

Report from
Online Pre-COP28 meeting
“Sharing Experiences and Best Practices Ahead of COP28”
October 31st, 2023



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Executive summary

The Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online meeting on October 31st focused on "Sharing Experiences and Best Practices Ahead of COP28". The meeting was moderated by Martina Berglund, the Institute's Deputy Director.

The virtual discussion convened a wide array of stakeholders from the MENA region and Sweden, including a blend of first-time and more experienced COP participants across civil society, governmental, and private sectors. Objectives were to enhance connectivity, share preparatory best practices for COP28, and encourage policy dialogues relevant to climate change, with an emphasis on youth involvement and inter-regional collaboration.

The panelists offered varied perspectives on COP28 expectations, discussing the significance of strategic groundwork for future climate conferences, the centrality of climate finance, and the urgency of a just transition. They also addressed the nuanced challenges to achieving inclusive participation in climate action, advocating for substantial representation of youth and marginalized groups in decision-making processes and the incorporation of diverse lived experiences into the climate narrative.

Among the key points raised in the meeting was a stress on the importance of recognizing unique country-specific and local challenges and understanding that there is no "one size fits all". Solutions need to be tailored to the diverse nature of the MENA region for more effective outcomes to increase the likelihood of success, as interventions that resonate with the local people are more likely to be embraced and sustained.

Participants also underlined that policies and initiatives should transcend national agendas to focus on prioritizing shared goals that benefit countries globally. To achieve this, it is important to build trust and mutual understanding through dialogues, exchange programs, joint ventures, and engagement sustained over time. Such processes also need to be inclusive and take different needs, concerns, and perspectives into consideration. The importance of transparency and accountability was also highlighted.

Other points raised included a recognition of the links between climate, governance, and justice, as well as climate and security. Climate change can exacerbate issues like water scarcity, food insecurity, energy dependence, and conflicts. Climate loss and damage funds should be customized to meet specific country, especially in conflict-prone areas.

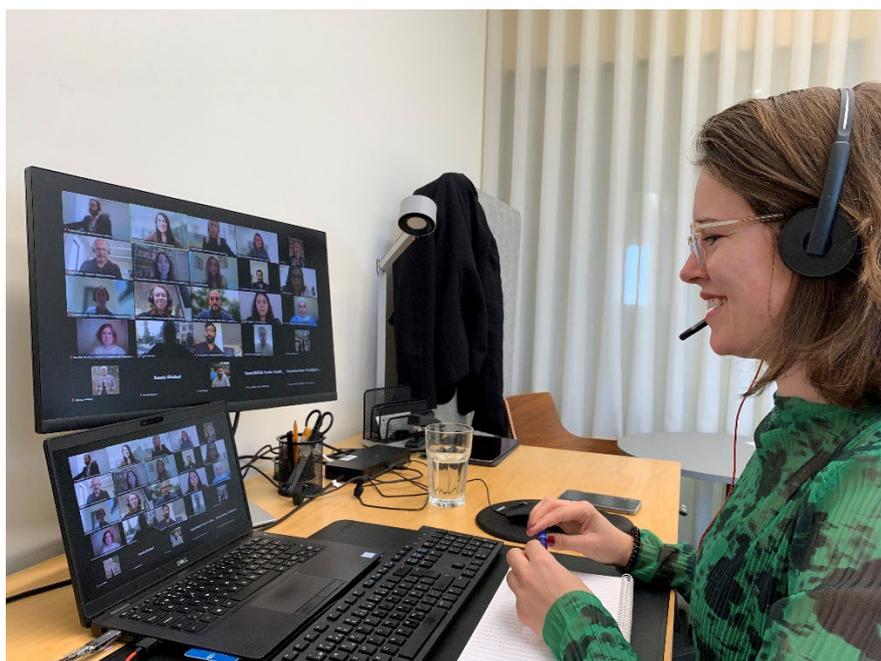
Detailed report

On October 31st, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online panel discussion titled "Sharing Experiences and Best Practices Ahead of COP28." The event gathered a diverse group of climate actors from various age groups and backgrounds representing the MENA region and Sweden. The meeting brought together both first-time and experienced COP attendees, coming from different sectors such as civil society, the public and private sectors, and the international community, all with the aim of exchanging experiences and insights in preparation for COP28 in Dubai.

The meeting's key objectives included enhancing connectivity and knowledge exchange among COP28 participants from the MENA region and Sweden, sharing best practices for COP preparation, promoting inter- and intraregional dialogues on climate change, and offering a platform for remote youth engagement.

During the introductory remarks, the Dialogue Institute highlighted its commitment to sustainable development as one of its key thematic areas. The Institute's director Charlotta Sparre shared information on previous work on climate, including the hosting of a similar [Pre-COP meeting](#) before COP27 and a follow-up meeting after COP27 titled [on the way from COP27 to COP28](#), as well as a panel on ["Women leadership in advancing the climate agenda"](#) in Abu Dhabi, and coordinating a water network focused on the intersection of gender, water, and security.

The meeting was moderated by Deputy Director Martina Berglund, who is in charge of the Institute's work on climate and environment. She informed participants that she would represent the Institute at COP28, participating together with the Swedish delegation. In preparing for the meeting, the Institute had collaborated closely with the regional development cooperation team at the Swedish Embassy in Amman.



Deputy Director Martina Berglund moderated the meeting.

Keynote remarks

The keynote speaker for the event was Ms. Kajsa Fernström Nåtby, Head of Section at the Swedish Ministry of Climate and Enterprise. She started by sharing her personal journey, with an initial participation at COP21 representing Swedish civil society, and later taking part in her role as a Swedish youth delegate on climate issues, and subsequently in official positions, addressing climate-related loss and damage. She pointed to the challenges she had faced during her first COP experience in Paris in 2015, highlighting the experienced complexity of the negotiations. She underscored the importance of thorough preparation and of having a clear plan before attending a COP events.

During her address, Ms. Fernström Nåtby shed light on the pivotal focus areas set for COP28. First and foremost, COP28 will mark a significant milestone as it will present the first Global Stocktaking of the implementation of the Paris Agreement. This process is a two-year process that happens every five years and involves a comprehensive assessment of each party's or country's climate action and its effectiveness on a global scale. Secondly, the conference aims to tackle the establishment and agreement on a framework for the loss and damage fund that was decided on at COP27. Finally, she emphasized the paramount importance of the just transition concept, which is poised to take center stage in climate action. Ms. Fernström Nåtby underscored the necessity of integrating principles of equitable and fair transitions into the national climate plans, development policies, and strategies of individual countries, ensuring that climate action benefits all segments of society and does not leave anyone behind.



Keynote speaker Kajsa Fernström Nåtby, Swedish Ministry of Climate and Enterprise.

Panel discussion

The keynote remark was followed by a panel discussion with panelists from Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, who shared insights on the anticipated outcomes of COP28 compared to previous COP meetings and discussed challenges to inclusive participation.

Expectations for COP28

Mr. Amjad Bany Issa, a Jordanian coordinator of regional initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between youth and policymakers, and an observer of the United Nations climate negotiations with a climate justice lens, said that COP28 is a pivotal moment for rallying a global climate action movement. While he did not expect significant decisions to emerge from COP28, he believed that the meeting would lay the ground for COP29, setting a strategic direction for countries to synchronize their efforts and Nationally Determined Contributions¹ (NDCs), with a focus on mobilizing increased funding for climate action.

Ms. Sarine Karajerjian, from Lebanon and Program Director for the Environmental Politics program at the Arab Reform Initiative, expressed some skepticism on the prospect for success at COP28, due to the economic and political uncertainties. She highlighted the Global Goal on Adaptation from COP26 and anticipated that climate finance will dominate COP28 discussions, particularly concerning the establishment of a framework for the Loss and Damage fund. She also emphasized the essential role of a just transition in economic recovery that aligns with the socioeconomic impacts of climate change.

Mr. Shady Khalil, from Egypt and co-founder of Greenish, a social enterprise that educates communities on environmental issues, highlighted the potential for the UAE's presidency at COP28 to set ambitious targets. At the same time, he pointed to a "growing trust gap between the Global North and South", fueled by recent developments and geopolitical shifts. He flagged accountability and climate finance as critical issues to prioritize at COP28.

Ms. Safa' Al Jayoussi, a Jordanian climate justice advisor for the Middle East and North Africa at Oxfam International, emphasized the importance of climate finance, particularly the loss and damage fund, urging industrialized countries to fulfil their financial pledges. She stressed the significance of hosting COP28 in the MENA region, noting its potential to push the climate agenda forward in a region that has only seen five COPs, with this being the second in a Gulf country.



The panel with regional experts.

¹ NDC, or Nationally Determined Contribution, is a climate action plan to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Each Party to the Paris Agreement is required to establish an NDC and update it every five years.

Challenges to inclusive participation

Drawing on their experiences, the panelists identified several barriers to inclusivity and youth engagement in climate initiatives.

Mr. Bany Issa emphasized the need for inclusive processes that move beyond mere consultation to active self-mobilization and the implementation of international agreements. He called for grants, rather than loans, from high-income nations to address climate change. Yet, he highlighted the benefits of concessional finance—a type of below-market-rate financing provided by major financial institutions to support development in emerging countries. Furthermore, he pointed out the main challenges in the MENA region, such as the public’s hesitance to prioritize climate action due to concerns about limited civic spaces, safety, unemployment, and the scarcity of funding for climate-related initiatives.

Ms. Karajerjian advocated for increasing transparency in agenda-setting and for creating a tailored glossary to deepen climate work understanding. She underscored the need to amplify diverse voices, including women, youth, and farmers, and to confront issues like land grabbing to enhance accountability. Building trust between MENA countries and the global community was also deemed crucial.

Addressing how civil society organizations can bolster their collaborative efforts and influence, *Mr. Khalil* criticized tokenism, advocating for meaningful participation that incorporates individuals’ lived experiences and insights to foster locally tailored solutions. He also highlighted security concerns for climate advocates facing repression.

In the context of including marginalized communities, *Ms. Al Jayoussi* underlined the distinction between hosting an inclusive COP event and fostering genuinely inclusive processes. She advocated for integrating youth and marginalized groups into actual decision-making processes and ensuring they are central to the development of NDCs. She also highlighted visa issues and the high costs that disproportionately affect young people, especially those from the Global South.

“Youth and indigenous people need to be part of the process itself and not just to be put in a room [...] It is important to put people’s lived experiences, knowledge, information at the center of the conversations”
Meeting participant

Reflections on the panel discussion

After the panel discussion, the Ms. Kajsa Fernström Nåtby and Mr. Axel Eriksson, who serves as the Youth Delegate for Sweden to the UN climate convention UNFCCC, reflected on the ideas shared during the panel and echoed many of the points that were discussed.

Ms. Fernström Nåtby emphasized the significant importance of the issue of climate finance. She also noted that it is only a matter of time before the pledge made by high-income countries to provide 100 billion USD for climate finance is fulfilled this year. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of inclusivity, mentioning that while COP is relatively inclusive compared to other conferences, efforts should be made to involve people in climate politics throughout the year.

Mr. Eriksson underscored the crucial role of allowing people to address climate-related challenges and actively participate in finding solutions. He also emphasized that the climate issue extends beyond just rising temperatures; it also encompasses issues of justice. Therefore, he stressed the significance of the loss and damage fund in achieving equitable transitions.

Key takeaways from participants

In a second part of the meeting, participants continued the discussions in breakout rooms. They were asked what their key messages and recommendations would be if they had two minutes with a key policymaker at the COP meeting.

The following is a summary of key takeaways and recommendations:

- **Addressing heterogeneity:** It is important to understand that the concept of “one size fits all” cannot be applied if the goal is to achieve effective policy and intervention. Hence, it is of significance to tailor solutions to the diverse nature of the MENA region for more effective outcomes. Recognizing unique country-specific and local challenges increases the likelihood of success, as interventions that resonate with the local people are more likely to be embraced and sustained.
- **Building trust and mutual understanding:** It was stressed that policies and initiatives should transcend national agendas to prioritize shared goals that benefit both the Global North and South. Building trust and mutual understanding is a process that involves dialogue, exchange programs, joint ventures, and consistent engagement. This collaborative approach can lead to sustainable solutions and regional as well as global stability.
- **Accountability and transparency:** It is essential to establish accountability at all levels of decision-making, holding governments, organizations, and individuals responsible for actions and commitments. Transparency is equally important, as it allows stakeholders to see how decisions are made and how resources are allocated and used. Such oversight is essential for building public trust and ensuring that policies are carried out as intended, especially in times where there is a deficit of trust in public institutions and across nations.
- **Climate security and loss & damage:** The pressing importance of incorporating climate security into the regional agenda was underlined. Climate change can

exacerbate issues like water scarcity, food insecurity, energy dependence, and conflicts. Customized climate loss and damage funds to meet specific country is needed, especially in conflict-prone areas.

- **Climate finance and justice:** Many participants underlined the need to allocate financial support to civil societies working on climate initiatives. Also, they underscored the need to reduce the proliferation of ammunition to mitigate conflicts, and to promote just transitions in regional economies, including more women and marginalized groups. Youth must be engaged in meaningful dialogues and decision-making processes. Climate refugees and displaced individuals should be prioritized in policymaking to address their unique needs.
- **Inclusivity:** The importance of enhancing inclusivity within the COP processes was highlighted, moving beyond tokenism to substantive engagement, and addressing systemic barriers faced by marginalized groups, particularly in terms of accessibility and financial constraints.
- **Youth engagement:** Youth engagement should be increased by shifting the focus from monetary contributions to building strategic partnerships. Empowering young people will lead them to take an active role in shaping policies and initiatives related to climate and regional development.
- **Clear communication:** Simplifying language and avoiding unnecessary jargon in communication and documentation will help ensure that information is accessible and easily understood by a wider audience, including the general public.
- **Evidence-based research:** The importance of relying on collective scientific knowledge and promoting unbiased research was emphasized. Creating conditions that support the development of accurate and objective research can in turn inform policymaking and decision-making processes.



Participants in the meeting, representing civil society, as well as governments and private sector.