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Guiding Package

Topic (3): Sustainable development in the Middle East and North Africa

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I. **Abstract:**

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces many challenges in securing long term prosperity. The assurance of sustainable development is not yet accomplished in this region. It is a misunderstanding and an understatement to say that it is only in the hand of the economic situation, since the economy involved has been analyzed and discussed various times. The focus in recent years has been diverted to environmental issues. A country's ecological footprint determines what its future will look like. What and how much their populations consume, their waste system, and how they take advantage of technology to maintain the protection of their resources. Sustainable development is an even more complex concept as it also includes social and educational aspects to be considered. Countries are required to address the subject of poverty and equality which are some of the biggest issues in the MENA region. Education is seen by many as a solution to many of the issues, through it the MENA region can flourish and develop. Another recurring problem in the region is the utilization of water resources which brings the issue back to the environmental aspect.

It is therefore evident that sustainable development includes many compromises in the present in order to preserve for the sake of the future. Every action and decision being taken nowadays needs to be evaluated in terms of its long term effects. Ergo, the MENA region, with the financial, political and technological support of the international community, can guarantee its sustainable development in all aspects. With ongoing armed conflicts, the Arab Spring and many other problems submerging every day; there is a delay in the security of sustainable development which will lead to more difficulty for it to be accomplished. It is the duty of the United Nations General Assembly and the relevant commissions to work on immediate actions to be implemented without any further delay.

II. Introduction:

The Middle Eastern and Northern African region has been victim of underdevelopment in various aspects. Notably, they have been struggling with economic and ecological development. Words of encouragement from the international community have shown their support. During a meeting with global financial institutions in New York, in the Economic & Social Council, the 20th of April 2015, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon said: “*We must work closely together to make this year a year of global action, one that will be remembered as the dawn of a new era of sustainable development*”. Evidently, he was striving to push all present nations and organizations to be aware of the global issue of sustainable development and aim to take action upon it. This push is one of the essential things needed for change, for development, and for unity. This push will help put an end the climate change, biodiversity loss, equality, poverty and environmental degradation. This push is the first step to sustainable development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Some countries are in possession of a variety of natural resources, however lack the strategies and means to properly benefit from them. Ergo, not all MENA countries are in need of the same degree or nature of help to attain sustainable development.

III. Key terms:

1. ***Sustainable development***: “*is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”¹; is the official definition given by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. A more profound definition can be made as the term can be seen as change in which the use of resources, the path of investments as well as technological progression are in unison in order to enrich current and future meeting of needs.
2. ***Economically sustainable system***: a system that is able to produce goods and services continually for the purpose of controlling debt and avoid extreme imbalances that affect industrial or agricultural fabrications.

¹ The World Commission on Environment and Development’s (the Brundtland Commission) report *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

3. ***Environmentally sustainable system***: a system with a stable resource base. It makes sure renewable resource systems are not misused or overused. Also it must use non-renewable resources wisely and have substitutes available and ready.
4. ***Socially sustainable system***: a system that provides well established social services such as education, health and political responsibility.
5. ***Environmental accounting***: a field that identifies resource use and costs of national economic impacts on the environment.
6. ***Policy reform***: process in which formal laws and regulations are changes to address a specific problem or achieve economic growth, social or political change.
7. ***Resource constraints***: limiting what can be done because of restrictions on available means to do it.

IV. **Background information:**

The quality of life is a system. It is good to be physically healthy, but what if there is no access to education? It is good to have a secure income, but what if breathable air is unclean? And it is good to have freedom of religious expression, but what if food is insufficient to feed families? *“Meeting the needs of the future depends on how well we balance social, economic, and environmental objectives-or needs- when making decisions today”* is the classic definition given to sustainable development in “Our Common Future”, the report of the World commission on Environment and Development. For as the sustainable development is the establishment of initiatives² guaranteeing the long-term development in all nations, notably the Middle Eastern countries.

The Stockholm Declaration³ in 1972 marks the first attempt by the United Nations in incorporating the goals for economic development with an awareness of environmental limits known as “the Brundtland Report”⁴ It has been known for its wide recognized definition of sustainable development; *“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of*

² Projects, aids,etc

³ Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment”, where the outlook on principles needed in order to preserve the human environment.

⁴ The report in under the title of “Our Common Future”: World Commission on Environment and Development”.

the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it 2 key concepts:

-The concept of need, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and

-The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."

Needless to say that "meeting the needs of the present and future" is an indispensable aspect in establishing the sustainable development goals. Furthermore, the 1992 Rio Conference led to the first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to a general outline of sustainable development policies for the 21st century, known as Agenda 21. Although the term was not referred to explicitly, the international community agreed to the concept. Therefore both development and environment initially addressed as separate issues are then managed in a mutual beneficial way.

Why the Middle East in particular?

Knowing the richness of oil resources, strongly benefiting the economy of many Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and so why is it necessary to focus on the sustainable development in this region? The answer to this question relates to many aspects holding back these countries from advancing. Stressing on the lack of proper usage and benefit from these resources. For example, the unpolished oil that has negative impacts on the environment as well as an absence of fuel change, which makes the benefits all the more hard to obtain. The present actions are therefore not reflected in the future, thus lacking the long-term effectiveness. Nonetheless, the main concern goes to less developed countries, having weaknesses in most aspects, also known as the MENA countries. These countries have faced many economic, ecologic, social and environmental protection challenges, as well as resisting the effects of climate change and poverty, leading them to a struggle to maintain a decent lifestyle helping them improve on the international and national scene. Thus, in need of long-term changes in order to develop.

The MENA Region faces a range of challenges, as it is vulnerable to climate change. It is one of the world's most dry regions whilst depending on climate-sensitive agriculture, with a large share of population and economic activity in flood-prone zones. However, they have managed to make the best out of a bad situation by adapting to the water scarcity and heat for many years and eventually developing various technical solutions and mechanism to deal with these environmental constraints.

Are sustainable development goals achieved by the expiry date?

In 2015, the anti-poverty targets in the eight U.N Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expired. Despite the 2012 U.N Task Team Report "Realizing the Future We Want for All", some goals are utterly challenging and hard to achieve. Yet, Scientists at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) found in researches the importance of increasing the poverty alleviation goals, since eradicating poverty in all its forms had been the greatest global challenge.

In addition, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from the 25 till The 27th of September 2015, announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. They seek to build on the existent Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. Ergo, they balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

The three pillars of Sustainable development:

There are three pillars that are indispensable when referring to Sustainable development, notably in the MENA area: society, economy and environment. As for people, habitats and economic systems are inter-related. There is a high dependence on ecosystems and the services they provide as to building communities, feeding populations as well as running businesses etc. Hence, there's a high dependence on the environment. Moreover, the long-term stability of societies relies on the population's health and productiveness. Henceforth, communities within large societies face poverty, diseases, climate change, etc that

keep developing over time. However, the three pillars are important when needing to reach Sustainable development, as they will ensure it.

V. **Major Countries involved:**

Jordan: is recorded as one of the world's poorest countries in water accessibility. However, the government is dealing with it correctly as they evenly distribute the available water resources to different uses and they search for substitute sources. They also regularly publish statistical reports that include supply and demand analysis.

Morocco: half of its public agriculture stems from water from the Oum Er Rbia River basin. They therefore rely on rain for their crops. Nevertheless, in the past decade, rainfall intensity has been wrongly predicted and so only half of the expected volume was reached. Consequently, the government as well as the World Bank are looking for climate change resilient irrigation and making the basin more sustainable.

Egypt: Is one of 24 countries in the Middle East and 19 in North Africa at high risk of rising sea levels from 0.1 to 0.3 meter in the next 40 years. In Alexandria specifically, it would cause the displacement of millions of people and massive property and infrastructure damages. Because of the rich cultural and historical artifacts as well, Egypt is seen as a priority in maintaining sustainable environmental development.

Yemen: is recorded to have one of the poorest economies in the Arabian Peninsula. In a modern technologically advanced world, agriculture employs more than 50 percent of the Yemeni population. They are also facing difficulties in adapting to climate change.

Major organizations involved:

TechWadi is the leading non-profit organization building bridges between Silicon Valley and the Arab world. From its beginnings as the community of top Arab American technology

professionals in Silicon Valley, TechWadi has evolved into a powerful platform for collaboration with members and events spreading across the world. In Silicon Valley, TechWadi brings together technology movers through conferences, networking events, workshops, and mentorship programs. In the MENA region, TechWadi works with leading regional and international organizations to empower high impact entrepreneurs and help build a sustainable infrastructure to help entrepreneurs succeed. Their goal is to contribute the Arab world –and MENA’s- ecosystem.

EcoMENA is training, advisory, awareness-raising and publishing organization with a goal to adopt sustainable development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It aims to create mass awareness on renewable energy, sustainability, waste management, environment protection, energy efficiency and resource conservation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (*SEEA*) contains the internationally agreed standard concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules for producing internationally comparable statistics on the environment and its relationship with the economy. It benefited the Middle East countries while presenting the natural capital accounting as a mean to encourage green growth, poverty reduction and job creation, in a regional workshop⁵ on “Natural Capital Accounting for Green Growth” in MENA.

The Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Program (*METAP*) is a program designed to strengthen the links between northern and southern edge countries as they deal with their common environmental problems. Therefore, their knowledge benefited the World Bank preparing a regional program for technical assistance on climate change. Between 1990 and 1995, METAP’s first phases mobilized over US\$32.0 million for activities that identified investment projects, strengthened capacity in national and local environmental institutions, promoted sustainable environmental policy actions, and created the first professional

⁵ It was held on March 26-27, 2013 at the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) in Marseille, France.

networks in the region. Those activities have also influenced or resulted in US\$1.6 billion in on-going or planned World Bank or EIB investment projects.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (*GCC*) is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf, except for Iraq⁶. They were aided to formulate their economic development strategies and transformation agendas in order to improve it.

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (*OECD*) has been doing an effort to advance sustainable development. They have supported extensive research on the challenges of sustainability and been active in efforts to develop best practices in areas such as sustainable production and consumption and measuring sustainable development. One of the significant challenges lies in policy coherence – ensuring that different policies and practices support each other in reaching a goal. Achieving this coherence in our policies and institutions is essential to achieving real and lasting progress. With a long record of research, analysis and international co-operation, the OECD can offer policy options for addressing these challenges.

VI. **UN Involvement:**

The UN's main involvements in this issue is through the creation of various organizations that insure and supervise sustainable development such as:

- The United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (*UNOSD*): established in 2011 in cooperation with the Government of Republic of Korea; helps plans and implement strategies for sustainable development through training and partnerships.
- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (*ESCWA*) promotes economic and social development through regional. It collaborated with DESA in strengthening the capacity of national tax administrations in developing

⁶ Its member states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

countries to effectively negotiate and apply double tax treaties for the financing of sustainable development.

Extract of Resolutions: The Economic and Social Council⁷

The Economic and Social Council Plenary,

Suggests international cooperation between UN agencies, such as the Commission of Sustainable Development, UNEP, UNDP, UN-Energy Knowledge Network, and national governments of Europe and MENA, as well as the regional associations and cooperation of the EU, AU and the League of Arab Nations, which would:

- a. Work with Member State representatives from Europe and MENA for the purpose of collaboration of research with renewable resources of energy and energy efficiency, new technologies, the connection of energy grids, and domestic strategies,
- b. Coordinate progress of newly-implemented energy-related projects with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote energy security and conservation, related government agencies of Europe and MENA, and private companies and contractors tasked/commissioned with the responsibility of providing/handling energy resources, which will include:
 - i. Monitoring the collaboration of the World Health Organization (WHO) which will contribute to the Sustainable Energy For All initiative by launching the new WHO guidelines on house fuel combustion solutions, clarifying remaining knowledge gaps about what are healthy home energy interventions, ii. Facilitating partnerships between private enterprises and regional NGOs modeled off of the competitions for innovative approaches and applications for rural energy access, and to provide energy access developed by Actions pour la Mobilisation des Initiatives et Stratégies d'Aide au Développement (AMISTAD) to foster the creation of energy technologies that are reliable, durable, and affordable;

⁷ Resolution 1/1, topic: “*Achieving Energy Security in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa*”

VII. Possible Solutions:

1. With the help of organizations such as the “Dow Water & Process Solutions”, developing innovative technologies and cooperating on local projects that provide a sustainable production of edible drinking water in order to make it more accessible across the Middle East region.
2. Bearing in mind the strategies used by developed countries in construction, whilst applying the most efficient ones in countries to avoid having excessive use of energy because of the misconstruction of many buildings in some countries.
3. Maintain and, if possible, enhance, its residents’ quality of life. Quality of life differs from a community to another. It has many components: income, education, healthcare, housing, employment, legal rights on the one hand; exposure to crime, pollution, disease, disaster, and other risks on the other. Each locality must define and plan for the quality of life it wants and believes it can achieve, for now and for future generations.
4. Enhancing local economic energy. A viable local economy is essential to sustainability. This includes job opportunities, sufficient tax base and revenue to support government and the running of infrastructure and services. A sustainable economy is also diversified, so that it is not easily disrupted by internal or external events or disasters.

VIII. Guiding Questions:

1. Which countries are in more need of help in order to guarantee sustainable development?
2. What are the issues facing the MENA region in regards to sustainable development?
3. At what stage is your country at in ensuring sustainable development? What could be its next steps?
4. How are the Post-2015 Millennium goals assuring sustainable development in the MENA area?
5. What are the priorities in your countries that would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development?
6. In what ways can education contribute to the ensuring of sustainable development?

7. How can large scale renewable energy sources be developed and deployed to the MENA area ? in your country?
8. What might be effective measures to take in the present to assure long term development?

IX. **Useful links:**

- http://www.zawya.com/story/Dow_Water_Process_Solutions_demonstrates_commitment_to_sustainable_development_in_the_Middle_East_through_local_partnerships_and_projects-ZAWYA20150319124338/
- <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- <http://www.un-documents.net/k-001303.htm>
- <http://www.mei.edu/content/sustainable-development-and-built-environmentmiddle-east-challenges-and-opportunities>
- <http://www.marketresearchworld.net/content/view/2530/77/>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/middle-east-centre-for-sustainabledevelopment-mecsd->
- <http://www.un.org/apps/news/region.asp?Region=5>
- <http://www.mecsd.com>
- <http://gulfresearchmeeting.net/index.php?pgid=Njk=&wid=NjU=&yr=2013>
- <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21596766~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:256299,00.html>
- <http://www.cfr.org/economic-development/report-world-commissionenvironment-development-our-common-future-brundtland-report/p26349>
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