

Regional integration and the Post 2015 Development Agenda: *Towards a Follow up and Review Mechanism of Sustainable Development Policies in the Mediterranean Arab Countries*

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* Opinions exposed in this paper are those of the author and do not engage UN-ESCWA.

Triumph of the multilateralism or defeat of the regionalism? As expected, the implementation of the 2030 agenda will reveal the importance of the regional dimension in achieving the 17 goals and their related 169 targets, as agreed upon by the open working group on SDGs¹ and reiterated in the New York Summit outcome document² adopted last week by the General Assembly. Nevertheless, the progress for the implementation of the new Agenda at the national level will largely depend on regional dynamics, the integration of national priorities to SDGs under national planning systems and the reporting on progress related to those priorities should be grounded in regional strategic frameworks on sustainable development to be considered as a driving force for the 2030 agenda.

Such regional strategic, as well as legal and institutional frameworks on sustainable development deserve to be reconsidered for compliance to the new agenda. This alignment will provide the legitimacy of regional preparation for Follow up and Reviews Mechanism at the global level involving Arab Mediterranean countries to the annual meeting of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)³ and to the ECOSOC forum on financing for development. UN commissions in the region, notably ESCWA shall undertake such preparations for Arab Mediterranean countries through the Arab Sustainable Development Forum.

Against a regional strategic framework on sustainable development for the Mediterranean⁴, apparently aligned with the 2030 Agenda but reflecting regional sustainable development goals with a special focus on environmental sustainability, this group of countries would have the opportunity to contribute to the elaboration of the regional strategic sustainable development framework proposal for the Arab region⁵ and its full alignment to the new agenda profiting, hopefully, from lessons learned related to the Mediterranean experiences about mainstreaming sustainable development at the regional level.

Suffering from occupation, protracted conflicts and terrorism, peace and security issues are, with no doubt, prerequisites of any development endeavor for the future of Arab Mediterranean countries. Security and development in the region will benefit all Mediterranean peoples and could reframe the vision reflected in MEDPRO (Mediterranean Prospects) for the region in the horizon 2030 and its more optimistic scenario "The blue scenario"⁶ into evidence-based policies and results-based approaches to sustainable development. Strengthening the environmental pillar of sustainable development is key for any regional arrangement aiming at establishing new dynamics in the Mediterranean and the Arab region. Coherence of the regional strategic frameworks on sustainable development (i) should be complemented by bringing closer the legal and institutional frameworks on sustainable development for Arab states and their partners in the North of the Mediterranean (ii).

¹ Available through this link: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf>

² See the New York Summit Outcome Document in this link: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7891Transforming%20Our%20World.pdf>

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

⁴ Available from this link:

http://planbleu.org/sites/default/files/upload/files/smdd_uk.pdf

⁵ <http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3315/2.pdf>

⁶ What scenarios for the Euro-Mediterranean in 2030 in the wake of the Arab spring? Rym Ayadi and Carlo Sessa MEDPRO Policy Paper No. 2 / October 2011 (Updated 25 February 2013)

Coherence of the regional strategic frameworks on sustainable development: Alignment to the horizon and to 2030 Agenda spirit

The optimistic scenario 2030 of MEDPRO called "blue transition" toward sustainable development and involving the Arab Region, could be reconsidered to rethinking the horizon of the new strategic frameworks on sustainable development both for the Mediterranean and the Arab Region⁷.

Under a multilayered strategic framework on sustainable development from national to the global, a regional strategic framework on sustainable development is, in principle, perceived to maintain the momentum of the 2030 Agenda and to provide guidance for national priorities to sustainable development goals either under national sustainable development strategies or other adequate strategic frameworks under the national planning system for the horizon 2030.

The new strategic sustainable development framework to be aligned to the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region should pursue environmental security as the priority of the region, taking into account conventional and unconventional threats to human security. Six southern and eastern Mediterranean countries are considered currently fragile and conflict-affected countries and need to be targeted by adequate policies under this strategic framework, especially for southern and eastern Mediterranean countries where human well-being would have been harmed, economic development slowed down, and natural resources submitted to further pressures caused by humanitarian situations, refugee's movements and camping. Environmental degradation cost assessments should be added to the cost of conflicts⁸ (occupation, war, civil war and terrorism...) and their spillover impacts⁹ in order to conceive for the future responses in terms of new sustainable development strategies for resilience and alternative sustainability pathways based on the "blue scenario" as underlined above.

All these pressures are environmental in nature and related to natural capital assets. A comprehensive perception should be built upon different forms of capitals: To the natural capital, we have to add the human capital, the industrial, financial and social capital for sustainability assessment in the Mediterranean and Arab regions. Therefore, we can conclude to inequality among and between Mediterranean and Arab countries in terms of human well-being, quality of life and other socio-economic performances as an additional threat exacerbating pressures in the region beyond inequality related to natural assets¹⁰. Ways forward to enhance awareness

about the need to assess the value of ecosystems and to dispose of a natural capital accounting system in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries should be explored, especially in the context of Arab region where neither comprehensive nor thematic assessments on biodiversity and ecosystems services are available.

Current initiatives such WAVE and the involvement of other UN entities and programmes were not successful to trigger the expected change for the implementation of new UN Economic-environmental accounting framework of 2012 in the Arab region. Data revolution couldn't have true perspectives in this part of the world if such initiatives wouldn't have been implemented in the near future. Indeed, further efforts should be undertaken for strengthening the science-policy interface for decision making processes. Environmental Policies Reviews (EPR) in southern and eastern Arab Mediterranean countries should be conducted by UN commissions, notably UNECE (UN Economic Commission for Europe) and UN-ESCWA (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia)

The review of the Mediterranean sustainable development strategy and the proposal of a strategic framework for the horizon 2025 provided some useful insights for the endorsement of the regional strategic framework on sustainable development in the Arab region and especially for its expected first action plan. National strategic frameworks on sustainable development are needed for realistic options to be endorsed at the regional level and against which progress could be measured periodically through adequate monitoring system. Ideally, a reporting system should be conceived for accountability under a three-level approach for a follow up and review mechanism on sustainable development.

Moreover, a horizontal solidarity between the Mediterranean region and Arab States could build on joint programmes and new initiatives for capacity building, especially in Arab Mediterranean countries and could benefit from experiences, researches, knowledge and success stories in the North of the Mediterranean region. A joint regional initiative for strengthening sustainable development could structure a new partnership Med-Arab region, aiming at mobilizing climate finance and innovative financing mechanisms for the promotion of sustainable production and consumption patterns and the transition to green economy in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, and renew the Euro-med process. New policies and regulations under the two regional strategic frameworks will offer a unique opportunity for revisiting the legal and institutional frameworks on sustainable development in the Arab region, and especially, in the Arab Mediterranean countries.

⁷ The proposal retained 2025 as a horizon for the Arab Strategic Framework on Sustainable Development.

⁸http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecri_editor/Download.asp?table_name=ecri_projects&field_name=id&FileID=48

⁹ ESCWA WORKING PAPER Beyond governance and conflict: measuring the impact of the neighborhood effect in the Arab region.
http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecri_editor/Download.asp?table_name=ecri_documents&field_name=id&FileID=272

¹⁰ Ways forward reducing inequality in order to boost growth as advocated recently by OECD

(<http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Focus-Inequality-and-Growth-2014.pdf>)

Toward the harmonization of legal and institutional frameworks on sustainable development in Arab states and their partners in the North of the Mediterranean

Compliance to the international and regional legal framework and Institutional building on sustainable development should mobilize new synergies for the 2030 agenda implementation in Mediterranean countries and their neighboring Arab States. The Arab region includes five main regional marine bodies of water. Each of these seas or oceans is guided by a regional conservation organization or programme, as well as a regional fisheries management arrangement.

Each marine area is tethered to its own set of challenges in relation to the misuse and/or degradation of marine resources; this differentiation stems from a diverse set of realities but ultimately leads to similar ends, in terms of adapting to and mitigating changes. Beyond fisheries management, the Barcelona convention with its different protocols offers a comprehensive regional legal framework that could inspire other sea programmes in the Arab world for the protection of marine ecosystems to be considered as a vital interest for food security and sustainable development.

The ambition shouldn't be only the unification of the legal regimes related to the seas and oceans protection under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) but also the adoption of the spirit of Barcelona convention and its arrangements for effectiveness such the compliance mechanism and the reporting system on progress related to the implementation of the different protocols. In addition, adopting and adapting the spirit of UNECE conventions on trans-boundary environmental risks in and to the Arab region, starting by Arab Mediterranean countries, could mobilize UN actors from the two regions, EU and probably European countries through an ambitious program for the Codification of Environmental Law in Arab Mediterranean countries, highly needed for compliance to Barcelona Convention at the national level and for the effectiveness of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements at the regional level. The UNECE legal frameworks, especially on environmental trans-boundary issues should influence the national legal systems in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries¹¹.

Under the expected new Development Agenda, special needs for capacity building on data and Sustainable Development Indicators should be pointed out in the context of southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The state of environment is one of reporting tool on sustainable development and should be undertaken under the integration principle of UNEP¹². However, measuring sustainable development through human well-being,

despite the fact that it would be difficult for Arab Mediterranean countries, could offer the opportunity to establish one of the data revolution prerequisites: The Economic-environmental accounting system as mentioned above, and could harmonize, national, regional and global sustainable development baselines and propose the needed measurement methodologies of sustainable development goals and targets for salience and comparability; and contribute therefore to capacity building on sustainable development statistics and accountability for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The ESCWA proposal of a comprehensive framework to monitor democratic governance with focus on the present circumstances and priorities of the Arab region ¹³should be the cornerstone of a regional monitoring system on sustainable development.

A Regional Observatory on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region is highly recommended and the League of Arab States (LAS), ESCWA and other UN entities and programmes could benefit from lessons learned from similar experiences in the Mediterranean for its design and establishment. Furthermore, the endorsement by LAS of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development as a regional multi-stakeholder platform, will prepare progressively further steps for performing the institutional framework on sustainable development in the Arab region under LAS. The transformation of the Joint Committee on environment and development (JCDAR) into a Regional Commission on Sustainable Development will contribute to coherence with the global level under the HLPF and should benefit from lessons learned from the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Commission.

Supportiveness between the two regional institutional frameworks on sustainable development needs to be recognized under an ad-hoc arrangement: A Mediterranean-Arab Council on Sustainable Development. This option will contribute to the implementation of the two strategic frameworks on sustainable development bridging institutions at all levels, ensuring coherence for country-led follow up and review to the HLPF and the role of regional institutions and especially UN regional commissions in providing support through capacity building programmes to their member countries for such reviews of sustainable development policies.

To tap its whole potential, the "blue scenario" of MEDPRO, will need strong and effective institutions on sustainable development, coherent and realistic strategic framework on sustainable development at all levels and new partnership based on an anchored conviction that since Mediterranean peoples are sharing this vital space, they are sharing common risks and burdens. The crisis of today shall be perceived as an opportunity to establish a durable peace and to sustain development.

¹¹ Reference should be made to UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.

¹² For more information see the following link: <http://www.nrg4sd.org/news/unep-post-2015-briefing-notes>.

¹³ ESCWA report: From Government to Governance: How Will the Arab Region Meet the Goals of Sustainable Development in the Post 2015 Period?

