



The Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region

Since the Rio Summit, 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, the scarcity of water resources and limited agricultural land, the moderate capabilities of the academic and research centers, in addition to the relatively recent experience of Civil Society.

Based on the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Development issued in Cairo on 25 October 2001, the League of Arab States adopted a comprehensive regional approach, through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and other specialized Ministerial Councils and in cooperation with international, regional and Arab organizations. This approach aims at developing a regional program for sustainable development. The League of Arab States looks towards the international community to assist the Arab countries to face the challenges and the obstacles that exist in the region. The League of Arab States welcomes the readiness expressed by the international community to activate the implementation of Agenda 21, the development objectives included in the Millennium Declaration and the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

This initiative aims at addressing the challenges faced by the Arab Countries to achieve sustainable development. It asserts the commitment of the Arab countries to implement Agenda 21 and the development objectives included in the Millennium Declaration and the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, taking into consideration the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. The initiative seeks to enhance the participation of the Arab countries with the aim of strengthening their efforts in realizing sustainable development, particularly in the light of globalization and its impacts, as well as finding a mechanism for financing the programs for environmental protection and sustainable development.

The initiative is considered as a framework for the implementation of programs and activities 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 at the national and regional level, particularly Civil Society, including the media.

The initiative covers the following areas:

Peace and Security:

- Establishment of a suitable environment at the regional level to support the efforts to achieve peace and security, including the termination of occupation and elimination of threats of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of countries, based on the United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and on a just and equitable basis in order to achieve sustainable development.
- Protecting the environment and natural resources of the peoples under occupation and building the economic and social structures destroyed by the occupation.

Institutional Framework:

- Supporting and enhancing the institutional framework in Arab countries in the field of sustainable development, including the development and implementation of the necessary policies and legislations.
- Supporting the efforts of the League of Arab States to establish a mechanism for addressing sustainable development at the regional level.

Poverty Alleviation:

- Supporting the plans of action and programs on the local, national, sub-regional 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.

Population and Health:

- Supporting the development of integrated population policies and improving primary health services and enhancing programs of awareness for family planning and motherhood and child care.
- Supporting the efforts for the development of population health through the provision of clean water, safe food, sanitary services and the control of chemical hazards and all forms of pollution.

Education, Awareness, Scientific Research, & Technology Transfer:

- Supporting the development of strategies and national programs for education and illiteracy eradication as a part of the strategy for poverty alleviation and also through support to the implementation of the internationally agreed upon objectives on education, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.
- Encouraging the transfer and adaptation of the appropriate technology in the Arab region and developing the Arab capacities, and those of the institutions of scientific research and technology, to stand up to the challenges faced by the Arab region, as well as benefiting from the technical support provided by international organizations and institutions in this field and calling upon the industrial countries to fulfill their commitments on this matter contained in the relevant international agreements.

- Supporting the development of a system for information and technology through integrated initiatives and the creation of a conducive environment to attract investments to the Arab Region in this field.
- Encouraging initiatives to enhance the national and regional capacities in the field of environmental information, such as the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI).
- Encouraging the programs of Arab prizes related to environment and sustainable development such as 'the International Zayed Prize on Environment' and 'Sultan Qaboos Prize for the Protection of the Environment'.

Resources Management:

- Encouraging the integrated management of water resources, including river basins and water catchments, on the basis of international law and existing agreements. This includes the development of legislation and the maximization of benefits on upstream, middle course and the downstream of existing activities.
- Protecting water resources, including groundwater and the environmental systems of wetlands, from pollution, including supporting the efforts to develop alternative water resources and developing new sources of technology for water desalination, rainwater harvesting and the recycling and reuse of water.
- Supporting the development and implementation of national policies and programs in the field of agricultural research, in particular the agricultural methods suitable for the region and harvest technology for arid lands.
- Supporting the regional and sub-regional implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification through the existing mechanisms in the region in order to develop and implement existing action programs.
- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of the Arab countries to implement the strategies of the integrated management of coastal zones, putting into consideration population concentration in coastal areas in the Arab region and the importance of the regional implementation of the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities and other programs within regional seas regions for the protection and conservation of the quality of the marine environment and biodiversity.
- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of the Arab countries to achieve sustainable development in mountain areas and in afforestation and reforestation in Arab countries and in capacity building in the field of sustainable management of mountains and forests.
- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of Arab countries to develop a regional program for the protection of biodiversity, including the establishment of a regional bank for genes and the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on biodiversity in the region.
- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of Arab countries to cope with the deterioration of the quality of the air in many Arab cities, including urban planning strategies, the specification of land use areas, programs of control of

air emissions and the establishment of regional and sub regional systems and networks for sustainable transport.

- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of Arab countries to achieve sound management of chemicals, with special emphasis on hazardous chemicals and waste, through initiatives to identify national focal points for chemicals and wastes and assist Arab countries to establish national databases for chemicals and frameworks and national and regional strategies for the management of chemicals and waste.
- Supporting the promotion of mechanisms, and cleaner and safer production mechanisms and techniques, cleaner and more efficient utilization of oil and natural gas and the development of carbon sinks through afforestation.
- Supporting Arab capabilities to implement the Multilateral Environmental Agreements and their mechanisms, including technical and financial assistance from the international community.
- Calling upon industrial countries to implement their obligations under international environmental agreements through the abolition of all forms of subsidies to the energy sector in their countries, particularly those directed to nuclear energy and coal and the tax bias against petroleum products.
- Providing technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of the Arab countries, including institutional and human capabilities to effectively manage disasters, including inspection and early warning systems.

Production and Consumption:

- The promotion of the concept of sustainable production and consumption in the Arab region and encouraging the use of products that contribute to the protection of the natural resources.

Globalization, Trade and Investment:

- Calling upon the international community to support the efforts of the Arab countries to avoid the negative effects resulting from globalization on the economic, technical, environmental and social levels.
- Supporting the Arab efforts to improve inter-Arab trade through strengthening and supporting the Pan-Arab Free Trade Area.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of Arab commodities and to endeavor to abolish all forms of subsidies, assistance and barriers imposed by the industrial countries to impede the access of Arab commodities to the international markets.
- Aspiring to facilitate and speed up the accession of the Arab countries to the World Trade Organization and to enhance international efforts aiming at the diversification of their economic base.
- Creating a suitable investment environment that would be conducive to international and regional institutions to increase the investments directed to the Arab countries.

The Arab Initiative calls for the support of partnership initiatives between developing countries, as called for in the Joint AMCEN/CAMRE Declaration on Sustainable Development (Cairo 2002), between industrial and developing countries and between the states and the organizations of Civil Society and the private sector. Those partnerships are to be fair and not selective and should not include political or economic conditions.

The establishment of a program of action for this Initiative is to be based on the provisions of the Jeddah Declaration on the Islamic Perspective for Environment (2002), the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Perspectives of Arab Environmental Action (2001), the Oman Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development (2001), the Abu Dhabi Declaration for Agricultural Development and Combating Desertification, the General Framework of Islamic Agenda for Sustainable Development (2002), and the outcome of the Amman International Forum on Environment and Sustainable Development (2001). It will also take into consideration the outcome of the relevant international and regional conferences and symposiums, such as the Dubai Declaration on the Integrated Management of Water Resources in Arid Zones (2002) and the Muscat Declaration of the Oman International Conference for the Development and Management of Watercourses (2002).

Priority is given to three areas in the implementation process, with projects currently being identified in cooperation with the relevant Arab and regional organizations under the program on the integrated management of water resources, the program on land deterioration and combating desertification and the program on the integrated management of coastal zones and marine resources. The three programs and projects will be ready for adoption by the regional mechanisms at the end of October 2002.