

Summary report

Third meeting of the Arab Working Group on sustainable development indicators, Amman, 13-15 March 2017

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1 Background and objective of the meeting

The Arab initiative on sustainable development was adopted in 2005 and updated in 2012 to take into account the outcomes of the RIO+20 conference outcomes. The initiative became then the strategic framework for sustainable development including other issues such as peace and security, justice sovereignty of states over their resources, participation of civil society and good governance.

An Arab Working Group on Sustainable Development Indicators chaired by the League of Arab States has been set-up. A core set of 83 indicators to monitor the progress of the strategy were then proposed and adopted. In 2012 and due to the problems encountered by the countries to report on the indicators and in order to reduce the burden of the League of Arab states member countries, it was decided to reduce the set to 44 indicators.

The general objective of the meeting held in Amman from 13-15 March is to strengthen the ability and capacity of the Arab working Group with the implementation of environmental and sustainable development indicators.

The third meeting of the Arab working group on sustainable development indicators, chaired jointly by LAS, CEDARE, UN environment and UNESCWA was held in Amman, 13-15 March. It gathered 40 participants from different Arab countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen and Tunisia). The Meeting was attended by two Focal points from each country, one representative from the Ministry of Environment, and the second from the statistical office. The meeting was also attended by the Environment Agency Austria on behalf of the EEA, presenting the ENI SEIS II South Support Mechanism activities and experiences with the Mediterranean countries), as well as ACSAD.

The meeting aimed to:

- Take stock of achievements, gaps and challenges in the implementation of Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators in the Arab region;
- Choose a smaller set of environment and sustainable development indicators for the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to be submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) for approval and adoption;
- Discuss means to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the Arab Working Group;
- Strengthen environmental information network in the Arab region;
- Evaluate infrastructure of the data of sustainable development indicators in the Arab region using a questionnaire and conduct a SWOT analysis to define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;
- Develop an action plan for the Arab Working Group on environmental and sustainable development indicators (2017 - 2019).

2 Countries achievements and challenges

After setting the scene on Sustainable Development indicators, regional organisations and countries reflected the progress in implementation of the set of environmental and sustainable development indicators and the challenges faced during the implementation. At national level,

the level of achievements differs from a country to another but the countries share the same challenges and difficulties which can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ Funding;
- ✓ Lack of data and the need for field surveys for bridging data gaps and producing data flows to populate the agreed set of indicators;
- ✓ Poor coordination between the institutions in some countries and absence of processes for sharing data and information at the national level;
- ✓ Need for support (in terms of capacity building as well as financial support) to ensure the production of required data and information and ensure the sustainability in production and collection of data;
- ✓ Unavailability of qualified persons/ environmental experts to prepare/handle/analyse the data and contribute to the reports on the state of environment;
- ✓ Lack of awareness about the importance of data and information in the planning.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, difficulties linked to the political situation and security in different countries (such as the war in Yemen which resulted in water and air pollution with the high risk to spreading diseases) were raised. Yemen has achieved results in the first year of implementation of environmental and sustainable development indicators but due to the war the country is behind schedule.

The SEIS project was presented by the Environment Agency Austria, sharing the experience and the results achieved within the implementation period focusing on indicators development and assessment. Convergence and synergies with the Mediterranean indicators were highlighted during the discussions.

3 Proposed activities for Arab Working Group work plan 2017-2019

Activities of the Working Group for the next three years were discussed during the meeting. Based on this initial proposal, UN-ESCWA will prepare and share a final version in the coming weeks. A summary of the ideas and activities proposed are summarized in the table below.

2017	2018	2019
1- Identify a small set of environmental indicators and indicators of sustainable development intersecting with social and economic dimension of the 2030 plan	1-Adoption of the small set of indicators by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.	1-Presentation by the countries of the progress and achievements in the production and dissemination of the agreed set of indicators.
2- Assess the current situation related to the small set of environmental and sustainable indicators by	2-The Technical Secretariat to communicate with the focal points and provide them with methodologies and guidelines for calculation of the set of indicators in	2- Assessment of the work by the Technical Secretariat agree on the actions to be

<p>focusing on infrastructure (for this purpose a questionnaire prepared by CEDARE was distributed during the meeting. Countries were asked to provide the filled questionnaire within the next two months)</p> <p>3- Work on conducting a data mapping</p> <p>4 -Establishment of the data portal (idea of using UNEP live was discussed) to share data and information and help enhance cooperation among the Arab countries.</p>	<p>accordance with international standards.</p> <p>3- Establishment by the countries of databases to populate the agreed set of indicators.</p> <p>4-Production and dissemination of the agreed set of indicators and provide the Executive Secretariat with time series to populate the indicators before next meeting</p>	<p>undertaken for the work of the team after 2019</p>
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4 Result of the SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted during the meeting and the results of the analysis can be summarized as follow:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Most of the countries have laws and regulations for the production of data and information</p>	<p>- lack of experts in the field of environment</p> <p>Lack of funding</p> <p>Lack of sustainability continuity of the network (national focal points are subject to changes) and lack of Knowledge transfer.</p>	<p>Guidelines and methodologies provided in Arabic</p> <p>Databases available in most of the countries. Possibility to use UNEP live.</p>	<p>Discontinuity of the network if resources/funds are not secured.</p>

	<p>External funding is not sustainable is up to the Arab countries to find ways to finance the network and ensure its sustainability</p> <p>Lack of communication and coordination within the network</p>		
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5 Recommendations

The working group agreed on the following recommendations:

- a) adopting a smaller set of priority indicators, for environment, social and economic themes for the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- b) the necessity to build national capacities in environment and sustainable development in Arab countries in data production and sharing ;
- c) request Arab countries to appoint an expert from each statistical office and ministry of environment to serve as focal points for the working group and aim to stabilize the network to guaranty a sustainability of the work of indicators working group;
- d) request countries to reply to the questionnaire prepared by CEDARE for assessing the status of the infrastructure of environment and sustainable development indicators of priority within the next two months,
- e) cooperation with regional indicators networks and build on existing and ongoing initiatives.