A framework for an updated Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region (SDIAR)

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PREFACE

This paper provides a draft framework for updating the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region (SDIAR) as a background paper for the Arab Regional Implementation Meeting in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 29-30 May 2013.
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.

Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, major accomplishments have been made in the Arab region 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 recent experience of civil society. Additionally, some major challenges have emerged over the last decade, including demographic change and unemployment, the Arab Spring, 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.

At 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 framework for an updated initiative aims at addressing the key challenges faced by the Arab Countries in achieving sustainable development. It asserts the commitment of the Arab countries to 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 initiative seeks to enhance the participation of the Arab countries with the aim of strengthening their efforts to realise sustainable development, particularly in light of globalization and its impacts, as well as finding a mechanism for financing programs for environmental protection and sustainable development.

¹ESCWA (2011)
²LAS (2012)
The initiative 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. The initiative will also be implemented through building partnerships with the other regions, groups and international organizations and institutions, as part of the international framework for achieving sustainable development, and with the involvement of all the stakeholders including the private sector at the national and regional level, particularly civil society. It is envisaged that the updated initiative will need to be supported by an action plan or similar document outlining key programs for delivering the initiative.

II. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE SDIAR

A. PRIORITY ISSUES FOR INCLUSION IN AN UPDATED SDIAR

It is proposed that the updated SDIAR would focus on the priority issues outlined below.

Peace and Security
- Supporting the efforts aimed at achieving peace and security in the Arab region, including efforts to end occupation, renounce the threat of aggression and interference in internal affairs of States guided by legitimate international decisions on a fair basis to enhance sustainable development.
- Protecting the environment and natural resources of people under occupation and aggression according to principle 23 of the Rio Declaration, and rebuild the socioeconomic infrastructure destroyed by occupation and other acts of aggression.
- Supporting the efforts of the League of Arab States for implementation of the recommendations arising from the different United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) post-conflict assessments in the region.
- Calling for turning the Middle East into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction.
- Supporting efforts to enhance access to basic human rights and human dignity at the national and regional levels.

The Water-Energy-Food Nexus
- 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
- 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.
- Supporting the implementation of water policies within the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).

Energy Security
- Supporting the implementation of the Arab guideline to improve electricity efficiency and its rationalization at the end user.3

3 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 diversify energy sources including cleaner fossil fuel technologies, new and renewable energy and nuclear energy to achieve sustainable development.
- Facilitate support for energy access in a reliable, affordable, economically viable and socially and environmentally acceptable manner as part of strategies for poverty eradication and sustainable development.
- 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 the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE).
- Supporting the implementation of the Arab Strategy for the Development of Renewable Energies (2010-2030).

**Agriculture, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security**

- Supporting the development and implementation of national 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 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 finally consumption).

**Climate Change**

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to implement the Arab Framework of Action on Climate Change.
- 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.

**Green Economy**

- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to undertake a gradual transition towards green economy in line with national sustainable development objectives and priorities.
- Promoting sustained 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 implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

**B. OTHER ISSUES FOR AN UPDATED SDIAR**

The updated SDIAR could also include the following issues.

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4 Adopted at the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Riyadh in 2013.
5 Approved at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh in 2007 by resolution #393.
6 Adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, resolution #355, on 4 October 2012.
**Poverty Alleviation and Employment**
- Fostering international trade and foreign direct investment to contribute to job creation, economic security, investments in health, education, rural development, water and sanitation while safeguarding human rights and empowering women, youth, the vulnerable and the poor.
- Supporting 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 empower Arab women to undertake an effective role in all aspects of political, economic and social life.
- Supporting 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.
- Supporting efforts of Arab countries to address the challenge of youth unemployment 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’.
- Supporting 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.
- Supporting efforts of Arab countries to provide social protection to all members of society, fostering growth, resilience, and social justice.

**Population and Health**
- 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 the 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**
- 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 skill-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.\(^7\)
- 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**
- Encouraging policy reforms of science and technologies 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.

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\(^7\) Adopted by the Arab League Summit in Damascus in 2008.
• 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).

• Embracing and encouraging the use of indigenous knowledge in identifying and implementing sustainable development solutions, such as the “Hima”.

**Information and Communication Technologies**

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

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

• 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.

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

**Coastal Zones and the Marine Environment**

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

• 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.

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

• 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.

**Drought and Desertification**

• 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).\(^8\)

**Biodiversity and Biosafety**

• 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.

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\(^8\) UNCCD (2007)
**Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Management of Mountains and Forests**

- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of the Arab countries towards conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity.
- Supporting the efforts of the Arab countries to build capacity in forest management, reforestation, conservation of biodiversity, and development of eco-tourism.
- Supporting the implementation of the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production as related to sustainable tourism.

**Urban Planning and Sustainable Cities**

- 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.\(^9\)
- Supporting the efforts of Arab countries to enhance the climate resilience of Arab cities.

**Management of Chemicals**

- 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).
- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of Arab countries to build national capacities to achieve sound management of chemicals, with special emphasis on hazardous chemicals and waste.
- 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.
- Encouraging Arab countries to ratify the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

**Sustainable Consumption and Production**

- Supporting 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).\(^10\)
- Supporting Arab countries to implement the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production.

**Disasters Management**

- 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).\(^11\)

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\(^9\) CAMRE (2012)

\(^10\) As adopted at Rio+20 in June 2012.

\(^11\) Adopted by CAMRE, resolution #345, at its 22nd session held at the League of Arab States 19-20 December 2010.

**Means of implementation: Finance**
- 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, Green Climate Fund) towards the transition to green economy and low-carbon development.
- Encouraging Arab countries to operationalize the Arab Environment Facility (AEF) as a means to mobilize funding for green projects.
- 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.
- Encouraging Arab countries to improve income growth and distribution, inter alia, by raising productivity, empowering women, and protecting labor rights.

**Means of implementation: Trade and Investment**
- 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 green 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.\(^\text{12}\)

**Means of implementation: Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals**
- To follow-up on the implementation of this SDIAR, and within the post-2015 global process, Arab countries are requested to input into the development of a set of global sustainable development goals including through the identification of 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.

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\(^{12}\) As requested by CAMRE at its meeting in Baghdad in December 2012.
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