

## Agora Monthly Arab digest

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### Parliaments, the Environment and Climate Change

The world is facing severe challenges relating to climate change and the exploitation of environmental resources. Parliaments have a key role in setting a country's wider development vision, and in developing sound environmental policies in support of this vision. This includes shaping a policy and regulatory framework that promotes mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, the development of renewable energy potential, and the provision of improved energy access and security, among others. In addition to their law-making functions, parliaments should provide effective oversight to ensure that the legislation it passes is sufficiently funded and implemented, and that the citizens it represents are consulted and included in these decision-making processes.

Legislators have a wide range of tools at their disposal to carry out these tasks and to promote inclusive, sustainable development that successfully tackles climate change:

- **As a lawmaking institution**, parliament is accountable for the laws it makes and amends. It is essential to establish a robust legal framework that governs the development, management and taxation of the energy, forestry and fishery sectors, but that also tackles climate change and establishes much-needed adaptation and mitigation measures. This framework should also function as a sound legal basis for administering the rights and demands of a country's different stakeholders.

Beyond this, parliament also has a crucial role to play with regard to the ratification of international climate change treaties. Since such treaties have proved extremely difficult to negotiate and have fallen far short of the necessary targets, however, many countries

(and their parliaments) are increasingly directing their attention towards climate change frameworks at the national level.

- ***As an oversight body***, parliament is responsible for holding the government to account for its execution of laws, policies, and funding. Parliament can assume this ‘watchdog’ role through question periods, by conducting public hearings and by inviting government officials to testify before committees.

Parliament also plays a key role in the **budgetary cycle** by securitizing the expenditure and revenue proposals of the executive, and by overseeing their implementation. An example of this is India, where MPs aligned in the Climate Parliament network succeeded in having 1% of the national budget earmarked for renewable energy development.

- ***As a representational institution***, parliament needs to channel the views and concerns of the population to the relevant government actors. This includes a healthy and constructive collaboration with all constituents, including civil society organizations, women, indigenous peoples and citizens in general, to ensure that government decisions reflect the perspectives of all concerned.

### **Climate Change Impacts- Arab States**

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is considered one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change impacts, on account of its water scarcity (the highest in the world). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report estimates an increase in temperature in MENA of up to 2°C in the next 15-20 years, and over 4°C for the end of the century.

Climate models are projecting hotter, drier and less predictable climate, resulting in a drop in water run-off by 20% to 30% in most of MENA by 2050, mainly due to rising temperature and lower precipitation (Milly *et al.*, 2005).

The projected higher temperature and reduced precipitation is expected to have a combined effect that will increase the likelihood of droughts. Many parts of North Africa, and in particular Morocco, are already experiencing more droughts.

The vulnerability of the region to climate change is aggravated by the significant dependence on climate-sensitive agriculture, the concentration of population and economic activity in flood-prone urban coastal zones, and the presence of conflict-ridden areas in which climate-induced resource scarcity could escalate violence and political instability even beyond the region's boundaries.

The Arab countries account for more than 5 per cent of the world's population, but less than 1 per cent of global water resources. And as a consequence of the phenomena associated with climate change, the region is facing an even greater water shortage. As the estimated overall decline in rainfall projected for Mediterranean North Africa, Northern and Western Sahara, and the eastern Mediterranean will be reduced by a third, droughts are more likely to become more frequent, severe and protracted in the region. Frequent droughts, in conjunction with an overuse of groundwater and major aquifers, have greatly reduced the availability of both renewable and non-renewable water resources<sup>1</sup>.

Arab countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are particularly vulnerable to the risk of environmental changes due to global warming. This area is home to many of the world's poorest nations, countries which will not be able to afford adaptation strategies on their own.

### **Contribution of Arab countries to climate change**

The region's emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) are generally small in absolute terms (less than 5% of the world's total), and in per capita terms. However, the amounts of these emissions

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<sup>1</sup> Impacts of Climate Change on Arab States- IPCC  
[ipcc-wg2.gov/njlite\\_download.php?id=6784](http://ipcc-wg2.gov/njlite_download.php?id=6784)

and consequent contribution of the region to climate change varies between countries, with the oil producing countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) shouldering the biggest share (74% of the region's total). Moreover, at +88%, the growth of CO2 emissions in the Middle East and North Africa was the third-largest in the world in 1990-2004 and more than 3 times faster than the world's average; most of that growth came from fuel combustion (WB 2007).

## **Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change**

### **What can Parliaments do?**

*Climate change is a reality for people in Arab countries," said Inger Andersen, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa region. "It affects everyone – especially the poor who are least able to adapt – and as the climate becomes ever more extreme, so will its impacts on people's livelihoods and wellbeing. The time to take actions at both the national and regional level in order to increase climate resilience is now."*

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change defines '**adaptation**' as 'the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effect.' As such, adaptation 'seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.' In short, countries should integrate risks and opportunities related to climate change into national planning, and address the needs of vulnerable groups (women, indigenous people) that are most affected by climate change.

**'Mitigation'** on the other hand refers to the "human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases." Curbing emissions is an absolute necessity if the worst excesses of climate change are to be avoided. To date emissions have contributed to global warming, rising sea levels, increased ocean acidification, loss of summer ice in the Arctic, extreme weather patterns, increased severity and frequency of droughts and storms, and greater temperature extremes. A business-as-usual scenario would see global temperature

increases of around 4% by the end of this century, creating a vastly different habitat for all life on earth.

### **What can Parliaments do?**

Legislators have a wide range of tools that are needed to reduce carbon emissions while ensuring energy access for all specifically by drawing up and implementing national policies and programs promoting renewable energy initiatives. Parliamentarians have a key role to play in supporting the development of sound environmental policies concerning the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. They can develop policies concerning mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and, where political space is available, institute the framework required to reduce or remove the barriers to the establishment of a renewable energy industry

The Parliament has three core functions, each of which provides an entry point for the promotion of renewable energy development: Law making, Oversight and Representation.

*Parliaments can make substantial contributions to adaptation policy and planning.* Through their legislative function, parliaments can ensure that the legal and policy framework on adaptation is sufficiently strong, and that adaptation efforts are streamlined across all relevant policy fields and sectors. Legislative proposals that fail to meet adaptation requirements should be amended as needed, and budgets should be secured to implement the necessary activities. With regard to representation, parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to channel citizens' concerns and to solicit citizens' input on what actions are most urgent. They are also an important focal point for civil society organizations and experts looking to share their findings, and play a key role in ensuring that decision-making processes on adaptation are as inclusive and participatory as possible. Finally, through its oversight powers parliament can ensure that the legislation and initiatives it approves are implemented correctly. To do so parliamentarians can work through the Budget or Public Accounts Committee, organize committee hearings and field visits or submit parliamentary questions, among others.

## **Concretely speaking parliamentarians can:**

### **a- Law Making and Legislation**

Develop or amend new and/or existing legislation that will provide a new legal framework conducive to the development of renewable energy. An inclusive and participative process is highly encouraged to ensure to gain momentum, garner media and political attention and will. Suggesting amendments to draft laws is sometimes more timely than developing new laws given the time required for drafting, deliberating and negotiating new laws. Similarly, amending existing laws require drafting changes to the select parts of the law that are necessary to improve the current scheme for energy development.

For example, [Tunisia](#) has become the first country outside of Latin America to make a constitutional commitment to combatting climate change. A constitutional amendment sponsored by the MP Dhamir Mannai, a member of the Climate Parliament has been voted for successfully, hereby including "Contribution to the preservation of the climate" in the new constitution (144 Yes, 21 No, 10 Abstentions).

### **b- Monitor Government's Commitment to Renewable Energy**

As an oversight body, the parliament can hold the hold the government to account by questioning whether the passed laws are properly implemented. Check whether a funding or tax incentive schemes allocated in the state budget and verify that funds are sufficient for achieving the goals.

The [Jordanian parliament](#) has recently passed a number of laws promoting and facilitating investment in renewable energy.

### **c- State Budgets and Funding**

Parliaments consider, approve and monitor the implementation of the state budget. Parliaments may have the ability to directly or indirectly influence the content of the state budget to encourage more resources and incentives for the development of renewable

resources either individually by spurring a debate about the need for more investment in renewables if parliament allows, or collectively by working with their parliamentary group, a parliamentary committee or with civil society.

Once the budget is passed, the role of the parliament shifts; A member can then work with parliamentary committees that have a mandate to scrutinize government expenditures, such as a Public Accounts Committee or Budget and Finance Committee, to ensure the funds allocated are properly spent. **Morocco**, for example has passed a law reducing fossil fuel subsidies and promoting renewable energy development.

### **Current situation and trends in the Arab Region**

The energy potential in the Arab States has been long recognized yet it is still underutilized. Several states have declared objectives towards RE contribution and many initiatives already exist, notably the Experts Committee for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency established by the Arab League. Subsequently, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates have dedicated national RE agencies or departments.

However, two cases still prevail in most of the region, the absence of effective laws and/or the improper implementation and application of clear and transparent procedures and rules. Thus the existence of a proper legislative framework is key for effective promotion and use of RE sources i.e. access to grid, pricing, subsidies and contractual obligations to name a few.

#### **➤ Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in the Arab States**

Framework construction including strategies, policies and legislation are quickly developing in the region. Morocco leads with very ambitious targets, generates largest share of electricity from renewables and has the biggest number of RE projects. Jordan ranks second as it has created a favorable environment for investment by introducing a specific law on Res, feed in

tariffs and preferential purchase pricing. Egypt which ranked third, has not only laws that encourage private investments, subsidies and tax exemptions but also a dedicated area/land for development of renewables. Tunisia and Palestine rank fourth respectively yet while Palestine has opened its market for external investment, Tunisia is still not open for large scale private investments.

### **What is UNDP doing?**

The [Parliamentary Action on Renewable Energy \(PARE\)](#) project is jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and Climate Parliament, with the support of the European Commission and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The PARE project seeks to leverage the powers and privileges of parliamentarians to promote the development of renewable energy resources. It does so by supporting cross-party groups of parliamentarians from 10 countries namely: India, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania and South Africa in support of renewable energy, in order to build the required political will and strengthen the relevant policy and regulatory frameworks.

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*Parliaments play a pivotal role in building policy and regulatory frameworks that promote renewable energy development and energy efficiency. Beyond that, there exists an increasingly diverse range of financial and fiscal instruments (most notably carbon pricing and carbon emission trading schemes) that help limit the amount of GHGs being pumped into the atmosphere*

**For more information, please visit our new climate portal available in [En](#), [Fr](#) and [Ar](#) or contact Reem Askar, Arab States Facilitator at [reem.askar@undp.org](mailto:reem.askar@undp.org).**