

Comments of Dr. Adnan Shihab-Eldin
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on AFED Report
High-Level Discussion: Challenges and Prospects
First Session
2nd November 2017, Beirut - Lebanon

Overall Comments:

1. Due to the diversity of the ecosystems and socioeconomic profiles of the countries within the Arab region, to address the environmental challenges plaguing the region, a two-pronged approach should be taken. First, each country, should set their priorities in environmental research, and focus their allocated national R&D resources towards addressing these issues. This also includes defining and prioritizing the SDG objectives for their development and growth.

The second approach is to ensure that countries with similar priorities in relation to environmental research and development collaborate to enhance to address these challenges. For example, perhaps the GCC countries will work together on policy making due to recent reforms in energy and water, or Arab countries, such as Algeria and Sudan, giving priority and collaboration on agricultural research.

2. Focusing on both national and regional efforts to address environmental issues will also ensure the most efficient and effective use of limited resources, such that each nation can focus their limited resources towards environmental issues which they find pertinent to their national development, and contribute to the overall regional pool of knowledge on these environmental concerns. Developing a forum or platform for sharing knowledge will allow for the collection of data and information from different countries and projects, that can then be utilized to develop regional collaboration and partnerships. Examples of these forums are AFED, CEDARE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNESCWA, etc.
3. A top-down (government, policy implementation) and bottoms-up (grassroots) approach to addressing environmental issues should be initiated, because the success in tackling environmental issues and raising awareness will rely on the buy-in from both the government and leadership, including policymakers, as well as the individual citizen who will be the end-user and implementer of change. An example of this is the Solar PV/RT project at KFAS, in which the success of the project was due to, not only because of the support of private sector and government, but also the support of individual citizens who installed solar panels on their rooftops and receive the benefits, first hand, of this initiative.

4. Irrespective of the geopolitical environment of geographical location of the Arab country within the region, more concerted efforts should be made towards addressing the main challenges facing the environment.

Ultimately, there should be concerted efforts by governments of the region to spend more on research and development, including building and enhancing human capacity to find innovative solutions to these environmental challenges.

The role of policymakers on a national and regional level, will be critical, and more efforts need to be made to engage policy makers and legislatures in environmental research.

More effort must be made in raising awareness to the general public, where campaigns should be developed to ensure that every aspect of the society is aware and involved in doing their part to address the environmental challenges impact the long-term sustainability and development of each Arab nation and the region as a whole.

Specific Comments

5. It should also be noted that the Sate of Kuwait has set a renewable energy target of 15% by 2030. (page 18)
6. The first phase of the nuclear power station in Abu Dhabi should be mentioned, as an example of nuclear energy initiatives within some Arab countries (page 18)
7. On page 19, it mentions that the “Reduction of sulfur content in diesel fuel in most Arab countries has been achieved by tightening the standards, which results in a drop from levels as high as 1000ppm to around 50 pm”. It should be noted that the tightening was also driven by the international markets in view of the of the standard, which limits sulfur content in certain fuels. Exporting countries will not be able to sell fuels containing sulfur at levels higher than the international standard to international markets.
8. The investment in young researchers and intellectual capacity should be promoted and enhanced on a national and regional effort in all fields, relating to environmental research, such as energy and water.
9. The Pan Arab region is a mosaic of ecosystems and socioeconomic feature. Bundling them all in one framework conceals the most important factor that needs to be tackled by country and/or region.
10. SDG may be the way to characterize progress in such a mosaic. On one hand the SDG’s cover the entire range of ecosystems and socioeconomic parameters, and on the other it has well defined metrics that will document the situation in each country within its appropriate context.
11. Resources are always limited and it is important to identify the one or two factors that could be managed for maximum outcome.

12. Although the political will is the fastest way to ensure change, such will has is usually distorted by short-term gains and populist trends.
13. Emphasis on informal pathways and raising the awareness of the grass root and providing them with alternative solutions, might very well prove it's the most cost-effective way.