

**31 October 2019. UN ESCWA's Input into Secretary-General's background note for the preparatory meeting of the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14**

## **II. Activities, challenges and opportunities for the implementation of SDG 14**

### **1. Status and trends**

Fisheries and aquaculture make a significant contribution to food security and livelihoods of people in Arab countries. Collectively, Arab countries have more than 23,000 km of shoreline and access to two oceans, three major seas and adjacent gulfs. In 2013, its total fish production was estimated at 4.1 million tons, 2.9 million tons from capture and 1.2 million tons from aquaculture. (Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2017/1).

While governments in the region have made progress in establishing marine protected areas, the situation remains challenging and the trends are largely negative. Rapid coastal development and pollution from onshore and offshore activities are increasing pollution and threatening the health of seas and species, including fish stocks that are critical for the livelihoods of coastal communities, especially small fishers, in a number of countries. Examples are:

- Ocean warming, acidification and marine pollution are threatening marine areas surrounding Arab countries.
- Fishing levels have become biologically unsustainable due to over- and illegal fishing; 78% of marine stocks in the Mediterranean Sea were considered to have reached biologically unsustainable levels in 2018; stock depletion of some fish species is also reported in the Arab Gulf.
- Marine litter in the Mediterranean Sea is impacting over 130 marine species;
- The five regional oceans and seas that surround the Arab region are at moderate to high risk of coastal eutrophication<sup>i</sup> by 2030, based on modelled data.
- Arab LDCs are at heightened risk as they often lack the institutional capacity to regulate fishing or enforce measures against illegal fishing.

In addition, conflict in the region has increased the impact of pollution, untreated sewage and unregulated use of coastal land and marine resources. In the case of the State of Palestine, the Israeli occupation limits the ability of Palestinian authorities to manage coastal areas sustainably and to maintain or repair sewage treatment facilities that impact the health of marine ecosystems; it also forces Palestinian fishers into shallow waters and unsustainable fishing practices.

2. **Challenges and opportunities:** Challenges and opportunities to the conservation and sustainable use of seas, oceans, and marine resources in the region include the following:
  - a. The conservation and sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems is not integrated into national development plans. Economic growth and urban development strategies need to take into account the impact on marine and coastal ecosystems. This can only happen by strengthening the science-policy interface, supporting research, increasing impact assessments and improving the generation and sharing of data.

- b. Coordination and management of coastal and marine ecosystems need to be further enhanced at national levels and between countries of the region. Such cooperation is needed to enforce protective measures and curb illegal fishing and polluting activities, and to build the capacity of Arab LDCs in this area.
- c. Small and artisanal fish farming is particularly important both for the incomes of the poor and for food production as it significantly contributing to the food supply chain, however, small fish farmers do not have the capability to optimize their farming or fish catch. (Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2017/1).

### **III. Scaling-up ocean action based on science and innovation**

ESCWA and UNEP/MAP, ECE and ECA are developing a joint project on “Enhanced regional knowledge and experience sharing for waste reduction in the Mediterranean”. The objective of the project is to undertake a regional assessment of the effectiveness of high-tech and low-tech solutions that have been implemented in the selected countries of the Mediterranean region, with a view to their widespread utilization in waste reduction solutions and efforts.

The planned expected result is enhanced technical capacities of Mediterranean decision-makers and stakeholders in the targeted riparian Mediterranean countries to achieve waste reduction and ensure sustainable waste management and strengthened dialogue among the regions and countries that border the Mediterranean basin towards progressing into a more circular economy, while contributing to poverty eradication particularly among women and marginalized communities.

### **IV. Developing partnerships for implementation of SDG14 through voluntary commitments**

ESCWA has partnered with UNEP/MAP, ECE and ECA in the organization of a Roundtable on “Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” during the 18th Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD), held in Budva, Montenegro, from 11 to 13 June 2019. ESCWA focused on mainstreaming implementation of the environmental dimension in the 2030 Agenda. The meeting highlighted the need for concrete actions to integrate sustainability considerations at the local level, for increasing transboundary cooperation, as well as for synergies between environmental and socio-economic targets.

The MCSD recommended to develop an institutional modality for cooperation with the three UN Regional Commissions that cover the Mediterranean basin (UN-ECA, UN-ECE, UN-ESCWA) and to provide relevant inputs to their respective Regional Fora for Sustainable Development to the High-level Political Forum.

### **Key messages from the Arab Region:**

- Countless coastal communities depend on the Mediterranean to provide direct food security, along with dependence on income from tourism. Eight Arab Mediterranean countries along with other Mediterranean countries need to act urgently and collectively with other Mediterranean countries to save the Sea from pollution, plastic waste, and over fishing while also addressing climate change impact.

- There is an urgent need for technology transfer and capacity building of the countries, particularly the Southern Mediterranean to cooperate on waste reduction and sustainable use of the coasts and develop basin level monitoring schemes to control over fishing and waste dumping.
  - There is a need to enhance North-South and South-South cooperation to achieve Goal 14.
  - Arab countries need the commitment and collaboration of all parties involved to address the waste and other challenges of the Sea to ensure sustainable food security systems and the health of the environment that the communities' livelihoods depend on.
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