



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20)
16-17 October 2011
League of Arab States – Cairo, Egypt

Outcome of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

We, the representatives of Arab States participating in the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20),

Recalling resolution 64/236 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, dated 24 December 2009, on the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,

Recalling resolution (341-XXII) of 20 December 2010 adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment at its twenty-second session to convene an Arab preparatory meeting for Rio+20,

Reaffirming the need for a balanced approach to achieve sustainable development and promote linkages and interaction among its economic, social and environmental pillars,

Stressing further the need to achieve fair and equitable development, so as to ensure the right of everyone to live with dignity in social cohesion and harmony; to decent employment; and to freedom from poverty, hunger and disease,

Considering that regional cooperation is a fundamental pillar for strengthening sustainable development programmes in a balanced way through regional integration, the exchange of expertise and best practices, sharing of knowledge, and emphasizing the inclusion of a regional dimension into the outcomes of Rio+20, on the basis of the commitment to the principles of the Rio Declaration (1992), Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002),

Reaffirming the importance of consistent and effective preparation for Rio+20 at the national and regional levels, through concerned institutions, for forging a unified position to represent the Arab region at Rio+20, which would reaffirm commitment to the principles of sustainable development, lead to a road map to sustainable development goals in the region and ensure a better future for its people,

We hereby agree on the following:

A. General Recommendations

1. To ensure that the principles set forth in the Rio Declaration in 1992 are not compromised, and to reject any attempt to renegotiate them.

2. To reaffirm the principles of the Rio Declaration, particularly principle 7 on the common but differentiated responsibilities of States, and also principle 23 on the protection of the environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation.
3. To further emphasize the importance to implement the outcomes of the United Nations summits and conferences on sustainable development, including Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Monterrey Consensus; and that developed countries honour the commitments made at these summits; and that developing countries achieve the full enjoyment of their rights.
4. To achieve sustainable development by enhancing and integrating its economic, social and environmental pillars.

B. Progress Achieved and Gaps in the Implementation of the Outcomes of Major Summits on Sustainable Development

1. Arab countries have made progress towards sustainable development in a number of areas, notably education, health and the environment.
2. Challenges remain, especially in poverty eradication, job creation, the right to development, social cohesion, women's rights, the right of access to information, the needs of youth, trade liberalization, the transfer and localization of appropriate technology, finance mechanisms, and capacity building in the areas of sustainable development.
3. In order to face those challenges, Arab countries:
 - (a) Call on developed countries to honour their commitments, particularly towards developing countries; failure to honour commitments made in previous summits has been a major reason for the delay in the achievement of sustainable development in developing countries since the first Rio conference in 1992;
 - (b) Reaffirm their commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region adopted by the 2004 Arab Summit, and to bring it in line with new and emerging developments and challenges and support national and regional efforts and policies aimed at achieving sustainable development in the Arab region, including agreed upon goals;
 - (c) Refrain from accepting any additional commitments on developing countries; developed countries must fulfil their commitments towards developing countries, including the provision of adequate funding, transfer of appropriate technology and capacity-building to achieve sustainable development goals;
 - (d) Stress the importance of promoting Arab regional integration as an imperative for achieving sustainable development;
 - (e) Support the participation of women, young people, persons with special needs, the private sector, civil society organizations and stakeholders in development and decision making processes;
 - (f) Assert that conflict, occupation, aggression and economic sanctions are major obstacles to achieving sustainable development; special support is therefore, required to meet the development needs of people suffering from these problems, particularly people living under occupation;

(g) Stress the need to support and establish sustainable development information and data networks, with a view to strengthening the decision-making process and the creation of a regional sustainable development information system.

C. New and Emerging Challenges

1. Emerging social and political transitions in the region provide an opportunity to reconsider development priorities; notably give the social pillar greater attention in order to achieve social justice, create new job opportunities in public and private sectors, and reduce the brain drain, especially among young people.

2. Emerging issues facing the Arab region include:

(a) Climate change and climate change adaptation, the adverse effects stemming from the adaptation measures and the implications on the social and economic sectors, in addition to food security, water security, increasing drought and desertification, land degradation, natural disasters and extreme events (dust storms, heat waves and floods), diseases and epidemics;

(b) The impact of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries, and the impasse of Doha Round negotiations. In this context, Arab countries call for the establishment of a fair international trade system that provides developing countries with adequate resources to support their efforts towards achieving sustainable development. They also call for devising a solution for the external debt problem, and honouring commitments to provide official development assistance at internationally agreed levels;

(c) Unprecedented population growth and urbanization over the past years, which has inflicted more pressure on infrastructure and increased demand for the provision of basic services such as water supply, sanitation, healthcare and education.

D. Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

1. An institutional framework for sustainable development is not an end in itself; it is rather a means to implement decisions agreed upon in the upcoming conference. Therefore, such a framework should address the three dimensions of sustainable development, and should not impose any further burdens, technical or trade barriers or conditionalities on developing countries.

2. The institutional framework has to be addressed on the basis of the following considerations:

(a) The need to adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach for sustainable development along its three dimensions, to strengthen the existing international institutional framework with a view to address its gaps and to work towards establishing and strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development on both the national and regional levels;

(b) The institutional framework for sustainable development should not be used as a pretext to set environmental considerations as barriers or conditions on the provision of development assistance;

(c) The need to strengthen and establish national councils for sustainable development with a clear structure and defined terms of reference to enhance their ability to implement sustainable development strategies, plans and programmes;

(d) At the international level, focus should be placed on activating available mechanisms and existing institutions to address the shortcomings in coordination, and ensure cooperation and the optimum use of available resources, particularly already scarce financial resources, prior to considering the possibility of creating new

institutions, in addition, to activating, strengthening and enhancing the existing institutional structures for sustainable development at the regional level, including regional commissions such as the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and regional offices such as those of the United Nations Environment Programme.

(e) The need to strengthen coordination among international, regional and national frameworks, and support further coordination and coherence among United Nations agencies and organizations.

E. The Green Economy

1. There is as yet no agreement on the definition of green economy.

2. In this respect, Arab countries highlight the following:

(a) Any concept of green economy to be agreed upon in the future shall not imply that the green economy is an alternative for sustainable development but rather a tool to achieve it. The opportunities and challenges of a green economy shall be assessed, in addition to the required means of implementation, primarily funding, transfer and localization of appropriate technology, capacity-building and provision of technical support to developing countries;

(b) If an international concept of the green economy is to be adopted, special emphasis shall be placed on the principle of gradual transition to a green economy, in accordance with the socio-economic characteristics of individual countries and through the adoption of appropriate policies;

(c) The concept of a green economy shall not be used as:

- A standard model applicable to the region as a whole;
- A pretext to create trade barriers and environmental standards that are difficult to implement;
- A basis and precondition for providing financial support and aid to recipient countries;
- A means to restrict the right of developing countries to utilize their natural resources according to their own development priorities; or
- A tool to exempt developed countries from honouring their commitments towards developing countries.