

## Preface

*Arab Environment: Future Challenges* is the first annual report produced by the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED). The policy-oriented report is designed to evaluate the progress made towards the realization of sustainable development goals and a good environmental quality. It also examines the Arab contribution to global environmental endeavours.

AFED was proclaimed as a regional non-governmental organization in June 2006, at the conclusion of a conference on Public Opinion and the Environment, organized in Beirut, Lebanon, by *Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia* (Environment & Development) magazine. The conference deliberated on the results of a pan-Arab survey tracing the environmental views of the public in Arab countries. The outcome has been reflected in AFED's mandate, which gave its work a demand-driven impetus. AFED aims at encouraging Arab societies to protect the environment and use natural resources in a sensible manner, ultimately resulting in sustainable development. The Organization has embarked on a wide ranging programme of activities, the main one being an independent periodic report on the status of Arab environment. The present report launches a series of other reports to follow, each of which will concentrate on specific topics of particular significance to the Arab region.

Alongside tackling major local and global issues and challenges, the outcome of the report is also meant to serve as a baseline for the state of Arab environment, in a manner that will allow measuring progress in the future. It has been developed to set benchmarks, by means of evaluating the state of the environment under different sectors. Moreover, the AFED report is meant to be independent, reflecting the views of the civil society, by relying on the wide participation of researchers and academic institutions, in consultation with active sectors of the society, while ensuring synergy with other initiatives.

The approach to preparing the report has been to build on existing knowledge of environmental issues. It stresses partnerships, takes advantage of ongoing monitoring and research. It promotes the incorporation of the traditional approach of a State of the Environment report into the design of policy-driven, science-based assessments, stressing major issues and challenges.

Based on analysis of the best data available, the report targets the general public as well as policy and decision makers in public and private sectors. Data has been collected from reliable national and international sources, and cross-checked with experts and research institutions. One of the main constraints in preparing this report has been a lack of reliable and coherent national data in various sectors. To overcome this difficulty, authors of the different chapters were selected from among experts with extensive experience in their research areas, who could rely

on first-hand information directly from the field. Wherever possible, authors carried out field surveys to collect accurate and up-to-date data. Some countries of the region are not included in certain tables due to lack of data. Where data gaps still persist, the report tries to identify them in view of triggering further field and laboratory research, not only to collect and collate existing data but to establish permanent reliable monitoring centres and databases.

The Arab Environment Report attempts to answer five key questions:

1. How are environmental conditions in the Arab world changing?
2. What are the causes of environmental deterioration, and how is it linked to human activities and other stresses?
3. Why is environment a significant issue to the Arab world?
4. What is being done about it? How is society responding to the issues through public and private initiatives?
5. Are the measures taken to limit environmental degradation and deterioration of ecosystems enough?

The report provides an easily understood overview of environmental issues for the non-scientist without frustrating the scientific accuracy of the issues discussed.

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*The Editors*

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