional cooperation and partnerships in advancing the SDG 12 implementation while addressing the impact of COVID-19 on development.
- Means of implementation required to address SCP within the regional context

Through their discussions and inputs, participants including panelists will address the following questions:

- What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on advancing implementation of the SDG12 in the Arab Region? Particular focus will be given to the impact on vulnerable groups (women, youth, internally displaced persons, refugees, persons with disabilities, etc.).

[5] Assessment of Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Arab Region 2020 https://www.unescwa.org/assessment-sustainable-consumption-and-production-arab-region-2020
[6] (FAO 2011)
[7] All reports and the Background Note will be shared with confirmed participants.

- How can we build back better after the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the desired progress in implementing SDG12?
- How can we enhance regional cooperation, and strengthen partnerships between different actors to advance SDG12's implementation?
- How to best include and engage private sectors and SMEs in decision-making processes to trigger a transformative change?

IV. Organizational issues

A. Participants

The regional consultation will include government experts from the Arab countries, practitioners, and advocate of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as concerned regional organizations
. Other regional stakeholders and experts will also be invited to contribute.

B. Partners

The regional consultation is organized in partnership between ESCWA and the UN Environment Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA), under the umbrella of the CAMRE processes to implement the resolution 575, that was adopted during its 31th regular session in October 2019.

C. Date and venue

The meeting will be held virtually. It will be organized on 10 March 2021, from 11:30 till 13:00 Beirut time.

D. Language

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic language.

E. Registration

Invited participants are asked to register online by Wednesday 3 March 2021 so that they can be provided with the link to join the virtual event on time.

F. Correspondence

Queries related to the meeting should be directed to the following counterparts:

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