



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Gender, Climate and Security in the MENA region

Stocktaking and Way Forward

Roundtable discussion at

STOCKHOLM FORUM
on Peace and
Development 2022

SUMMARY

As part of the 2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted a round table discussion entitled “**Gender, Climate and Security in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Stocktaking and Way Forward**” on May 25. The session addressed how women across the MENA region play important roles in managing climate-related security risks, took stock of the current challenges, and identified opportunities for further progress on women’s participation in the intersection of Gender, Climate and Security. This session was co-hosted by the Dialogue Institute and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

Recommendations that emerged from the discussion included:

- Ensuring more women’s representation at policy, negotiating, and decision-making levels;
- Establishing safe spaces for women and other groups to meet and discuss these issues;
- Enhancing the engagement with the private sector, and improving conditions for women’s economic participation;
- and Collecting more robust data and evidence of climate change, disaggregated by gender.

REPORT

On May 25, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa ([Dialogue institute - Sweden Abroad](#)) and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation hosted a round table discussion entitled “**Gender, Climate and Security in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Stocktaking and Way Forward**”. The session addressed how women across the MENA region play important roles in managing climate-related security risks, took stock of the current challenges, and identified opportunities for further progress on women’s participation in the intersection of Gender, Climate and Security. It was part of the 2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, co-hosted by SIPRI and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which focused this year on the theme “From a Human Security Crisis towards an Environment of Peace”, ([2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development | SIPRI](#)).

To set the scene for the round table discussion the Dialogue Institute and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation had invited a varied set of speakers: Eman Duwaik (Coordinator of the Palestinian Women Water Practitioners’ Network), Dr. Marisa O. Ensor (Gender and youth specialist, at Georgetown, US), Abdelazim Sultan (Ph.D. student in climate and gender and founder of a climate change initiative, Jordan). Their interventions were followed by a discussion with some 40 participants. It was moderated by Ambassador Charlotta Sparre, Director of the Dialogue Institute.

The discussion was set against the backdrop of challenges for women to have full access to participation in politics and society in the MENA region. Despite some progress on gender equality in the region, women are still largely excluded and absent from policy- and decision-making, due to a combination of factors, including legal, economic and practical barriers, as well as gender stereotypes and social norms.

“There may be up to 90 million IDPs in the MENA region by 2050 due to climate change.”

Dr. Ensor, who as a researcher has followed the region for many years, began by explaining the links between gender, climate and security, calling climate change a “threat multiplier”. She pointed to the rapid rate of climate change in the region, including water scarcity and sea level rises, which will make certain areas uninhabitable and could lead to the displacement of millions of people: “*There may be up to 90 million IDPs in the MENA region by 2050 due to climate change.*” Dr. Ensor reminded the audience that women are disproportionately affected, while government responses tend to be gender-blind and non-inclusive.

Abdelazim Sultan, who runs a climate initiative in Jordan, further stressed that men and women are impacted differently by climate change. His own engagement in the climate change movement reflected a realization that all genders should be included in discussions related to the climate and environment, and he emphasized the need for *“safe spaces for women and men to carry out dialogue together on these topics”*. Indeed, he underlined the need for capacity-building workshops for young men to provide them with education and tools on how to create gender balanced policies to ensure that women are included in climate change initiatives and projects. Sultan explained that conservative social norms may become particularly problematic in an era of climate change. In his research into the depiction of gender in climate fiction he has noted how men and women react and are impacted differently by climate change, depending on culture, geography, and socioeconomic status.

“There is a need for safe spaces for women and men to carry out dialogue together on these topics”

Eman Duwaik, who coordinates a women’s water network in Palestine, spoke of the particular challenges facing Palestinian women, with, for example, limited rainfall, water resources largely controlled by Israel, a long-standing occupation, and an educational system unable to provide sufficient knowledge about climate change. But she also recounted how the newly established Palestinian Women Water Practitioners’ Network, with the goal of amplifying women’s voices and promoting Palestinian women into senior management positions, is beginning to provide knowledge, data, and research opportunities to its members. She emphasized that *“national and international collaboration is crucial.”*

In the ensuing discussion, a women’s rights activist from the Kvinna till Kvinna foundation underscored the importance of addressing structural obstacles – *“Patriarchal structures, which consider women as objects that can be owned and exploited, need to be dismantled.”* In her view, *“women need enhanced capacity, and enabling environment,”* to drive real change. The challenges related to women’s mobilization in patriarchal societies was alluded to by several participants, whether the patriarchy came in the form of village elders at the local level, male-dominated governments or as underlying social norms and structures.

The lack of priority given to women's voices and climate change in the region, as well as the underlying patriarchal norms, was tragically illustrated by a Yemeni women's rights activist's retelling of an encounter with a former Yemeni President: *"When I asked him about women's rights in relation to climate change, he responded, 'This topic is not important now, my daughter. You should stop talking. You have always been a dreamer.'"*

A Tunisian environmental activist underlined the issue of providing adequate representation to women (and men) in rural communities: *"Funding and opportunities are much greater in the capital, as compared to the countryside."* This theme was reinforced by other participants. According to a Lebanese analyst, *"Local communities often lack a seat at the table, whereas the 'usual suspects' are represented,"* while a MENA regional analyst explained that *"Especially the needs of rural women are consistently under-represented."*

"Politicians don't know what it feels like to live in 50 degrees Celsius."

The Tunisian activist also spoke of the disparity between the decision-making elite, with resources to afford air conditioning, and the many who lack those means: *"Politicians don't know what it feels like to live in 50 degrees Celsius."*

The private sector's role in addressing gender disparities was also underscored, with mention made of efforts by various organizations in the region to support women-owned or women-led companies. By investing in capacity building and financial support, and ultimately seeking a better enabling environment, such initiatives have been shown to make a real difference for women entrepreneurs, innovators, and employees.

A researcher at Sipri reminded the audience that the countries in the region have some of the highest military expenditures in the world. In this context, the women, peace, and security agenda is seeking to prioritize a reduction of arms spending, and pushing also a broader human security agenda, including addressing gender equality and the consequences of climate change.

Several recommendations emerged from the round table discussion:

- Create conditions for enhanced inclusion of women at policy, negotiating, and decision-making levels.
- Establish safe spaces for women (and members of other potentially disenfranchised groups) to meet and discuss these issues, so as to identify gender-inclusive and contextualized solutions
- Break silos: seek more inclusive processes, incl. through inter-generational and inter-sectoral exchanges.
- Prioritize educational and advocacy efforts and adapt language and messaging to local contexts.
- Enhance the engagement with the private sector and improve conditions for women's economic participation, including better possibilities to open bank accounts and start businesses.
- Increase funding opportunities for women's organizations, incl. through more flexible funding mechanisms (it is especially challenging for small organizations to receive funding but also difficult to register organizations)
- Improve collection of more robust and relevant data and evidence of climate change, disaggregated by gender.

The Dialogue Institute will continue to support gender inclusive dialogues on climate change by:

- Continuing to adopt a gender lens in all its work.
- Further strengthening networks of environmental activists in the region, through meetings, workshops, seminars, webinars etc. to contribute to breaking existing silos.
- Building on collaboration within the regional gender-water network for the MENA region, created in 2021 and coordinated by the Dialogue Institute, to contribute to knowledge- and experience-sharing, as well as to advocacy for greater inclusivity and more effective gender mainstreaming.
- Looking into possibilities of contributing to highlighting the role of women (and youth), not only as vulnerable groups, but also as agents of change.