



AFED Conference on Sustainable Development in Arab Countries

Recommendations for Green Economy and Sustainability in Rebuilding

Beirut, 11/11/2016

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) concluded its ninth annual conference, held at the American University of Beirut. The conference brought together about 500 delegates from 58 countries, representing 160 institutions from public and private sectors, universities, research centers and civil society.

AFED's secretary general Najib Saab cited draft recommendations which endorsed results of AFED report on *Sustainable Development in a Changing Arab Climate*, advocating the need to shift to a green economy in the Arab region and integrate principles of sustainable development within the anticipated rebuilding efforts.

The Conference recommended a series of measures that can help Arab countries achieve the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. It called for action to bring peace and security as a condition for the achievement of these goals. A long-term vision and executive strategy should be adopted, with priorities to push Arab economies in a green and sustainable path, and integrated policies that incorporate SDGs implementation with requirements to address climate change, including mitigation and adaptation. It was suggested to create a national body for sustainable development to ensure policy integration, follow-up and evaluation.

The importance of coordination and cooperation among Arab countries in achieving their development plans was emphasized, along with investing the comparative advantages of different Arab countries, especially their natural resources. Moreover, to address the major challenge of water scarcity and aridity, aggravated by climate change, Arab countries should embrace the water-food-energy nexus approach. Procedures and incentives should be agreed upon for the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production endorsed by the League of Arab States.

The Conference called for the introduction of measures for the greening of the financial sector and encouraging investment in green projects, including the issuance of green bonds, and the allocation of sufficient funding for research and development programs that support sustainable development. It recommended phasing out subsidies, while addressing negative impacts on low- and middle-income people. It pointed out the potential for attracting domestic resources to finance the implementation of SDGs, including national and regional development funds, government budgets and private sector.

The conference stressed the importance of strengthening the role of the private sector and civil society as partners in the government's efforts to achieve SDGs. It pointed the need

to adopt special measures in countries that are hosting refugees, to ensure their basic needs while maintaining the ecological balance, and to prepare appropriate conditions for their repatriation at the earliest opportunity.

The conference recommendations will be disseminated to Arab governments and agencies, and presented to the climate summit in Marrakech, Arab Ministers of Environment, and the League of Arab States.

Second Day Sessions

A session was held about the challenges of achieving sustainable development goals in Arab countries going through wars and conflicts. Results of a field study by Lund University, Sweden, were presented, featuring capacity building for Syrian refugees to engage in the process of development and reconstruction.

Education for sustainability was the topic of a session that emphasized the need to invest in human resources. This includes reviewing educational curricula at all levels, encouraging critical and creative thinking, and supporting research and development programs.

Health for sustainability was the subject of a session featuring the results of a study on the impacts of environmental health conditions on development in the Arab region, conducted by a team at AUB faculty of health sciences. The study urged the need to adopt an ecosystem approach to health and considered SDG3 "Health for All" goal a unifying regional sustainable development goal for wellbeing and survival in the Arab world.

52 students from 12 Arab universities, meeting at AFED's Future Environment Leaders Forum (FELF), presented a youth statement to the closing session. Arab NGO representatives also met and presented the civil society statement on sustainable development.

The closing session included a keynote address by Dr. Ferid Belhaj, World Bank director for the Middle East, about the WB role in the implementation of the SDGs in Arab countries.

A delegation of AFED board of trustees visited prime minister designate Saad Hariri and presented to him AFED's report on Sustainable Development. They discussed with him highlights of AFED conference and possible implications of Donald Trump's election on USA's commitments to the Paris Climate Accord.

Full AFED report on Sustainable Development in a Changing Arab Climate can be downloaded at www.afedonline.org

Photos:

- 1. Tarik Mitri talking about sustainable development in post conflict countries**
- 2. Najib Saab presenting AFED conference recommendations**
- 3. AFED Trustees with PM designate Saad Hariri**