

The Economic Impacts of Climate Change Perspective in the ESCWA Region

Presentation Abstract

Achieving sustainable development in the ESCWA region is faced with several challenges such as political instability, acute water scarcity, unsustainable production and consumption patterns and inadequate financial resources. Responding to climate change should be addressed within the context of sustainable development.

Despite the fact that the ESCWA region is one of the lowest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, it will highly suffer from climate change implications, which might undermine national and regional development plans. Among such implications are temperatures rise leading to an increase in drought spurs, increase of semi-arid lands areas, increase in desertification and land degradation, and reduction in rivers run off; and sea level rise leading to loss of agricultural lands, seawater intrusion and potential increase in natural disasters occurrence. Additional implications could be in terms of increased political conflicts, population displacement and mass immigration, increase in unemployment, and spread of health problems.

Climate change is also expected to have significant economic implications, especially on the agricultural, oil and gas, and the tourism sectors in the region. Climate change repercussions on the Nile Delta, Shatt El Arab and the Gulf peninsula could lead to huge economic losses in infrastructure, housing and building sectors, and to huge financial losses resulting from potential natural disasters. Additional economic impacts of climate change include limitation of urban development in drought prone regions; increased costs associated with addressing water scarcity and quality deterioration; and difficulty in providing food and increase in food prices.

Concerning regional initiatives to address climate change, ESCWA member countries have expressed their political will and commitment to achieve sustainable development and address the threat of climate change through a number of initiatives and declarations on the subject. Most recently, the 2007 Arab Declaration on Climate Change (ADCC) expressed the Arab commitment to join the international community in its move towards adaptation and mitigation of climate change; and the 2008 draft Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change (AFAPPC) included a series of programs on Climate Change adaptation and mitigation covering different sectors. Arab countries have adopted and implemented to a varying degree, policies and programmes which are linked to Climate Change adaptation and mitigation in the areas of energy, water and land, however, the achieved results are not sufficient and further efforts are needed.

In recognition of this growing threat, ESCWA's 25th Ministerial Session in May 2008 resulted in the adoption of a resolution for addressing climate change issues in the region.¹ The resolution requests the ESCWA Secretariat to prepare an assessment of the economic and social vulnerability of the region to climate change, with particular emphasis on effects resulting from impacts on fresh water resources. It also requests ESCWA to take the measures necessary to increase awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures and to work with member country Governments to discuss possible recommendations and actions. The development of the Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change (AFAPPC), in partnership with the League of Arab States and relevant regional organizations, is also requested in the resolution. ESCWA has been addressing climate change issues as part of its work program, and recent activities in 2009 have tackled

¹ Resolution 281 (XXV) of 29 May 2008 concerning Addressing Climate Change Issues in the Arab region.

various issues including renewable energy, sustainable transport, sustainable consumption and production, and assessment of the vulnerability of water resources to climate change in the Arab region. ESCWA has also included climate change issues in its 2010-2011 work programme, and future activities will seek to foster greater understanding of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures by the identification of adaptation measures to increase resilience in Arab countries; large-scale renewable energy applications; sustainable transport; and energy policies and measures for promoting climate change mitigation in ESCWA countries. ESCWA will also continue to offer technical assistance to its member countries on the preparation of action plans and formulation of measures to combat climate change.