

Report from
Conference on Climate Vulnerability

Amman, 4 October 2023

Report from
**Participation in MENA Climate
Vulnerability Conference**

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Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Report

On October 4th and 5th, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a conference on ‘**Climate vulnerability in the MENA region**’, with support from Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The conference sought to address the intertwined nature of climate change-related challenges through a set of panels, each with a distinct focus and angle. It brought together a wide array of climate actors from the region.

The Dialogue Institute participated actively throughout the conference and the Institute’s Director Charlotta Sparre moderated a panel which addressed the regional governance challenges with regards to climate. In opening the discussion Sparre highlighted the region’s multilayered challenges and asked the panelists to reflect on the correlations between the impacts of climate change and socioeconomic vulnerabilities and governance deficits.

The panel convened four eminent experts: Safa’ Al Jayoussi, Regional Climate Justice Advisor for Middle East & North Africa at Oxfam International, Shada El-Sharif, Founder of SustainMENA, Marwan Muasher, Vice President for Studies at Carnegie and former Foreign Minister of Jordan, and Sarah Yerkes, Senior Fellow in Carnegie’s Middle East Program. Each panelist gave a brief presentation from the perspective of their respective areas of expertise, before opening up for a discussion with the broader audience.

In connection with the conference, the Dialogue Institute also hosted a roundtable discussion with participation from Carnegie Endowment, Sida, and the Arab Reform Initiative to discuss synergies and possible future areas of collaboration.



Panel discussion on “Climate - Governance and Policymaking Challenges Across MENA Region”

Climate justice

Speakers emphasized that the MENA region is a unique region with great political, cultural, and geographical diversity. They argued that while region is suffering severe consequences of climate change, not enough is being done to address the challenges with a holistic approach of economic, governance and social measures. They also reminded that some countries in the region contribute to the negative consequences of climate change and pointed to the special role and responsibility of fossil fuel producing countries.

They highlighted the need for a systematic approach to climate change and for climate justice and gender equality to be mainstreamed in all activities. It was argued that the civic space in the region must be expanded and that the work on intersectionality must seek to include more voices. The importance of promoting the participation of women, youth, and indigenous peoples in formulating climate action was underlined.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the climate issue is largely about consumer behavior and lifestyle – something that the region, according to one speaker, often overlooks. At the same time, vulnerable groups were described as having neither the opportunity nor the resources to change. Another problem brought forward was that of countries in the region not consulting with civil society before developing their NDCs.

Climate inequality

The panel also tackled how climate change contributes to exacerbating existing inequalities. Vulnerable groups in society, such as those working in agriculture and tourism, are disproportionately affected by phenomena such as rising temperatures and sea levels as well as reduced access to drinking water. Widespread drought leads to diminishing or non-existent harvests, devastating the agricultural sector on which many vulnerable people depend. Those of a low socio-economic status are also more vulnerable in terms of housing, which is less resistant to climate impacts, but also in terms of health; during heatwaves, death rates rise, and low-income people have fewer means of protecting themselves from the heat.

Moreover, in decision-making processes women are significantly underrepresented while being disproportionately affected by climate change, not only due to livelihood opportunities but also because of their limited capacity to take political action.

Governance and accountability

In addition to global effects of climate change, speakers addressed the region's governance deficit and pointed to governmental neglect, failed socioeconomic policies, and lack of transparent and inclusive processes. They pointed out the poor coordination between institutions both on the centralized and local levels and argued for an effective multistakeholder-based governance framework, which would require greater engagement with local communities, civil society, and private sector.

In addition, speakers highlighted the absence of meaningful, sustainable engagement on climate. Instead, they explained that much of climate policy occurs on an ad hoc basis. The panelists argued, however, that the implementation of climate action requires long-term commitment and cannot respond to minor incidents but must instead target the root causes of the climate crisis.

The issue of accountability was also brought up, illustrated for example by regional water scarcity. Even where water scarcity is not a 'natural' phenomenon, societies find themselves struggling to meet the water needs of their populations due to water mismanagement. Further, one speaker mentioned how governments apply a securitization framing to climate issues, which often serves to deflect responsibility rather than dealing with the urgent need for action.

Another obstacle that was underscored as hindering effective climate governance was the preference among decision-makers for short-term economic benefits rather than long-term economic development. Although a green transition might imply increased spending in the near future, it would ease economic conditions by making economies more resistant to climate shocks in the long term.

Climate nexuses

A central part of the speakers' interventions centered on the interrelationship between the climate crisis and a parallel set of issues, such as pertaining to the economic and political dimensions. The panelists argued that policy aimed at promoting environmentally sustainable practices must simultaneously account for the context-specific vulnerabilities of each society.

Panelists spoke of the issue of institutions working in silos on climate change, mentioning for example how the water-energy-food nexus requires organizations and agencies with distinct areas of expertise to join forces and formulate a collective coordinated response which considers each area.

The speakers argued that there is a fundamental need for public and private sector dialogue to apply a climate perspective, to encourage green innovation and ensure that climate strategies are not viewed as being at odds with growth and entrepreneurship.

Main takeaways

Some of the main takeaways from panel included the following recommendations:

- Develop climate policies in a holistic way, tackling the crisis from different angles in parallel.
- Prioritize long-term commitments to climate over policymaking on an ad hoc basis.
- Undertake governance reform to make climate policy more effective.
- Improve coordination between national and local levels, as well as between different sectors in society - civil society and the public and private sector.
- Identify mutually beneficial solutions where green solutions promote economic benefits, as this would strengthen the incentives for climate investments.
- Enhance national and international coordination for financing for climate policy, while enhancing development interventions which address the climate crisis.
- Promote work on awareness campaigns, in local languages, which reflect local contexts.
- Improve channels of communication with donors.

Roundtable meeting

In connection with the conference, the Dialogue Institute hosted a roundtable discussion with participation from Carnegie Endowment, Sida, and the Arab Reform Initiative. During the conversation, participants shared insights from within their respective areas of work, key findings, and main target groups. They noted a good level of complementarity and initiated discussions on possible future areas of synergies and collaboration.

To learn more about the regional MENA climate program run by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, see: [Climate Change and Vulnerability in the Middle East - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)