

### Project Summary

This EDA-led research project examines potential for improved environmental governance in the Arab region that supports the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by:

- Providing an update of existing cooperation and governance efforts and exploring potential for further cooperation and improved governance in five critical areas for the Arab region: food security; water security; sustainable energy; climate change; and biodiversity conservation; and
- Proposing possible ways for governments (particularly the United Arab Emirates) and other regional stakeholders to further support stronger environmental governance in the region, which is key not only to sustainable development but peace and stability as well.

### The Issue

- In any part of the world, achieving sustainable development is no longer possible without addressing environmental sustainability. This has been recognised in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which brings together the global environmental and development agendas in 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a number of which are directly or indirectly related to the environment and natural resources. These include SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land).
- Given the transboundary character of most environmental challenges, sustainability requires both strong governance frameworks and close cooperation. While there has been significant interest since the 1990s in global environmental governance, regional governance has received less analytical and academic attention. Regional governance, however, has various advantages, as it enables a more focused approach to shared challenges and opportunities.
- The Arab region faces significant challenges in all major environmental and natural resource-related SDGs, particularly in relation to food, water and climate change, but also biodiversity conservation and sustainable energy (see e.g. SDSN and Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Sustainable Development Report 2019*). Many of these are shared or have spillover effects across national boundaries.
- The environment generally features low on the policy agenda and, despite some improvement over time, collective engagement on environmental issues at the regional level remains weak, characterised, according to some, by 'periodic summits with limited follow-up'.<sup>1</sup> Focus has been mainly on a small number of issues, primarily water security and desertification.<sup>2</sup>

- In many parts of the Arab region, a ‘legacy of conflict’ and persistent geopolitical tensions both push environmental issues down on the policy agenda and complicate intergovernmental cooperation at the regional and sub-regional levels. At the same time, environmental challenges are becoming increasingly complex and acute and, in many cases, addressing them will be a prerequisite for stability in the region. Water scarcity and climate change are prime examples.
- At present, there is a dearth of up-to-date studies that take a systematic approach to the topic at hand. In addition, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs offer a new frame for thinking about development objectives and policy, and provide new opportunities for environmental and natural resource cooperation at various levels.

## Project Outcomes

- The two major policy-relevant contributions of this project will be to:
  - Generate new ideas for improving regional environmental governance both vertically (within sectors and issues) and horizontally (by identifying the factors that hinder and enable regional environmental governance and cooperation across the board); and
  - Articulate regional environmental governance challenges and opportunities through the SDG framework.
- The project will comprise six EDA Insight briefing papers, authored by regional experts and published in 2019, on:
  - SDG 2 & food and agriculture;
  - SDG 6 & water;
  - SDG 7 & sustainable energy;
  - SDG 13 & climate change;
  - SDGs 14-15 & biodiversity; and
  - Summary of the findings.

1. Gerald Stang. *Climate Challenges in the Middle East: Rethinking Environmental Cooperation*. MEI Policy Paper 2016-2. Middle East Institute, May 2016, pp. 7-14.

2. Dora Kulauzov and Alexios Antypas. ‘The Middle East and North Africa: Sub-Regional Environmental Cooperation as a Security Issue.’ In: Lorraine Elliott and Shaun Breslin (eds.). *Comparative Environmental Regionalism*. Routledge, 2011, p. 117.