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ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Expert Group Meeting on “Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region: Monitoring Progress of SDG 12 and Building Back Better from COVID-19”

Online Virtual Meeting, 7-8 October 2020, 12:30 to 15:30 Beirut time

Information Note

ESCWA, UNEP, and LAS are organizing the Expert Group Meeting on “Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region, Monitoring Progress of SDG 12 and Building Back Better after COVID-19” during 7-8 October 2020. The meeting will be virtual and will take place on WebEx from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm Beirut Time (9:30 -12:30 GMT).

I. BACKGROUND

Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are a primary cause of climate change, land degradation, resource depletion, and air and water pollution. Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) comes as one of the main responses to those challenges and contributes to environmental protection, enhancing human wellbeing, and achieving sustainable development.

Achieving SCP has been recognized as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is identified as a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 12) and as a central component of many of the 17 goals and 169 targets agreed in the agenda, hence a vital element for achieving the global development agenda.

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) at its 20th session in November 2009 adopted the *Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production (ARSSCP)* and agreed to hold regional roundtable meetings on SCP at regular intervals to follow up on implementation of the strategy. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) collaborated with the League of Arab States and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) in organizing six roundtable meetings to date¹. The roundtable meetings included showcasing best practices, reviewing progress, and exchanging views on the needs and priorities of the region to promote a shift towards more sustainable consumption and production. The process has also supported implementation of the Ten-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) adopted at Rio+20 in 2012, and is currently aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of goal 12.

¹ The 1st Roundtable Meeting on SCP in the Arab Region was held during March 17-19, 2008, in Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates; the 2nd Roundtable Meeting was held at LAS during September 27-29, 2009, in Cairo, Egypt (the Arab Strategy on SCP was discussed during that event); the 3rd Roundtable Meeting was held from 26th to 27th of January 2011 at the LAS premises in Cairo, Egypt; the 4th Roundtable Meeting was held during 17-18 June 2013 at LAS premises in Cairo, Egypt; the 5th Roundtable Meeting “From Action Plans to Implementation”, was held in Cairo, Egypt during 18-20 December 2017, and the 6th Roundtable Meeting during 9 and 10 October 2019, with the theme “From action plans to implementation”.

In support of advancing SCP in the Arab region, ESCWA has produced the following two reports:

- The “*Guiding Framework for the Environmental Dimension of the SDGs for the Arab Region (the ‘Guiding Framework’)*”² sets out a framework of priority environmental SDG targets and indicators for the region, as well as supporting information and analysis to facilitate implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. It also includes specific measurable potential target values as well as baseline data for a range of SCP-related SDG targets and indicators while not being specifically focused on SCP. This framework was adopted by CAMRE in October 2017.
- The report on “*Progress on sustainable consumption and production in the Arab region: comprehensive baseline assessment of regional, sub-regional and national progress and challenges for achieving SCP and the SDGs*”³. It provides a summary of progress in the region on national SCP planning through a **framework of 21 SCP-related indicators** of most relevance to the Arab region. The report concluded that SDG indicators, in relation to exposure to air pollution, per capita CO2 emissions, level of water stress, and per capita municipal waste experienced little or no progress at the Arab regional level and are currently going backwards. For these indicators, breakthroughs are needed to turn the situation around. They could be considered top priorities for action at a regional scale. ESCWA is now working on updating the data for SCP indicators in the Arab region, to be followed by a revised analysis of indicators’ trends to identify any progress compared to the first assessment.

UNEP works in the Arab region on the promotion and implementation of SCP policies, programs and initiatives through several initiatives among them:

- GO4SDGs, which is an enabling platform that brings together successful global and regional initiatives, and enhancing capacity of countries and regions to achieve progress towards the SDGs – while providing concrete solutions for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It does so by working in three key areas: (i) business innovation, especially by SMEs; (ii) sustainable lifestyles and youth; and (iii) transformative government policy. For the West Asia region, UNEP will work on producing a regional SCP outlook.
- SwitchMed: The EU funded SwitchMed programme assists eight countries in the southern Mediterranean to switch to sustainable patterns of consumption and production and supports national and regional stakeholders in implementing circular economies. Sustainable Consumption and Production National Action Plans (SDG Target 12.1) were developed in all project countries through nationally owned multi-stakeholder processes through more than 100 national capacity building sessions and SwitchMed workshops. Under phase I, UNEP has provided advisory services and technical support to the countries in the developing process and has further supported Egypt, Palestine and Jordan in the implementation of the SCP-NAPs through demonstration activities. Under phase 2 the support to the implementation of the SCP-NAPs, the preparation of the “SCP status reports 2020” and the organization of national SCP roundtables and will further present concrete examples on linkages between SCP and circular economy, blue economy, climate change (NDCs) and national post covid-19 responses.
- SCP assessment for Bahrain has been conducted, and work is underway on supporting Kuwait in developing its SCP National Action Plan in addition to green growth assessment work in Oman.

Recently, with the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of addressing resource efficiency is high on the agenda of the region. Governments working on plans to rebuild their economies need to ensure the recovery actions are in line with sustainability and resilience of economies are in place, i. e., “build back better. This is of particular importance to the circumstances in the Arab region which suffers from scarce

² https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/guiding_framework_final.pdf

³ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/technical_paper_10-scp.pdf

natural resources, and poor management of these resources. The pandemic has exposed many fragilities in our economies, and deepened existing inequalities, thus the need for resilience, innovation and cooperation. While the immediate priority is for emergency measures to contain the current health crisis and economic fall-out from the lockdown, greening the recovery efforts by enhancing ecosystems integrity and reducing environmental and climate risks can increase resilience to future crises.

Addressing the Covid-19 consequences in different countries provides insights on how sustainable consumption and production practices could feature in recovery strategies to align the economy with enhanced public health, nature and climate. These strategies should include better economic and development planning, fostering of digital and circular technology policies, behavioral changes, institutional strengthening and fostering local supply chains and local green enterprises.

In parallel, the region needs to periodically assess its implementation and progress to ensure advancement in SCP targets. The first assessment report of SCP that ESCWA published in 2017, mentioned above, identified comparable indicators, at the regional level and can also be used at the national level.

ESCWA and partners provided statistical capacity development along the overall environmental dimension of the SDG indicators in the context of three related frameworks:

1) The International standard on the System of Environmental Economic Accounting, Central framework (SEEA-CF) ; The sub-accounts on material Flow accounts (MFA) and energy and water accounts have a direct link to SCP indicators through the Supply and use Tables on material produced and used in the national economy and the rest of the World. ESCWA also developed an Arabic version of the E-learning course on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012 - Central Framework (SEEA CF)

2) The implementation of the Framework for Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) 2013 which was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session in 2013 as the framework for strengthening environment statistics programmes in countries.

3) The Implementation Framework for the Environmental Dimension of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab Region -Statistical Component in cooperation with UN Environment and LAS which included selected SDG 12 indicators among the agreed list of Environment related indicators.

In addition, new metadata for SDG12 indicators was updated by custodian agency UN Environment, Programme and clearer guidelines for measurement are available for countries. ESCWA and the Global Footprint organization would like to cooperate to support member countries in the statistical part of the monitoring.

Building on the successes of the six previous roundtable meetings on SCP, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) at its 31th session held on 24 October 2019, invited ESCWA and partners to continue the SCP follow-up meetings as well as follow up on the environmental indicators for sustainable development. ESCWA, UNEP, and CAMRE Secretariat are organizing the Expert Group Meeting on “Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region, Monitoring Progress of SDG 12 and Building Back Better after COVID-19” during 7-8 October 2020.

II. OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS OF THE MEETING

The main objective of the meeting is to discuss SCP status in the Arab States and the actions towards a green economic recovery from COVID-19. The meeting will inform policy makers and offices of statistics on areas to enhance resource efficiency and explore ways to monitor progress on SCP-related targets and indicators.

The meeting will focus on the below three thematic areas:

Statistical Frameworks and Methodologies for Measurement of SCP Indicators

The statistical focus in addition to an overview on the current status of data availability in the Arab region on SCP, will be on three themes: 1) The System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) and its application in measuring domestic material consumption, 2) The Framework for Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) in relation to SCP and waste management, and 3) Global Footprint analysis with a regional perspective. The existing frameworks and their relevance for the SCP in the Arab Region will be presented, and will help countries to track SCP in the national context and for cross-country comparable data.

Monitoring Progress on SDG 12 in the Arab Region and Review of National Progress

Overview of progress on SDG12's indicators and targets in the Arab region, and highlight of regional trends. Sharing of country experiences and challenges encountered in implementing SCP at the national level with documentation of best practices through the SwitchMed programme experience in (SDG12).

Building Back Better and Green Recovery in the Context of COVID-19

Discussion of how to build back better in to the context of COVID-19, and presentation of UNEP's building back better response to COVID-19, and collection of feedback on the regional SCP best practices, and formulation of recommendations on the design and implementation of coherent SCP policies in the recovery phase from a regional perspective. This will include presenting the SwitchMed II project, in addition, UNEP will launch the GO4SDGs project in West Asia.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS

A. PARTICIPANTS AND REGISTRATION

The meeting is expected to attract senior officials from Arab Environment Ministries in charge of SCP, member country representatives to the Technical Committee on Environment as well as senior officials from national statistical offices in the region, concerned regional institutions members of Technical Committee On Environment and relevant experts. United Nations agencies working in the Arab region will also contribute to this activity.

The meeting will specifically benefit from resource persons and experts well versed on regional policies and strategies for SCP and resource efficiency, and environmental statistics.

Participation in this virtual meeting is by invitation only. For more information and enquiry about the registration links for day one and day two, environment nominated participants are kindly requested to contact the Department of Environment and Meteorology Affairs (ema.dept@las.int) or the United Nations Environment Program (tarek.alkhoury@un.org), or ESCWA (wehbe@un.org), and (rouhanac@un.org) for statistics nominated participants.

B. LOGISTICAL ISSUES

Date and venue: Expert Group Meeting on “Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region, Monitoring Progress of SDG 12 and Building Back Better after COVID-19” will be held online, from 7 to 8 October 2020, from 12:30 to 15:30 Beirut time.

Languages: Arabic and English are the official languages of the Meeting.