



المنتدى العربي للتنمية المستدامة

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Key takeaways from the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021

The following are key messages from the AFSD-2021 as shared by the Chair of the Forum in the Closing session. The messages highlight the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development: they focus on common priorities for Arab countries including a focus on groups at risk of being left behind in the region; address transboundary issues of priority for achievement of the SDGs such as illicit financial flows; and highlight the importance of regional cooperation and coordination in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. The groups that have been most affected by the pandemic are those that were the most vulnerable and neglected before the crisis. Priority should be given to extending social protection and health coverage to all.
2. The education system must be transformed to include all, improve quality and develop digital learning platforms.
3. There must be a strengthened political commitment to building health care systems that are based on primary care and ensure health security for all. The Forum also highlighted mental health, and it was stressed that it is not only part of health but part of development because of its impact on the economy, gender equality, children, youth, education, employment, social cohesion and peace.
4. Participants stressed the importance of addressing social inequalities through the implementation of redistribution policies and reforms to support decent employment and create jobs. Good practices in the area of governance and migration management should be shared and regional achievements in this area should be built on.
5. The Forum stressed the need to strengthen the political commitment to gender equality, enact and implement legislation to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and expand women's representation and participation in all aspects of public life.
6. The discussion addressed the topic of cooperation and coordination between local and central authorities and non-governmental organizations and multilateral entities. The pandemic has highlighted the role of local

government and the effectiveness of civil society in times of crisis, underscoring the importance of expanding the civic space and engaging all parties in policy-making and programme implementation.

7. The discussion also addressed the central role of parliaments and audit institutions that support the development process by monitoring and overseeing planning, implementation and performance and developing a culture of accountability in development work.
8. The Forum's discussions emphasized the pivotal role of the private sector in driving the national and regional economy. As such, Governments should support this sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which have played an important role in responding and adapting to the pandemic.
9. Regional cooperation and joint investments in agriculture to achieve food security and SDG 2 remain an urgent priority for the Arab region, both presently and to fortify the region for future crises.
10. The Forum focused on environmental and climate change goals as central issues for the Arab region. Arab States need to improve the coherence of their policies with the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda through integrated development planning and the adoption of innovative financing tools to adapt to climate change and reduce disaster risks. Discussions underscored the importance of green finance in the recovery phase.
11. Urgent issues include supporting universal access to technology, accelerating the digital transformation in the public and private sectors, adopting strategies to improve research and development and strengthening the technological capacity of researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs, in particular women and young people. Equitable access to technology is important for the continuity of State services and the continuity of work in various sectors, and to avoid another gap between different segments of society.
12. In the face of the data challenge, the discussion focused on the important role of alternative data sources, the use of new technologies in censuses and surveys, the adoption of alternative methodologies and building on methodologies developed during crisis management, which help to fill statistical gaps in line with international recommendations and standards.
13. Financing sustainable development and the need for innovation in financing occupied a large portion of discussions, which focused on strengthening the political commitment to a regional road map and coordinated response mechanisms to reduce illicit financial flows, tax evasion and financial corruption, so as to fill the financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals, increase revenues and redirect expenditures in the recovery phase. Additionally, improving financial integrity demands coordinated efforts nationally, regionally and globally.
14. Enhancing national resource mobilization and allocation efforts demands better alignment of national budgets with the SDGs and national sustainable development plans and programs. Some good practices from the Arab region and beyond can inspire ongoing and future alignment initiatives to ensure coherence between planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting.
15. Participants focused on the dual burden on many groups in the region from the COVID-19 pandemic and wars and protracted conflicts. On this point, discussions once again underscored the importance of Goal 16 as a key SDG in the region and political commitment at all levels to ending wars and conflicts and the importance of linking humanitarian aid and emergency response to long-term recovery.