Climate Change Governance and Cooperation in the Arab Region

Dr Aisha Al-Sarihi and Dr Mari Luomi

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The impacts of climate change do not recognise country borders. Addressing the challenge should therefore also involve transboundary responses. Regional governance and cooperation in the Arab region have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts). This EDA Insight explores ways in which advancing regional governance and cooperation can play a role in helping Arab countries address the challenge of climate change, and progress towards the Paris Agreement and SDGs.

Regional governance and cooperation can be particularly advantageous in the areas of: policy coordination and agenda-setting; research and sharing of knowledge and information; technical assistance and capacity building; and leveraging of finance. It can also take place at a sub-regional level or involve other definitions of ‘region’ (e.g. the Mediterranean or Islamic countries), and it should incorporate non-state actors. This Insight provides a detailed overview of both the current regional governance architecture and cooperative activities in the above-mentioned areas to date.

At present, the Arab region has in place the outline of an institutional architecture conducive to regional climate governance: the League of Arab States provides an umbrella for both high-level agenda-setting and technical cooperation; the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) offers support activities in most of the main areas of cooperation examined in this study; and a number of other regional organisations have been undertaking programmatic activities.

Despite these positive developments, the Arab region does not yet have in place any major action-oriented climate initiatives or partnerships. The analysis in this study suggests that a number of weaknesses in the existing regional and sub-regional arrangements have contributed to delaying action on climate change, including: a legacy of weak regional institutions; absence of clear implementation targets, defined roles and follow-up mechanisms; low levels of transparency and accountability of governance activities; limited focus on mitigation; and a siloed approach both within and across institutions.

Arab countries can take advantage of existing regional arrangements, but should work closely together to overcome the main weaknesses identified in this study, including by: enhancing sub-regional cooperation through strategic implementation initiatives; developing detailed regional action plans with clear targets and strategies, and defined roles for implementation, review and follow-up; adopting an integrated approach to climate change and the SDGs in regional governance; improving transparency on relevant regional governance activities and proceedings of meetings; and mobilising Arab development finance institutions to provide sustained funding for regional-level scientific and technical assistance initiatives and implementing climate action.
The Issue

Regional governance and cooperation in the Arab region have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts). Their potential, however, remains unexplored and unexploited. Over the past decade, attention to developments at the global level, on the one hand, and to implementation of climate action at the national level, on the other, has overshadowed attention to the regional level and its role in supporting national-level implementation of these global goals.1

The Arab region consists of 22 countries – 12 in West Asia and 10 in North Africa. It already suffers from aridity, recurrent drought and water scarcity, and is in many ways among the most vulnerable regions in the world to the potential impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Climate change may exacerbate existing social, environmental and economic pressures on various sectors, such as water, agriculture, infrastructure, aquaculture, health and tourism, and could significantly hinder efforts to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see Box 1 on next page).

Since the impacts of climate change do not recognise country borders, addressing them should also involve transboundary responses. This EDA Insight explores ways in which advancing regional governance and cooperation can play a role in helping Arab countries address the challenge of climate change and progress towards the Paris Agreement and SDGs.

In this paper, regional governance is defined as ‘more or less formal arrangements dealing with public issues and involving a wide range of participants,’2 most prominently governments, that takes place in a regional or sub-regional (e.g. economic bloc or ecoregion) context. In the Arab region, regional governance so far has mainly focused on the area of adaptation, which is reflected in the paper.3

Regional cooperation, in turn, refers to any cooperative activity undertaken in a regional context that is aimed at either reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (i.e. mitigation) or adapting or building resilience to the negative impacts of climate change.

The Insight starts with a discussion of the importance and benefits expected from enhancing regional governance and cooperation in addressing climate change. It then provides a background about the current regional governance architecture, followed by an overview of current mechanisms and dynamics of cooperation in various thematic areas. The paper then analyses the main weaknesses of the status quo and concludes with recommendations for governments and other stakeholders on how to support enhanced regional governance and cooperation in this area.

Importance of Regional Climate Governance and Cooperation

Regional governance and cooperation on climate change can play an important role in supporting the goals of the Paris Agreement and SDG 13, namely limiting global temperature increase to well below 2°C and increasing countries' adaptation capacities through fostering low-emissions development and climate resilience (see Box 2 on page 4).

There are various ways in which climate change governance and cooperation can take place in the regional or sub-regional contexts, including through climate change-specific initiatives (the EU emissions trading scheme for example), trade agreements, sectoral initiatives (e.g. the Africa Clean Energy Corridor) and, most commonly, through existing regional organisations.

Cooperation on climate change in developing regions often also takes place through initiatives coordinated by regional offices of UN and other global agencies, as well as through aid agencies and development financing institutions.

For climate action in the Arab region, the regional level is important, and can be beneficial, for various reasons:

- **Common challenges need common solutions:** The Arab region is bound together by a common language, culture and, to an extent, similar political systems and economic endowments. It also suffers from conflicts with transboundary causes and implications. Many of the negative direct and indirect impacts of climate change in the region also have transboundary impacts, ranging from shared water aquifers and marine environments to food security and migration, which means solutions often require cooperation across borders.4

- **Achieving global climate goals requires leaving no-one behind:** Despite the significant differences in income and development across Arab countries, there are important synergies in various areas where the wealthier and more stable countries stand to benefit from supporting the poorer and less stable ones – and vice versa. These include sharing of lessons learned and best practices, and provision
of climate-friendly finance, technology and capacity building support. Cooperation can also help achieve a ‘critical mass in the size of markets required to make policies’, such as carbon trading schemes or electricity grids.

- **Regional institutions can serve as an interface, convener and amplifier**: Regional-level organisations can serve as a ‘nexus to strengthen feedback loops from the national to the global levels, and vice versa’. Regional-level policy coordination processes can help create common visions and strategies, and develop shared measures of progress. They can also help in the articulation of regionally-shared interests and translation of global goals into regional circumstances. Furthermore, regional-level institutions and initiatives can facilitate horizontal interactions among specialised agencies and stakeholder groups and support multi-stakeholder engagement on regional-level policy issues. They can also help give a voice to weaker actors in the regional system, both states and non-state actors. Finally, they can help facilitate effective sharing of resources, technical expertise and knowledge from regional expert organisations and governments to those with less resources and capacities.

**Box 1: Transboundary Effects of Climate Change in the Arab Region**

The Arab region – stretching across more than 13 million square kilometres of Africa and Asia – covers a variety of climate zones and natural ecosystems ranging from arid deserts to forests and rivers. Climate models project that temperatures in the region may increase by 1.2°C–1.9°C by 2046–2065 and 1.5°C–2.3°C by 2081–2100 under a moderate case scenario, and 1.7°C–2.6°C and 3.2°C–4.8°C, respectively, under the worst case scenario. Such increases in temperature have implications on natural ecosystems, which are often borderless.

Thus, the impacts of climate change are likely to be felt across borders and shared resources. That is, climate impacts in one country could exacerbate risks in others, especially given the variance between Arab countries in terms of endowments of natural resources, and social and economic conditions. Examples of negative transboundary effects of climate change in the Arab region include:

- **Tension over water resources**: Extreme climate conditions, such as increased heat and evaporation, present additional stresses on water resources. Given that 66% of freshwater resources in Arab states originate from outside national borders and 14 out of 22 Arab states share a surface-water body, there is a growing concern that climate change may act as a catalyst aggravating water scarcity and tensions within and between the nations sharing hydrological resources, and geographical or political boundaries.
- **Public health**: In a region that already suffers from extreme temperatures even a small rise in temperature could expand the range of carriers of malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever, and other vector-borne diseases.
- **Desertification**: The expansion of the Empty Quarter desert (or Rub’ al Khali), which is part of Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and Yemen, along with increases in average temperatures, decreased annual precipitation, water stress and recurrent droughts, brings additional stress to agricultural areas and biodiversity. Similar impacts are expected from the expansion of the Sahara Desert which covers about 31% of Africa.
- **Deforestation**: Home to 12% of forests in the Arab region, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, and Djibouti are faced with the challenge of forest and biodiversity loss due to a combination of thermal and water stresses.
- **Coastal ecosystems**: Stretching along 22,105 km in the Arab region, they face high risk from projected sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion and loss of agricultural land and wetlands, which can in turn have a negative impact on tourism and fisheries, flooding and human displacement.
- **Conflict and human security**: Degradation of natural resources, especially stress on water resources, can in many ways contribute to conflict or insecurity. Climate change is particularly challenging for weak states and countries in conflict, as it can worsen conditions on the ground, leading to further instability, as well as forced migration.

Regional cooperation is necessary to minimise the conflict-catalysing effects of climate change:
The Arab region has a history of long-running social and religious conflicts and disagreements. Climate change could exacerbate existing challenges in parts of the region with low levels of socio-ecological resilience, contributing to potential conflicts over natural resources (e.g. water) or refugee crises.3

Having regional platforms of governance and cooperation that integrate climate change early-warnings and knowledge can help to avoid or quickly resolve disputes.

Regional governance and cooperation can be particularly advantageous in the areas of: policy coordination and agenda-setting; research and sharing of knowledge and information; technical assistance and capacity building; and leveraging of finance. It can also take place at a sub-regional level or involve other definitions of ‘region’ (e.g. the Mediterranean or Islamic countries), and it should incorporate non-state actors. These areas are explored in more detail in the sections below.

Status of the Regional Governance Architecture10

This section maps out the regional climate change governance architecture in the Arab region. Given the scarcity of literature and information about related institutions, the authors have gathered the information through stakeholder interviews and from official documents and websites of the respective institutions. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the main regional organisations as well as their relevant sub-sections and cooperation mechanisms involved in climate change governance, at three levels: regional, sub-regional and inter-regional. The table also includes information about the mandate of the organisation or relevant sub-entity and lists some of their main plans, initiatives and regulatory instruments.

Box 2: The UN Goals on Climate Change

Two 2015 global landmark agreements established the goals for combatting climate change at various levels, from national through regional to global: the Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 13.

The Paris Agreement, which was adopted by consensus by 196 countries in 2015, applies to all countries that are parties to it. As of June 2019, 21 Arab countries had signed the agreement and 18 had become party to it. Worldwide, a total of 186 countries were party to the agreement – Arab countries have the highest rate of non-parties of all regions (18%).

The Paris Agreement, which will be implemented from 2020 onwards, sets various important global targets for averting dangerous climate change, including: limiting global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C by reaching a global peak in emissions as soon as possible and net-zero emissions in the second half of the this century; increasing adaptation and resilience to climate change, and fostering low-emissions development; and ensuring sufficient finance is available to support climate-friendly development pathways.

The SDGs, which were unanimously adopted by the UN Member States through UN resolution A/RES/70/1, apply to all countries, at all levels, including at the regional level. SDG 13 includes a total of six targets, of which three are so-called means of implementation targets (intended at facilitating SDG outcomes, including through finance, technology and capacity building). The other targets focus on building human and institutional capacity and policy mainstreaming. SDG 13, “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”1a has the following targets:

- 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries
- 13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
- 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
- 13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible
- 13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.
### Table 1. Regional-level Climate Change Governance Architecture in the Arab Region

Sources: Compiled by the authors from websites and official documents of the organisations and via stakeholder interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level/type</th>
<th>Organisation (and participating countries)</th>
<th>Sub-entity</th>
<th>Mandate</th>
<th>Main initiatives/plans/ regulatory instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Regional organisation** | **League of Arab States (LAS, est. 1945, all Arab countries)** | **Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) (est. 1986)** | Coordination and cooperation among Arab countries in all matters related to the environment and sustainable development. Organised in a similar way as other LAS ministerial councils, with a technical secretariat based at the LAS Department of Environment, Water, Housing and Sustainable Development in Cairo and an Executive Bureau meeting twice a year. | • The Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development (2002)  
• Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change (2007)  
• Resolution of the Arab Summit on Climate Change (2010)  
• Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020 (2010) and 2030 (2018)  
• Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change (2010-2020) |
| **Regional organisation** | **LAS (est. 1945, all Arab countries)** | **Arab Council of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology and Climate; Permanent Committee on Meteorology, Weather and Climate Risk Information Management Committee** | The council of ministers is mandated to support cooperation between Arab countries in areas of meteorology and climate change. The permanent committee is comprised of heads of statistical agencies, supported by a technical information management committee. It coordinates programmes and activities related to meteorology and climate change, including research, technical capacity and meteorological services. (Technical literature also suggests that there is/has been a Committee on Climate and Climate Change, established in 1992, under the Permanent Committee.) | • Integrated Strategy and Operational Plan for Arab Meteorological Services (2018–2030) |
| **Regional mechanism** | **LAS-related** | **LAS Arab Climate Change Negotiations Group** | Coordinates the Arab Group countries’ positions in the UNFCCC negotiations. | |
| **Regional organisation** | **Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC, est. 1968, 11 member countries)** | | Members coordinate during and around international climate change meetings. Publishes research on climate change and organises side events at UNFCCC meetings. | |
| **Regional entity** | **UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA, est. 1973, West Asia/18 Arab countries, but works on climate change with all Arab countries)** | **ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Section, Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies** | ESCWA works with its members on sustainable management of natural resources at the national and regional levels, with an emphasis on water and shared water resources, energy and efficient production and promotes commensurate economic policies. Also works with CAMRE, LAS and UNEP on climate change issues. Climate change-related activities have since 2018 been consolidated under the Centre for Climate Change Policies. | • Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (ESCWA-wide)  
• Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), among others |
| **Regional mechanism** | **ESCWA and UN Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA, scope: ‘West Asia’)** | **Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Climate Change (RCM TWG-CC, est. 2008), chaired by UNEP/ROWA, under the ESCWA’s leadership** | Enhancing streamlining of cooperation between UNs agencies in programme planning and implementation related to climate change, and assisting Arab countries in addressing their technical and capacity-building needs with a focus on regional activities. | Note: the RCM is currently inactive, awaiting the finalisation of the related UN reforms and their effect on regional priorities. |
| **Regional entity** | **UN Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS, all Arab countries)** | | Based in New York, coordinates UNDP regional programmes and country offices in 18 Arab countries. Scope of work: supporting institutional capacity to address the impacts of climate change; supporting local approaches to climate change adaptation; and enhancing resilience in water and food security, sea-level rise and coastal erosion, and sustainable energy. | • Arab Climate Resilience Initiative (ACRI) |
### Table 1. Regional-level Climate Change Governance Architecture in the Arab Region (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level/type</th>
<th>Organisation (and participating countries)</th>
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<th>Mandate</th>
<th>Main initiatives/plans/regulatory instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional organisation</td>
<td>Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC, est. 1981, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE)</td>
<td>Committee on Climate Change</td>
<td>The general regulations provide a framework of the basic rules for environmental conservation and protection. They provide unified policies and regulations to foster environmental protection and ensure balance between economic development and natural resources in the GCC member states. A number of more specific ‘reference laws’ have been issued since, including on hazardous wastes, air and water quality and ozone-depleting materials.</td>
<td>• General Regulations of Environment in the GCC States (1994-1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional organisation</td>
<td>Regional Organization for the Protection of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA, est. 1995, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen)</td>
<td>PERSGA Program for Adaptation to Climate Change</td>
<td>Based on the programme’s webpage, its aim is to establish a dynamic regional system of adaptation to unavoidable changes of climate through assessing and mapping vulnerability of coastal and marine environments, promoting capacities and developing efficient observation systems, among other things.</td>
<td>Note: The current status of the climate change programme is unclear: the last available update regarding the adaptation programme found by the authors is from 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional organisation</td>
<td>Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME, est. 1979, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE)</td>
<td>Regional Task Force on Climate Change Dimensions in ROPME Sea Area</td>
<td>ROPME assists member states in the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols, as well as a number of projects, covering environmental assessment and environmental management, including public awareness and training.</td>
<td>Note: The status of the climate change task force is unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional organisation</td>
<td>Arab Maghreb Union (AMU, est. 1989, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The AMU's sustainable development charter sets aims, including establishing efficient land policies for soil conservation and food security, combat desertification (including at sub-regional level), supporting environmental protection in Sahara and the protection of water resources overall.</td>
<td>• Maghreb Charter For Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-regional organisation</td>
<td>Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC, est. 1969, all 22 Arab countries are members out of a total of 57)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The scope of the OIC has expanded from political issues to human development-related ones. The current strategic framework for 2025 includes 8 priority areas and 107 goals, which aim to position the OIC as an effective partner for peace and development in the Muslim world and beyond.</td>
<td>• Islamic Action Programme to Benefit from Adaptation Funds and Clean Development Mechanisms • Strategy for Promoting Energy Efficiency and Clean and Renewable Energy Sources Use in the Islamic World (2009) • Strategy on Management of Disaster Risks and Climate Change Implications in the Islamic World (2010) • OIC-2025: Program of Action • OIC – STI Agenda 2026 • UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Change (2014) • ClimaMed project (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-regional organisation</td>
<td>Union for the Mediterranean (UFM, est. 2008, 43 countries: 28 countries and 15 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, including the Maghrib countries)</td>
<td>UFM Climate Change Expert Group (UFM CCEG, 2014) and UFM working Group for Environment and Climate Change (2014)</td>
<td>The mandate of the CCEG is to: share experiences and knowledge about common climate action challenges impacting the region; stimulate discourses on climate action; and catalyse the identification, support and development of low-emission and climate-resilient development projects and initiatives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-regional agreement</td>
<td>Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention, 1975, 22 contracting parties)</td>
<td>Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas 2016–2025 (2016)</td>
<td>Defines a regional strategic approach to increase the resilience of the Mediterranean marine and coastal natural and socioeconomic systems to the impacts of climate change, assisting policy makers and stakeholders at all levels across the Mediterranean in the development and implementation of coherent and effective policies and measures.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The status of the climate change programmes found by the authors is from 2013.
Regional Level

The League of Arab States (LAS) acts as the main political-level organisation for governance of climate change in the Arab World. Of the UN agencies, the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) is by far the most active in this area and supports the 22 Arab countries in various ways (see next section).

The LAS Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) served for a long time as the main forum for high-level policy discussions. CAMRE operates through an executive bureau and is supported by a technical committee, the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR). CAMRE’s first major policy document on climate change was the Arab Ministerial Declaration from 2007, which called for mainstreaming of climate change into national and regional policies.

It also has in place an Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change 2010–2020, which identifies needed programmes in 11 sectors, in particular adaptation, capacity building and awareness raising, and provides guidelines for governments in addressing climate change at the domestic level.

LAS ministers have also approved two disaster risk strategies – the most recent one, the Arab Strategy for Disaster Reduction 2030 (from 2018), provides a framework for action in line with the capacities and needs of participating countries, specialised regional organisations and development partners.

More recently, in 2016, LAS members established an Arab Council of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology and Climate (ACMRMC), which is supported by a Permanent Committee on Meteorology, composed of leads of national meteorological agencies, and a technical Weather and Climate Risk Information Management Committee.

In the current institutional setting, CAMRE coordinates all matters related to environment and sustainable development, whereas ACMRMC works on issues related to meteorology and climate change. There are also records of a subsidiary Committee on Climate Change under CAMRE, established in 1992, and a negotiations Group serves as a forum for coordinating Arab countries’ UN climate change negotiating positions (see next section).

On the UN side, ESCWA has been playing an active role in coordinating climate and sustainable development activities between UN agencies and its members in the Arab region, in close partnership with CAMRE and its subsidiary bodies and other relevant LAS ministerial councils. Its most important governance fora in this area include the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, which is an annual high-level regional platform for coordination on pathways for implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development among various stakeholders. ESCWA is also the most active regional entity in building knowledge and capacity among the 22 Arab countries on various areas (see next section).

In 2018, ESCWA’s ministerial session approved the establishment of an Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies at ESCWA, which consolidates all work conducted by the commission in this area under one umbrella. The centre does not receive a core budget allocation, however, and, as of mid-2019, ESCWA was reaching out to potential donors to expand its activities and capacity into different areas, including migration, gender and the climate-disaster risk nexus.

Since 2008, a Thematic Working Group on Climate Change, led by UNEP/ROWA, coordinated the activities of UN and other regional organisations working on climate change in the region. However, the working group is currently not functional due to the ongoing UN Development System reform.

Also, working with 18 Arab countries, the UN Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS) has played an active role in coordinating UNDP regional programmes and providing support in the areas of climate change, disaster resilience and sustainable development.

Sub-Regional Level

Climate change governance at the different sub-regions of the Arab region is overall weak, reflecting in many cases the weakness of overarching governance frameworks. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has in place General Regulations of Environment, which provide a framework with general rules and regulations to guide environmental protection in line of economic and industrial growth strategies of the GCC members. The regulations, adopted at the ministerial level in 1997, which are the GCC’s only major environmental policy instrument, have not been updated since and do not reference climate change.

Similarly, in North Africa, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) is not known to be active in the area of climate change cooperation. In the Levant/Mashriq and Horn of Africa, there are no sub-regional organisations, which has translated into a total absence of sub-regional climate change bodies or initiatives in these parts of the region.
Climate Change Governance

The two sub-regional environmental conservation organisations organised around bodies of water, PERSGA (Red Sea and Gulf of Aden) and ROPME (Arabian Gulf) have both engaged on climate change to some extent: PERSGA has had a Program for Adaptation to Climate Change, and ROPME a Regional Task Force on Climate Change Dimensions, even if authors of this study were unable to verify if these remain active.

**Inter-Regional Level**

Arab countries have also been involved in partnerships that cross the boundaries of the Arab region and engage on the issue of climate change, most prominently the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean.

Already a decade ago, the OIC agreed to several action plans and strategies related to climate finance, sustainable energy and disaster risk and climate change impacts. More recently, it has issued two action plans that refer to climate change: the OIC Programme of Action 2025, from 2016, which has environment, climate change and sustainability as one of its 18 priority areas; and the OIC Science, Technology and Innovation Agenda 2026, published in 2017, which contains a recommendation to establish an advisory group of member states to prepare a detailed action plan for climate change in line with the Paris Agreement.

In the Mediterranean, the UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan system under the Barcelona Convention includes the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas, from 2016, which provides a ‘structured outline to facilitate the identification of strategic objectives... and priorities for adapting to climate change’.

Also, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which has nine Arab countries as members/observers, has working and expert groups focusing on climate change (est. 2014), which have been mandated to promote policy coherence and joint action. The UfM has also several climate-related initiatives both in the areas of mitigation and adaptation and coordinates climate-related activities across the Mediterranean region.

**Main Areas of Climate Change Cooperation**

This section reviews the main dynamics and activities in regional-level climate change cooperation in areas of: policy coordination (focused on UN negotiations); research and sharing of knowledge and information; technical assistance and capacity building; leveraging of finance; and non-state actors.

**Policy Coordination**

High-level political coordination on climate change takes place mainly through the LAS CAMRE/ACMRMC, albeit little information is publicly available about the proceedings. More recently, the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD), organised annually by ESCWA, has become an important coordination forum in the context of monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2019, LAS and ESCWA organised a Regional Consultation on Climate Change, which prepared inputs for the 2019 AFSD and the 2019 UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which call for, *inter alia*, enhancing cross-sectoral policy integration and regional coordination between countries.

In the specific context of the UN climate change negotiations, the Arab Group, which coordinates under the LAS Arab Climate Change Negotiations Group, has strong coordination and generally uniform positions. In addition to daily in-session meetings, the coordination group meets intersessionally. Oil-producing countries are generally more active than non-oil exporting Arab countries, which many perceive to reflect on the Arab Group’s negotiating positions.

OPEC and OAPEC also continue to provide an umbrella for their member states to coordinate climate change positions: OPEC has produced negotiations-related briefs and holds preparatory meetings prior to UNFCCC sessions. OAPEC members also coordinate around international climate change fora and have issued joint position statements.

No public records are available of GCC coordination, but stakeholders report some level of activity, including prior to the submission of the Paris Agreement pledges (‘NDCs’) in 2015. Also, four GCC countries were behind a COP decision (approved as 24/CP.18 and later incorporated into Paris Agreement Article 4.7) that recognises economic diversification as a possible frame for presenting countries’ climate actions to the UNFCCC.
Research and Sharing of Knowledge and Information

While a number of regional organisations have published ad hoc studies and reports on climate change in the Arab region, ESCWA and UNDP-RBAS have so far delivered the most substantive contributions, both in the area of adaptation and resilience:

- **RICCAR**, the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region, is a multi-year initiative coordinated by ESCWA and funded by Sweden and Germany. It has involved LAS, ESCWA and a number of other UN agencies and regional institutions, including LAS-affiliated Arab Center for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands. The project has developed regional climate models, and impact and vulnerability assessments in five water-dependent sectors, including infrastructure and human settlements and agriculture, and all project results have been made available via a Regional Knowledge Hub.

- **ACRI**, the Arab Climate Resilience Initiative of UNDP-RBAS, generated seven substantive research papers in the years 2010-2012 but, based on the initiative’s website, has been largely inactive since.

- **EU-GCC**: There has also been cooperation between GCC and EU climate change experts, and the EU-GCC Clean Energy Technology Network has for nearly a decade brought together energy stakeholders around events and joint research.

A number of regional institutions participate in the UNFCCC in their capacity of observer organisations, hosting ‘side events’ at COP sessions to share regional perspectives and exchange information. These include ESCWA, UNDP-RBAS, OAPEC and the GCC (the last at a dedicated pavilion, generally sponsored by Saudi Arabia).

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

ESCWA and UNDP-RBAS, along with the LAS, have similarly been the most active regional entities in supporting national capacities in various climate change policy-related areas:

- **ESCWA**, through its sustainable development and climate change teams, has been the most active entity in this area, with its work extending from scientific through technical to policy integration and negotiations support. It has since 2012 organised several RICCAR-related capacity building and information-sharing events, including training modules and a manual on climate change adaptation through water management. Since 2013, ESCWA has organised several capacity building workshops for Arab Group climate change negotiators. The team also receives and responds to several technical assistance requests from individual countries. In 2018, an ESCWA Ministerial Session approved the establishment of an Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies at ESCWA, which will focus on technical assistance, capacity building, regional consensus building on policy positions, promoting comprehensive solutions and serving as a knowledge hub.

- **LAS** provides the umbrella for the Technical and Scientific Committee for the Arab Climate Outlook Forum (ArabCOF, est. 2017), composed of experts working on seasonal forecasts to develop early warnings for the region and supported by ESCWA and the World Meteorological Organisation. According to climate negotiations stakeholders, LAS has also organised several training workshops on various issues related to climate change impacts and adaptation at its headquarters in Egypt (including jointly with ESCWA), as well as in Saudi Arabia.

- **UNDP**, in collaboration with LAS, emphasises capacity development for implementing the Paris Agreement in the region. Under the ACRI, which had the aim of supporting the formulation of regional responses to climate change and facilitating cooperative adaptation, the UNDP convened a series of policy dialogues in the run-up to the Paris 2015 COP. In 2018, UNDP reported that an SDG-Climate Nexus Facility was under establishment in partnership with UN and regional organisations (and supported by the Swedish government) that would provide a ‘multi-country platform to support bottom-up local actions to achieve SDG 13’. At the time of writing no further information about the initiative was available. The UNDP also has country programmes in several Arab countries.

Leveraging of Finance

While there are a number of institutions active in the region working in supporting Arab countries through either direct climate finance or facilitating access to climate finance, efforts in this area are still thin and fragmented. The region ranks at the bottom in attracting international climate financing: according to the UNFCCC and ESCWA, out of the total international climate finance flows of US$681 billion in 2016, only about US$31 billion went to Arab countries.
No Green Climate Fund (GCF) Structured Dialogues, for example, have been held yet in the Arab region, and support to readiness or project proposal preparation remains ad hoc in nature, with ESCWA having organised some awareness sessions and supported individual countries in readiness. At the time of writing, out of more than 102 projects in the GCF portfolio, only a handful included country-specific project activities in Arab countries, including one in Bahrain, one in Comoros, two in Egypt and three in Morocco.

Of the major development banks, the World Bank has in place, since 2016, a MENA Climate Action Plan, which has an annual regional climate financing support target of US$1.5 billion going into three areas: water and food security; climate-resilience in cities; and lowering GHG emissions.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)-affiliated Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) has supported climate change-related projects by more than US$100 million. Overall, the bank has supported climate resilience-related projects in the water and agriculture sectors, and has cooperated with both ESCWA and UNDP, signing an MoU with the latter in 2016 on collaboration in several areas, including climate change.

Another major regional development fund, the OPEC Fund for International Development, does not include climate change in its main focal areas, but the fund has supported some renewable energy projects, mainly outside the Arab region. For Maghrib countries, small grants are available, inter alia, via the African Union’s NEPAD Climate Change Fund, supported by the German government.

**Non-State Actors**

Regional cooperation and networks of Arab non-state actors (academia, civil society groups, businesses and cities, for example) is overall weak and fragmented. Some of the civil society groups and research institutions participate in ESCWA meetings, but scarce information on other areas of engagement with regional governance suggests they are weakly integrated into intergovernmental cooperation at the regional level.

Among the most notable examples of research-oriented organisations with a regional scope that have published on climate change are the Arab Forum on Environment and Development (international NGO based in Beirut), the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED, NGO based in Cairo), the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (intergovernmental organization with diplomatic status hosted in Cairo), the Arab Water Council (regional non-profit organization hosted in Cairo), the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (international not-for-profit organisation with diplomatic status headquartered in Cairo) and the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (network of 600 scientists with a secretariat in France).

In the area of climate change awareness raising and advocacy, the Arab Youth Climate Movement, established in 2012, has a small presence across the region and coordinates in the UN climate change negotiations as part of the global umbrella organisation Climate Action Network, which also lists several other national environmental NGOs from the region as its members. Arab civil society organisations, generally however, do not have a strong presence in the UNFCCC COPs or a focus on influencing national-level climate change policymaking.

There are some examples of business councils and groups working in more than one Arab country that focus on climate change-related sectors, including Dubai based Clean Energy Business Council and Middle East Solar Industry Association, but no major and established region-wide business coalitions. In the area of sub-national governments, to the authors’ knowledge, there are no established regional networks or fora for cooperation on climate change, even though two cities from the region, Amman and Dubai, participate in the global C40 cities’ climate initiative.

**Weaknesses of Regional Climate Governance and Cooperation**

At present, the Arab region has in place the outline of an institutional architecture conducive to regional climate governance: the LAS provides an umbrella for both high-level agenda-setting and technical cooperation; the ESCWA offers support activities in most of the main areas of cooperation examined in this study; and a number of other regional organisations have been undertaking programmatic activities, including the UNDP–RBAS and UfM.

Despite these positive developments, the Arab region does not yet have in place any major action-oriented climate initiatives or partnerships. While this can be argued to mainly stem from the generally low political prioritisation of climate change on the regional agenda,
the analysis in this study suggests that a number of weaknesses in the existing regional and sub-regional arrangements have also contributed to delaying action on climate change and, hence, progress toward achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and SDG 13. These include:

**Legacy of weak regional institutions:** Compared to some other regions, due to the region’s legacy of conflict and ever-shifting alliances, the LAS does not exert as strong a coordinating role in regional policies and initiatives. This same legacy has also pushed cooperation on environmental (and climate change) issues down on the policy agenda. Despite some experts suggesting that ‘cooperation and integration of institutions and policy objectives [in the Arab region] is most likely to... flourish at the sub-regional level’, evidence points to the contrary. Sub-regional environmental regulations of both the AMU and GCC date back to the 1990s. They have not been updated since and do not address climate change (see Table 1). In North Africa, this is due to the Arab Maghreb Union not being able to deliver on its mandate overall. However, cooperation in the Mediterranean context, driven by the EU, has been stronger. In the GCC, cooperation has been prioritised in other areas, which suggests climate change simply remains a relatively low priority for the bloc’s countries.

**Absence of clear implementation targets, defined roles and follow-up mechanisms:** As demonstrated by Table 1, a sufficient backbone of regional declarations and regulations is already in place. Yet, while these documents are the result of intergovernmental consultation and dialogue, publicly available information and stakeholder interviews suggest that their translation into national policies and implementation is very weak. Clearly-defined regional implementation targets, strategies and plans are absent. The LAS Climate Action Plan 2010–2020, for example, provides guidelines for national-level climate action, but leaves the specifics of implementation up to individual countries. Furthermore, existing plans and regulations do not delegate clear responsibilities for implementation, and mechanisms for systematic review and follow-up are absent.

**Low levels of transparency and accountability of governance activities:** Most regional and cross-regional organisations, such as the LAS and ESCWA, hold regular meetings to discuss climate-related issues. However, interactions with stakeholders from the region suggest that the roles, membership and scope of activities of the different regional governance bodies are generally not well-understood beyond a small group of high-level officials and technocrats. Moreover, while the agendas, participants and outcomes of most bodies’ meetings are documented and often made publicly available, involvement of non-state actors in these processes is weak (ESCWA being an exception to some extent). Information about regional governance activities is in general difficult to find and highly-fragmented across the websites of various organisations.

**Limited focus on mitigation:** The Arab region has a special relationship with the issue of mitigation, which relates to its overall high economic dependence on fossil fuels and its limited historical contribution to global GHG emissions (2.5% of total CO₂ emissions since 1850). The LAS Arab Group’s general position is that its contributions to global emissions reduction shall reflect the principle ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ and the ‘special national circumstances’ of its countries. This has led to a prioritisation of adaptation on the regional agenda and, consequently, most existing regional cooperative efforts are focused on adaptation. To date, the Arab region does not have a shared, aspirational GHG target, nor does it have regional regulations to achieve such target. As the world moves towards a lower-emission economy, mitigation policies will become an increasingly important instrument for Arab countries in maintaining competitiveness in the global economy.

Further challenges at the regional level include a siloed approach both within and across institutions: in the LAS architecture, the sectors most affected by climate change – water, food and energy – are dealt with by separate ministerial bodies. Cooperation is also weak among the two major UN regional organisations UNDP and ESCWA. Furthermore, stakeholders have identified a need for further coordination of regional organisations’ activities with UN country teams. A siloed approach to climate change is also characteristic of national-level institutional settings in many Arab countries.

Cooperation is also hindered by uneven capacities to engage with global climate governance: the authors’ experience suggests that institutional capacity to engage with the UNFCCC and other major international climate fora (in particular depth of technical expertise, and availability and permanence of human resources), remains weak in the majority of Arab countries, leading to an imbalance of representation of interests at the regional level.

There has also been low engagement on technology transfer and climate finance: joint activities in these areas, which are key sources of means of implementation for the region’s poorer countries, remain sporadic.
Finally, dependence of joint activities on extra-regional donors is a source of discontinuity: most projects, including RICCAR and the SDG-Climate Nexus Facility, have been funded by non-Arab donors. Also, upscaling of the activities of the newly-established ESCWA Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies is likely to depend on support from these traditional donors.

**Policy Recommendations – Towards Improved Governance and Cooperation**

Regional climate governance and cooperation mechanisms are still far from effective enough to meet Arab countries’ future needs. One important observation drawn from this study is the lack of dedicated regional organisations and mechanisms that facilitate the implementation of climate action. To date, regional governance and cooperation in the Arab region has largely focused on assessment studies, sharing of knowledge and capacity building, and has not yet directly supported and enabled implementation on the ground.

To enhance effective climate action, the Arab countries can take advantage of existing regional arrangements, but should work closely together to overcome the main weaknesses identified in this study, as follows:

- **Sub-regional cooperation:** Identify strategic implementation initiatives (similar to the Africa Clean Energy Corridor or SIDS Lighthouses Initiative) for each of the main regional sub-groups, based on common priorities, for example: regional power markets (GCC and Maghrib); climate security and livelihoods (Maghrib/Least Developed Countries); climate-resilient water sectors (Mashriq); and climate-smart agriculture (Least Developed Countries).

- **Strategic approach to implementation:** Develop detailed action plans with clear targets and strategies, and defined roles for implementation, review and follow-up. A dedicated LAS committee to follow up on the implementation of action plans could encourage further commitment.

- **Policy and institutional integration:** Adopt an integrated approach to climate change and the SDGs in regional governance; related policies and work by relevant regional institutions should be coordinated and streamlined. This can help pool resources, avoid duplication of efforts, enhance domestic-level climate and development policy mainstreaming and encourage a more opportunities-oriented approach to both adaptation and mitigation. Consider setting up a coordination mechanism among the different LAS bodies that work on issues related to climate change.

- **Improved transparency:** Establish a web-based platform for documenting relevant regional governance activities and proceedings of meetings. Include a dynamic listing of links to technical assistance resources and scientific data. Proactively communicate with all stakeholders, including on participation opportunities for non-state actors.

- **Leveraging climate finance:** Issue a call (either through LAS or ESCWA’s ministerial session) for Arab development finance institutions to provide sustained funding for both regional-level scientific and technical assistance initiatives, as well as for implementing climate action, while recognising the developed countries’ responsibility to lead in providing climate finance to developing countries. Opportunities are significant: in 2015, Arab donors provided US$12 billion in net official development assistance (ODA), of which a third went to the energy sector and one-tenth to the water and agriculture sectors each.\(^4\)
Endnotes


3. It is important to recognise the various interlinkages of climate change and SDG 13 with the other SDGs. These interlinkages can either be mutually reinforcing or they can lead to tradeoffs. Renewable energy and energy efficiency (SDG 7) is an example of an SDG where most interlinkages are synergistic. Another EDA Insight in the same series focuses on regional governance of sustainable energy and SDG 7. SDG 13 also is closely related to SDGs 2 (food), 4 (water) and 14 and 15 (biodiversity), as climate change has negative impacts on all four and, consequently, effective adaptation can support progress in these other SDGs, and vice versa.

4. There are significant differences in both socio-economic and geographic contexts between different regions, which means that different mitigation and adaptation options are suitable to different regions. Agrawala et al., Regional Development and Cooperation, p. 1089.

5. Ibid., p. 1089.


7. See e.g. UNeca, ‘Climate Governance and Climate Policy in Africa’, website, accessed in May 2019.


10. When a source is not referred to, information in this section comes from one of the following sources: Table 1 of this paper; and stakeholder inputs, obtained through phone interviews in May 2019.


16. The Subregional Office for North Africa (SRO-NA), part of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which supports seven Arab countries, is now not known to be active in the area of climate change. According to its website, the SRO-NA supports achieving structural transformation and balanced development through implementation of an environment conducive to the creation of employment for women and young people, including by strengthening national capacities to implement policies, contributing to the implementation of subregional development priorities, and providing technical assistance.


18. According to Allouche, the AMU has been dysfunctional due to mistrust between its members who, because of divisions following the Cold War, have preferred to cooperate elsewhere and have fostered memberships with other integration blocs. Yasmina Allouche, Regional Power Rivalry and the Failure of the Arab Maghreb Union, TRT World Research Center, 2019.


24. When a source is not referred to, information in this section comes from one of the following sources: Table 1 of this paper; stakeholder inputs, obtained through phone interviews in May 2019; and authors’ personal observations (particularly related to the UNFCCC).


27. Examples include a workshop on the issue of response measures organised by Saudi Arabia and capacity-building workshops organised jointly with ESCWA, during which the LAS group coordinates on common positions. Stakeholders have described Saudi Arabia as the
country most often leading in this context and Egypt as another active country.


33. ECOSOC, Proposal for the Establishment of an Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies at ESCWA, E/ESCWA/30/8, 28 May 2018, p. 4.

34. Ibid.


36. Also, ACCWaM, the Adaptation to Climate Change in the Water Sector in the MENA Region Program, focused in the first half of the 2010s on climate change adaptation capacity development for water sector institutions, with a specific emphasis on Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. GIZ. Regional Technical Cooperation Programme: Adaptation to Climate Change in the Water Sector in the MENA Region (ACCWaM), 2012.


38. The UNDP also collaborates on climate change-related projects with the Arab Water Council (AWC) and the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE).

39. ESCWA, Access to Climate Finance in the Arab Region, Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 AFSD and HLPF, 21 March 2019, PPT presentation.

40. The GCF Structured Dialogues ‘share knowledge about how to use public investment to address climate change and stimulate private finance, […] enhance understanding about GCF, [and] stimulate thinking on how to drive national and regional momentum on climate action’. GCF, ‘GCF Dialogues’, webpage, accessed in May 2019.

41. Also, the UNDP reported in 2018 that in the early 2010s, UNDP’s ACRI had provided small grants to Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan to support the preparation of project submissions to the GCF. UNDP and GEF, Climate Change Adaptation. p. 33.


44. OIC. OIC-2025: Progress Report, p. 24. The IsDB’s total climate finance flows will be reported for the first time in the 2018 Joint Report on Multilateral Development Banks’ Climate Finance.

45. UNDP and GEF, Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States, pp. 33–34.


50. This, in turn, leads to an absence of a process of ‘learning by doing’, which would ensure regular revision and updating of existing regulations, plans and initiatives and keeping up with changing dynamics of international climate and environmental regulations.


52. Table 1 shows that only the UFM has focused on mitigation along with adaptation. Other regional organisations such as the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE) have worked on capacity development and learning, policies and regulations, research and statistics, and technical assistance in the areas of renewable energy or energy efficiency, but these are not necessarily framed as climate change mitigation activities. Cooperative efforts that support clean energy and energy efficiency are analysed in detail in another paper in this series, which focuses on SDG 7.

53. The Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC), the Arab Ministerial Council for Electricity (AMCE) and the General Assembly of Arab Ministers for Agriculture (GAAMA), as well as CAMRE and ACMRMC. While the water–energy–food nexus thinking has gained some traction and presents an opportunity for integration among sectors and issues, there is not yet evidence of such collaboration between these entities. Planetary Security Initiative and AUB, Enhancing Regional Cooperation in the MENA through the Water–Energy–Food Security Nexus, April 2017, pp. 5–7.
