

Located in Manama, Bahrain, UNEP/ROWA is a committed partner in the region's environmental initiatives, taking a major role in converting the global programme and activities of UNEP to respond to the needs of the region. ROWA also works with other UN organizations as part of its Delivering as One process, but also works with a wide range of governmental, inter-governmental, civil society, private sector, academic and other partners in the region.

Highlights:

- Sand and Dust Storms (SDS) in West Asia have escalated in scale, geographic spread, intensity and frequency to a level that it has become a true impediment to development and human well-being across several countries in the region and beyond. The SDS initiative is a UNEP flagship programme with three parallel inter-linked tracks related to:
 1. Establishing a Regional Cooperation Framework
 2. Developing and Implementing a Technical Assessment and Diagnosis Programme
 3. Establishing a Regional Financial Implementation Mechanism to Combat Dust Storms.
- **The Arab Region: Atlas of Our Changing Environment** is a unique and powerful publication which brings to light stories of environmental change at more than 80 locations spread across the Arab region. Using a combination of ground photographs, current and historical satellite images, and a narrative based on extensive scientific evidence, the atlas illustrates how humans have altered their surroundings and continue to make observable and measurable changes to the Arab region and its environment.

Population growth, urbanization, socio-economic policies and high rates of natural resource consumption are among the main drivers underpinning environmental pressures in West Asia

Regional Facts

Population: 134 million (2010)

Land Area: 4 million km²

Environmental Challenges: the region is naturally arid, with many countries in the top 10 list of water stressed countries of the world. Associated with this are land degradation, sand and dust storms and food security, all set against high levels of population growth, which is exacerbating the challenges.

Regional Forums and Consultations on Environment



Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) is comprised of the CAMRE Bureau and representatives of regional and international organisations serving the Arab region. Both UNEP and The Economic and Social Commission For Western Asia (ESCWA) with the CAMRE Technical Secretariat provide secretariat support to JCEDAR.

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible For the Environment (CAMRE) is the regional mechanism to maintain coordination and cooperation among Arab countries in all matters related to the environment and sustainable development. UNEP has continued its support to CAMRE over the years, with emphasis on priority programmes identified at the annual Ministerial Meetings.

The League of Arab States (LAS) UNEP's cooperation with LAS was formally established in 1986 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), according to which UNEP pledges support to LAS Technical Secretariat, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) and its

Bureau.

West Asia Regional Consultation with Major Groups and Stakeholders of Civil Society

Civil society organizations in West Asia are aware of the importance of international resolutions in upgrading the forms of international environmental actions. At their meeting, held in November 2012 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, they emphasized the continuation of affirmative action and an unwavering commitment to work to influence governments to uphold their commitment to the positive outputs of the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) as it relates to the region, especially in relation to the Green Economy approach as a means of achieving the goals of sustainable development.

UNEP and UNDAF processes

UNEP works in support of the UNDAF process in the West Asia region through the provision of capacity building in mainstreaming environmental sustainability to countries rolling out their UNDAFs as well as engaging in Common Country Strategic Frameworks, which is the tool to assist the UN system in harmonizing the collective programmatic efforts. UNEP is currently working with Palestine in the roll-out of its first UNDAF and is an active member of the Environmental Working Groups in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, developing a number of joint programmes with sister UN agencies.

Post-2015 Development Agenda

In West Asia, UNEP has been actively supporting the national consultations in Jordan, with UNDP and UNEP partnering on the thematic consultation on environmental sustainability, water and energy. UNEP is also a partner in the dialogues in Iraq. A key message from Jordan was that “Environmental Sustainability should be mainstreamed with all themes of the Post-2015 Development Agenda”. At the regional level, UNEP is working with all relevant regional UN organizations in convening the environment working group at the Regional undg-led Arab Development Forum, a multi-stakeholder consultation and process for the Arab region.

Many West Asian countries are involved in land reclamation activities with adverse impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems

UNEP's work on the ground

Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production

Patterns of consumption in West Asia are high and unsustainable. Production processes also rarely consider environmental protection as a priority and are themselves unsustainable. Recognizing this, UNEP/ROWA has worked in collaboration with the League of Arab States, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) and other regional and international partners to develop the Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production. Approved by CAMRE, the implementation of the strategy provides both an opportunity and challenge in the region, and there is still a need to develop national policies, laws, regulations and programmes to support implementation at the national level in member Arab states.

Environment in Humanitarian Response

Supporting the refugee population from conflicts in the West Asia region is an ongoing challenge. This was exacerbated in 2012-2013 with the sharp increase in refugee numbers from Syria. UNEP works with humanitarian agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), to support the inclusion of environmental considerations in humanitarian response. This has included training for UNRWA staff in conducting environmental assessments of refugee camps in order to reduce negative environmental impacts.

Eye on Earth

UNEP/ROWA maintains its strong partnership with the Abu Dhabi Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI) by continuing to support the Eye on Earth Initiative which is a global public information network that focuses on the issue of greater access to environmental and societal data. The initiative, which was launched in Abu Dhabi in December 2011, aims to bridge the environmental knowledge gap by connecting and strengthening existing network initiatives. A ministerial-level Eye on Earth Declaration on environmental data and information was submitted and signed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012. UNEP/ROWA has continued to support the eight initiatives of the Eye on Earth Declaration and participated in the First Inaugural Meeting of the Eye on Earth Secretariat in July 2012.

Harmful Substances and Hazardous Waste

UNEP/ROWA is developing a strategy and action plan that aims at the sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes and the control of their illicit trade in the region. The proposed three-year strategy is based on the following three pillars:

- 1) Legislative and institutional reforms
- 2) Enhancing institutional capacities
- 3) Promotion of national, regional and international cooperation

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

In light of the global Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2011-2020 and the Aichi targets, UNEP/ROWA has elevated the biodiversity agenda in the region by strengthening its presence and catalyzing the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity through institutional capacity building. To this end, ROWA supports regional mechanisms and fora and provides technical support and policy guidance to national and sub-national authorities. In addition, ROWA has convened a large number of training workshops and awareness platforms to support the effective implementation of the Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2011-2020 in the region.

West Asia Regional Network on Climate Change (WARN-CC)

UNEP/ROWA's Climate Change Programme works at regional and national levels and covers the four pillars of the 2007 Bali Action Plan, namely mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology. Recognizing the importance of networking and knowledge sharing, ROWA has established the West Asia Regional Network on Climate Change (WARN-CC). In addition to its annual meeting, the Network provides a platform to deliver adaptation and mitigation capacity building on priority issues common to the region. Two of the flagship regional initiatives are the “Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region” and the “Ecosystem-Based Adaptation to Climate Change.”