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It's time to rethink climate-resilient development in the Arab region

Hassan Aboelnga is vice chair of the Middle East Water Forum. Nada El Agizy is director of the Sustainable Development and International Cooperation Department at the League of Arab States.



As the Arab region battles the health and economic crises caused by COVID-19, many countries are also suffering from the rapidly changing climate – including in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

The current crisis in the Arab region has challenged us to rethink our approaches to development, and to look at opportunities for a profound, systemic shift to climate resilient development.

While much of the debate in the region around climate finance and sustainable development focuses on “how much,” equally important questions to ask are: How? By whom?

The region produces less than 5% of global carbon dioxide emissions but only 5 of 22 Arab states have accessed money from the multilateral Green Climate Fund, even as efforts must be redoubled to align development co-operation with climate action.

Given the complex challenges to do more with less, the Arab region cannot be expected to shoulder climate adaptation efforts alone.



The [financing gap for achieving the SDGs](#) in the Arab region is estimated to be at least \$230 billion annually. The region faces a number of challenges which hinder taking the necessary action, and international help is urgently needed to support climate resilience and adaptation in the region.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020](#), indicated that from 1990 to 2019, climate extremes such as droughts affected over 44 million people in the Arab region and caused economic damages of \$5.7 billion from floods and \$6 billion from storms.

[The World Bank](#) also estimated that the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has the greatest expected economic losses from climate-related water scarcity, estimated at 6-14% of GDP by 2050.

By framing climate change as a security issue, adaptation has received increased attention.

The [Sustainable Development Goals Climate Facility Project](#) aims to enhance the capacity of institutions to effectively integrate climate change into development, crisis prevention and recovery actions, including support to scale-up climate finance for innovative local solutions that have co-benefits for other sustainable development goals.

How the climate crisis is handled today and in the coming years will determine the future of the sustainable development agenda and our ability to adapt to increasingly frequent and severe climate impacts.

In each scenario, the impacts on development will be huge. Climate change threatens every sector and community.

It is far from easy to reach climate security and resilient development in the Arab region with business-as-usual the norm. The region – the most water-scarce in the world – is at the tip of the climate change spear due to pre-existing social, economic, and political stresses, such as structural fragilities, political instabilities, poverty, poor governance, and chronic water and food insecurity.

Climate change contributes to all as a further destabilizing force and risk multiplier.

A new paradigm is therefore needed that turns the current approach on its head and changes the way we manage, finance and cooperate for climate resilient development.



It is not only about money. Solving wicked climate and development challenges requires creativity and innovation to turn risks into opportunities.

It also requires collective actions from all actors to drill down into the diverse mechanisms of vulnerability, to look beyond the hydro-meteorological impacts of climate change and consider their interactions with people, planet and policies that are crucial for peace and stability, with a focus on governance, job creation, resilience, justice and equity, safety and security.

How we tackle, finance and cooperate for climate change adaptation in the region is a turning point to ensuring we are on track to more sustainable and resilient communities – rather than exacerbating existing problems and creating more risks in already-fragile contexts.

With so many challenges to meet, we propose that Arab Leaders focus on 5 Cs over the coming decade for sustainable and climate-resilient development. Those include Coherence and integration; Co-financing; Cooperation; Capacity building and institutional development; and Communications and digital transformation.

By aligning climate adaptation and sustainable development with national [priorities](#), the region can get on track on delivering its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, while scaling up on resilient and adaptive solutions.

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