

Green MENA Network 2023

E-ZINE ON GREEN MENA ACTORS



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Introduction



Here are your green partners in the
Middle East and North Africa.



In 2019, the Greater Middle East Platform initiated a mapping project, aimed at identifying sustainable actors across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The primary objective was to establish green partnerships for Dutch aid and trade stakeholders. There had been a prevailing notion in the Netherlands and Europe, that green actors were scarce in the MENA-region, resulting in aid and trade aligning with mainstream or established partners, and overlooking the potential of the countless bottom up green actors and their environmental priorities for the region.

As the Green MENA network expanded, our focus extended beyond mapping. We added to the project a component of knowledge exchange and collaborations among network partners in the region itself. By 2022, our attention shifted to addressing the underrepresentation of sustainable MENA actors in global forums. We organized a three-day regional workshop in the forested mountains of Ajloun, Jordan, with participants from nine MENA countries (as documented in '[Voices from the Green MENA Network](#)').

Our endeavor to foster a just and sustainable global transition to a greener planet led us to propose a follow-up workshop in 2023: The intention was to encourage comprehensive presentations by Green MENA Network partners on their respective work, offering a deep dive into diverse contexts, approaches, challenges, and solutions.



Although the project was approved, the meticulously planned workshop in Lebanon had to be canceled following the tragic events of October 7th and the following horrors that unfolded in Palestine, in particular against the population of Gaza. Consequently, and in consultation with our participants, we adapted the project to an online format, organizing three online sessions: one focusing on Water and Rivers, another on Energy and Energy Transition, and the final session addressing Agriculture, Land, and Food Security. With these sessions we wanted to showcase the work done by our partners, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and perspectives among dedicated green actors across different MENA countries.

This e-zine presents the results of these sessions, offering concise articles introducing the recorded online sessions, compiling the recommendations from our green colleagues, and spotlighting the profiles of the dedicated individuals driving sustainable initiatives in the MENA region.

We also hope to ignite inspiration among European businesses, NGOs, scientists, journalists, and governments to actively pursue collaborative environmental endeavors with MENA-based actors. We believe there is immense potential for increased exchanges and partnerships among diverse entities, as long as they align with mutual interests and a shared vision for a sustainable future.

Vanessa Lambrecht & Sylva van Rosse
The Green MENA Network
The Greater Middle East Platform

December 2023





Bnwar Abdulrahman holds a bachelor's degree in biology science and currently works as a Projects Manager at Waterkeepers Iraq, with a primary focus on addressing the water crisis and the impacts of climate change in Iraq. Additionally, Bnwar is actively involved as a volunteer with Leopards Beyond Borders, an organization dedicated to wildlife conservation. He is in his twenties and is from Sulaimaniah, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



Maha Yassin is a Research Fellow at IRIS, specializing in environmental policy, climate security, and activism in Iraq. Previously, she worked as a Research Fellow and Outreach Officer at Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute for International Relations, managing the Basra Forum for Climate, Environment, and Security. Maha holds an MA in Communication Studies and a B.Sc in Geology. With extensive experience in the humanitarian sector, she specializes in civil society engagement and addressing environmental threats, particularly in the southern region of Iraq.



Lama El Hatow is an Egyptian born environmental advocate and community leader committed to fostering sustainable change. Lama is a prominent voice in the realm of environmental activism, leveraging her expertise to champion causes that intersect with environmental justice, climate action, and community empowerment. With a background in environmental studies and a passion for social change, Lama has dedicated her career to advocating for equitable and eco-friendly practices. Her work spans across various initiatives, from grassroots campaigns empowering local communities to policy advocacy at national and international levels.

Rivers of life – water in the Middle East

The Greater Middle East Platform emphasizes the necessity for a just, sustainable transition toward a green and democratic global society, advocating for mutual acquaintance, learning, and collaboration among networks and like-minded organizations. We therefore organised a series of online events.

The first event spotlights the pivotal work addressing water scarcity and drought in the MENA-region, featuring three speakers: Bnwar Abdulrahman from Waterkeepers Iraq, Maha Yassin, a research fellow at IRIS specializing in environment, climate security, and activism in Iraq, and climate advocate Lama ElHatow.

Waterkeepers Iraq is a non-profit organisation in the heart of a region grappling with water-related challenges and where pollution threatens both human health and ecological balance. As a member of the global Waterkeeper Alliance, this Iraqi organization is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the country's water bodies. Bnwar Abdulrahman is from the Kurdish Region in Iraq, and he is based in the city of Sulaymaniyah. Through a variety of activities, he and his colleagues work to protect the waterways, to have consumable and usable water in Iraq.

Waterkeepers Iraq works across various fronts: monitoring water quality, engaging communities, and advocating for policies that ensure the sustainable management of Iraq's precious water sources. Through education, grassroots initiatives, and collaborative efforts, they strive to foster a future where every Iraqi can rely on safe, clean, and sustainable water.

Abdulrahman illustrates a big hurdle in Iraq's water management: the absence of good government policies, both on a local and international level. Unfortunately, governmental support for water preservation is lacking, posing difficulties for NGOs to engage, while direct access is granted to oil companies and other big firms.

Approximately 80% of Iraq's water originates from Iran and Turkey, intensifying geopolitical issues around these shared rivers. These neighboring countries are constructing dams and water tunnels, which is severely impeding Iraq's water resources. Coupled with the impacts of climate change, water scarcity presents a grave threat to Iraq's sustainability.

But there is good news too: Iraq's youth are becoming more aware of the need to protect the environment and together with youth climate organisations, journalists, and documentary makers, Waterkeepers is pressuring the government to protect Iraq's water.

Maha Yassin, who is a freelance consultant specializing in environmental and civil society activism in Iraq, describes a challenging local landscape. Her work focuses on the south of Iraq, the Basra area, and the marshes. Despite the rapid regional climate changes, environmental concerns remain a low priority in the South, lacking the development of environmental policies.

Civil society actors face threats, leading many to flee the country. The urgent need to raise awareness about environmental issues needs to continue, but it is difficult to do that in this context.

The drying of the marshes is influenced by political failure and an oil industry that should not be present in this vulnerable ecosystem. But because corruption prevails, aid distribution and government access are not reaching those who need it and therefore locals have no other option as to leave or exhaust the limited resources.

"But it is not all dark and bleak", says Yassin. Hope emerges from the initiatives taken by young people, researchers, and journalists in southern Iraq, striving to address the deteriorating environmental situation. "The government has plans", says Yassin, "but the big problem is the implementation". Corruption and distrust are hindering the realization of these plans. An open, trusting exchange on climate issues affecting thousands of people, is difficult in Iraq and might be only possible with outside help. Eventually the government is responsible and has to be kept accountable. And the government must work with civil society and international organisations to start resolving the huge climate crisis in the region.

In her work, Yassin tries to show and spread these developments, aiming to gain access for Iraqi activists to international platforms that could apply pressure on Iraq's government. Despite Iraq's oil wealth, there is a crucial need for capacity building in governance, training for activists and civil society, and access to vital data.

Lama ElHatow from Egypt is a researcher. She speaks on climate change as an opportunity for cooperation on the Blue Nile River Basin between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Her research focusses on transboundary river basins. The Blue Nile comes from the Ethiopian highlands and takes rich sediment with it to the basin. The White Nile goes through marshland and swamplands and gets filtrated before it reaches the basin. When the two merge in Khartoum, they do not mix for miles. They move side by side as a brown, rich stream, and a white, clear stream. Arab poets call it "the longest kiss in history". This poetic expression not only celebrates the geographical phenomenon but also evokes a sense of cultural and historical significance. It reflects the admiration that people have for the Nile, which has been integral to the livelihoods, cultures, and histories of the regions it crosses.

The Nile River basin is the longest river in the world and travels through eleven countries. For years there is the rhetoric of water wars in the Nile region between the countries that share the Nile River basin. Countries sharing the Nile, see the river from different perspectives, says ElHatow: Egypt is a highly water stressed country and looks at the Nile from a water perspective, while Ethiopia is a highly energy stressed nation and looks at the Nile for hydropower and therefore built the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Sudan is a highly food stressed country and needs the Nile for agriculture.

"People are inclined towards cooperation", says ElHatow. So, recognizing the interconnectedness of the Blue Nile River Basin's water resources, these countries can use the urgency of climate change as a catalyst for joint efforts.

By prioritizing cooperation, they can develop adaptive strategies to manage water resources effectively, mitigate the risks posed by climate change, and ensure equitable access to the Nile and its water. Through dialogue, engagement of stakeholders on local levels, shared research endeavors, and collaborative initiatives, these nations have the opportunity not only to address the challenges posed by climate change but also to foster mutual understanding, trust, and peaceful cooperation in the management of the Blue Nile River Basin. "This can be achieved", believes ElHatow.

The fair managing of transboundary rivers by neighbouring governments is also possible for the Mesopotamian rivers. "The political situation of Iraq is unstable, and this is used against Iraq to control the water" says Yassin. Cooperation with the neighbours is not easy. Abdulrahman agrees, "but with the right policies and the right approach, it is still possible to get to a solution".

Iraq faces several significant challenges regarding its water resources, posing critical issues for the country's population and its environment:

1. **Water Scarcity:** Iraq grapples with severe water scarcity exacerbated by droughts, inadequate rainfall, and diminishing water levels in rivers like the Tigris and Euphrates. This scarcity impacts agriculture, industry, and overall livelihoods.
2. **Deteriorating Water Quality:** Pollution from industrial waste, agricultural runoff, and inadequate sanitation systems deteriorates water quality in rivers and groundwater sources. Contaminated water poses serious health risks to the population.
3. **Infrastructure and Maintenance:** Aging and inadequate infrastructure for water storage, distribution, and treatment hinders efficient water management. Insufficient maintenance exacerbates this issue, leading to leakages and inefficient resource utilization.
4. **Transboundary Issues:** Iraq shares its rivers with neighboring countries, leading to complex geopolitical challenges. Upstream dam constructions and water management practices in Turkey, Syria, and Iran affect Iraq's water flow and access.
5. **Climate Change Impact:** Climate change exacerbates existing challenges, leading to increased temperatures, decreased precipitation, and more frequent droughts. This phenomenon amplifies water scarcity issues and affects agricultural productivity.
6. **Conflict and Instability:** Decades of conflict and political instability have disrupted water management infrastructure and policies, hindering efforts to address water-related challenges effectively.





Mohamed Sherwali obtained his master's degree in Energy Management from the University of Tripoli, Libya. He works as a Renewable Energy and Environment Senior Specialist at the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE). This intergovernmental organization with diplomatic status based in Cairo, aims to enable and increase the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficiency practices in the Arab region.



Bishoy Reda got his BSc in 2013 from the Mechatronics department of Higher Technological Institute in Egypt. He worked for 6 years as a Utility Engineer in Global Napi for pharmaceutical industry and he is working now as a Biomedical engineer in Watani Eye hospital in Egypt. He is the treasure of IEEE Industrial Electronics Society Egypt Chapter which achieved best chapter in IEEE Industrial Electronics Society in 2023. Under the name of IEEE IES Egypt, He mentored primary stage students to achieve the third and fourth places in Minesweeper competition.



Fairouz Ramli obtained her master's degree in Sustainable Architecture and Green Energy from the University of Constantine, Algeria. She is the Head of department of energy efficiency in buildings and an Energy Auditor at the Algerian National Agency for the Promotion and Rationalization of Energy Use. Fairouz contributes to several national and international projects related to the building stock and the development of energy field.



Sarine Karajerjian is the Program Director of Environmental Politics at Arab Reform Initiative; an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. Sarine obtained her master's degree in Environmental Policy Planning from the American University of Beirut and is currently pursuing a PhD in Anthropology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris.

Energy Transition in the MENA-region: Can it be just?

Early December, the heads of state of 123 countries signed the [Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge](#), during the COP28. On the same day, three partners from the Green MENA Network showcased their work in the field of energy transition during a webinar. Bishoy Reda from Egypt works in a university, Mohamed Sherwali from Libya works for an intergovernmental organization, while Fairouz Ramli is Algerian and works for a national agency. Their efforts makes clear how the energy transition is a collective responsibility. It will affect bottom and top, rich and poor.

Fairouz Ramli is head of the Department of Energy Efficiency in Buildings at the Algerian national agency for energy use. The building sector in Algeria is very energy intensive, it uses more than the transport and industry sectors. Ramli's work involves much awareness raising and sharing of knowledge. Citizens in Algeria really don't know about the need to become more energy efficient. "I find it very rewarding, this collaboration between the building sector and different parts of society and the population." What is challenging is the absence of policies and regulations. Algerian stakeholders therefore have a hard time to meet up with global standards. Ramli's vision is to see a good mix of energy, fossil combined with renewables, where people can keep the same level of comfort in their lives.

Mohamed Sherwali from Libya works for the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE) in Cairo. RCREEE acts as a connecting agent between the various stakeholders involved in the renewable energy projects (private sector, government, NGO's, international financial institutions). Sherwali's focus of work is on something that is not mentioned often when renewable energy is discussed: the environmental impact of renewable energy. Sherwali researches the impact of wind turbines on migratory birds and bats. As it happens, parts of Egypt that have great wind potential, are also part of the route of soaring migrating birds. And when these birds (and bats) collide with the wind turbines, they get killed. RCREEE conducts research during different stages of construction of wind parks, and monitors fatality occurrence and the behavior of migrating birds that fly through the area.

"Something positive that comes with this work is that it provides jobs for local people, both the bird monitoring and working with the turbines. Plus, other countries can learn from our findings. There is still a lot of research needed when it comes to measuring the environmental impact." As for Bishoy Reda, this Egyptian is part of a programme called 'Sustainable SmARt Applications (SARA). This programme supports students and researchers in universities to develop sustainable solutions for cities. In addition, it helps transform projects into proper startups. For example, students in Heliopolis University in Cairo have developed cost-efficient wind turbines and IoT technology.

Besides energy, they also work in the field of water management, to develop smart methods for irrigation and waste water desalination. Their most important partners are always local communities.

How can we see these three examples of local renewable energy solutions in the wider context of global strategies and pledges? Meeting facilitator Sarine Karajerjian raises some crucial questions. "The EU promised to contribute 2.3-billion-euro, part of which is specifically allocated to support the energy transition in EU's neighbouring countries. Who will benefit from these funds, and who will be held accountable for how the funds are spent?

What will happen in the fragile countries in the region, countries that may be rich in energy resources, but that have collapsed by conflict, or where large parts of the population have no access to energy?

When it comes to the role of Europe, Karajerjian is very clear: "European partners, when supporting transition projects, need to always ask the question 'who is benefiting?' Renewable energy has to become available equally and for everyone." So, while the local populations in energy rich countries like Iraq and Yemen currently have no access to energy, investors and European partners need to ensure a just transition, for example when it comes to green hydrogen, and make sure that locals benefit too.

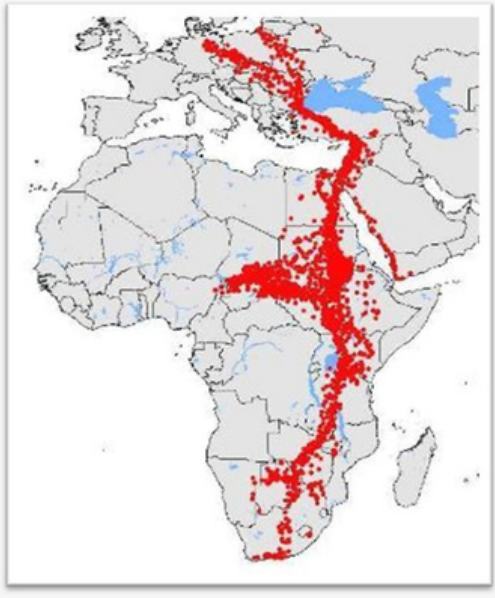
The speakers are in agreement that the MENA-countries need to manufacture their own renewable energy solutions, and become much more energy-sovereign.

Sherwali: "We need strategies on how to reach the objectives for the transition. Last week, Libya announced its energy efficiency strategy. This is great news. Libya has depended on fossil fuels for sixty years, and perhaps it is too late to move away from that, but better late than never." According to Sherwali, Egypt is also moving ahead with its transition strategy, it set targets for the renewables to increase considerably in the energy mix.

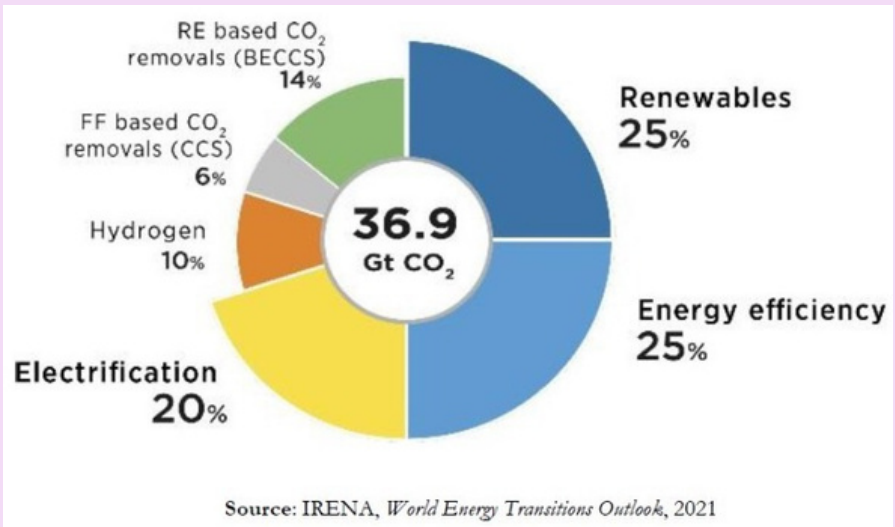
"We have the resources in our countries, plenty of wind and sun. What we need is awareness and action." Ramli agrees, and adds that the countries also need solid regulations and investments. "Our whole supply chain needs to be adapted for the transition to renewable energy: students, the financial sector, the technical sector, the management, the strategic planners, also to align such planning with the local context."

The question remains who will pay for the damage already caused by the industrialized countries. Sherwali: "Vulnerable countries are paying the price. We've felt the impact of climate change in Libya last September when a sudden flood killed more than 10,000 people. Who will be held accountable?"

Bird migration route over Egypt



Blue elephant water treatment



The energy mix





Joslin Faith Kehdy is the Founder and Director at Recycle Lebanon, catalysing a system change to re-psyc'le our linear mindset towards circular action. The four programmess of this Lebanese NGO include Regenerate Hub, EcoSouk, TerraPods and Dive Into Action. Joslin currently lives off-grid in the rural village of Baskinta, Lebanon, where she stewards the land developing the TerraPods regenerative agriculture, art residency and eco-design maker-space.



Emna Mornagui is an Agricultural and Forest Engineer, Activist, Researcher, Podcast producer, and Currently Coordinator of AfriFoodlinks program at Hivos Organization in Tunisia. She focuses on articulating Food sovereignty and climate Justice



Omar Hajji is a Regenerative Design Educator and the Founder of Marrakesh Organics, an agroecology farm, demonstration site and environmental education center in Marrakech, Morocco. He has an academic background in philosophy and sustainable development and over 10 years of regenerative design education and farm management experience. Marrakesh Organics is a demonstration site that experiments and implements best sustainability practices pertaining especially to dryland water management, arid climate agriculture, arid climate architecture and alternative energy.



Loay AlAtrash studied water and environmental engineering, and did a Master engineering under the title "Environmental Effects Resulting from Seawater Desalination." He has nine years of experience working in the field of water and environment in Palestine. He is the chairman of the Arab Youth Green Voices network, a non-profit civil society network.

Agriculture, Land, and Food Security

Countries in the Arab world and in North Africa import much of their food. This is a cause of concern for many of the members of the Green MENA Network. In our last webinar of the 2023 series, two farmers, one youth activist and one agricultural & forest engineer discussed how it would be possible to become food secure. They work in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Palestine.

Omar Hajji from Morocco inherited the land of his grandfather. In 2014 he founded Marrakesh Organics, an agroecology farm, demonstration site and environmental education center in Marrakech. In the past decade, Marrakesh Organics developed to have three main areas of focus:

Designing farms for water, building terraces for water harvesting, has become a specialization. Hajji helps people from cities who are starting to farm. He prepares their land with irrigation systems and plantations, including the techniques for water harvesting.

The second field of attention is the regeneration of soil. "How can we build soil in our dry climate? The water season in Morocco is very short. We are collaborating with universities to research and learn about how to organize the crop rotation. What are the right microbes to use? And how should we protect the layer of humus that is forming?"

Thirdly, Hajji and his team focus on finding drought tolerant seeds. "Our seed collection was diminished to such a small genetic diversity. In Morocco many farmers plant American wheat, Canadian alfalfa, it is not suitable at all for our climate!" Therefore, Hajji, together with Moroccan farmers and universities are researching which seeds are suitable for local conditions, and how to promote saving seeds as the holistic solution to food dependence and to increase food sovereignty. He believes this is the valid solution for many countries in the MENA-region and much of the rest of the world.

Joslin Kehdy is the founder and director of Recycle Lebanon. This organisation is not about recycling waste but about recycling the mindset of the Lebanese. It consists of four programmes: Regenerate Hub that provides open-source data about natural based alternatives; EcoSouk, a zero-waste shop in Beirut; TerraPods; and Dive Into Action. In our meeting Kehdy tells us all about TerraPods, an agroecology farm with an arts residency and a makerspace that is currently being built.

Like Hajji, Kehdy inherited land from her grandfather. This ancestral heritage farm lies in the steep mountain region of Baskinta in central Lebanon. In the past year she worked hard to restore the arable land which had not been touched for 50 years. She had to clear the pathways and waterways, and clean the old pond that is used to collect rainwater. She had old terraces restored and brought compost. She found a 150-year-old grape vineyard. Her grandfather used to share the land and the water sources with his brothers and neighbours, each taking turns for irrigation, and ownership borders were still complex to point out.

Once the land was ready to be cultivated, Kehdy chose to work with heirloom seed producers Buzuruna Juzuruna ('Our seeds are our roots'). Without using any chemicals, and applying techniques like companion planting, she grew fifteen varieties of tomatoes, and five varieties of peppers.

Kehdy trained villagers and farmers to grow food in more natural ways. In fact, once the TerraPods project is fully up and running, there will be more trainings and art residencies all aimed at finding solutions for plastic free and nature-based alternatives. She proudly sold her harvested crops at the market, albeit without making a profit. Laughing: "You don't get a lot for selling your tomatoes, so it's not the right business model at all. We sell at the same price as the regular vegetables. We offer an option of buying chemical free vegetables for a good price." But mostly "This work is both about preserving our heritage and about food security."

Loay AlAtrash lives in the occupied West Bank. He is a water engineer, and also the chairman of the Arab Youth Green Voices network. In our meeting, AlAtrash emphasized that 19 out of 23 Arab countries experience water scarcity. And as 85% of fresh water is used for the agricultural sector, water scarcity is a central concern for agriculture and therefore food security in the region.

Several members of the Arab Youth Green Voices network are active in agricultural projects in their country, in all kinds of ways. For example, in optimizing soil through biochar, or in ways to treat water in agriculture. In fact, AlAtrash himself is part of a project called the Blue Elephant, which is a waste water treatment tool that treats 6 m3 of water per day, for flexible usage in agriculture. "Unfortunately, in most Arab countries we observe there is no using of treated water for agriculture. It is something we really need to look into as the scarcity will only become worse."

The aim of the youth network is to combine experience and knowledge. During the COP27, the members concluded it wasn't very useful to talk to their governments. Therefore, their focus is now to reach out to local populations and to encourage bottom-up change.

Emna Mornagui from Tunisia is pointing at the macro-level perspective. In her work for AfriFOODlinks she looks at urban food systems in African cities. "It is all about food governance, about food production, and about the relationship between rural and urban areas." "Indeed, in Tunisia we import most of our food, and most of our seeds. It means we have no control over the quality or quantity of the food we eat. Like other African and Arab countries, we don't have access to global markets like Northern countries, which became very clear during the last global food crisis. The combination of increasing droughts and the lack of fair access to global markets drives the need to explore how cities can produce their own food, for example by using rooftops for gardening."

She continues: "As a young woman, I like to see myself as part of shabab aththawra, the revolutionary youth. And we, in our political groups, we want to strengthen rightsholders, farmers, women working in agriculture, people who are directly affected by pollution and by climate change."

Mornagui is angered by her government that is mostly interested in export crops like dates and olive oil. "What is a farmer? Is it a peasant who grows food, that we can eat? Or is it the big companies, the investors? There are two irrigation sources in Tunis, the surface water and the underground water. Small farmers are not receiving the surface water distribution anymore. Big investors are receiving permits to dig for underground water, in order to maintain monocultures and intensive agriculture for export. And we need to import wheat!" She believes that Tunisia needs a system that supports the population rather than exploits it. What would be efficient, is to subsidize small scale farmers to enable them to grow food for the local market, and to subsidize wheat irrigation instead of fruits for export. "It is a matter of food security, not even of food sovereignty."

The four speakers agree that the regional exchange of knowledge is very important. Spreading information in Arabic, raise awareness, and learn from our colleagues in the MENA-region, collaborate, converge. Mornagui: "We can do this outside the official negotiation structures like the COP, our own South-South exchange, an Arab gathering, an Arab-African gathering, and create our own narratives!"

Kehdy wants European partners to know that corruption is wide spread in her country, and it is best to collaborate directly with local people and organisations rather than with governments.

Hajji closes the meeting by pointing out that this time it might be Europe that could come to the MENA-region for help. "I hear people in Germany and Switzerland complaining about drought. Perhaps they can learn from us! If we would have 10% of the water that they have, we could create paradise."



Recommendations



These are the recommendations that were shared during the presentations:

Rivers of life

- Invest in civil society and train youth, activists, NGO's and journalists to take action on climate.
- Change the narrative from war mongering to transboundary cooperation on water and rivers.
- Put pressure and assist the Iraqi government with the implementation of its climate and environment plans.

Energy and Energy Transition

- Learn from the bird-migration research in the MENA region.
- Learn from the research of the environmental impact of wind turbines.
- When supporting transition projects, always ask the question 'who is benefiting?'
- The MENA should develop their own renewable energy solutions and become energy sovereign.

Agriculture, land and food security

- Subsidize small scale farmers to enable them to grow food for the local market.
- Subsidize wheat irrigation instead of granting water for export-crops.
- Spread information in Arabic and raise awareness in the MENA-region.
- Collaborate directly with locals and local organisations to avoid government corruption.
- Let Europe learn from the MENA, especially on drought and water-extensive agriculture.

All

- Good government policies and regulations on climate and environment and subsequent action
- Cooperate with local organisations, grassroot and direct.





Epilogue



**GREEN MENA
NETWORK**

The Climate Book, which was released in October 2022 after an initiative by Greta Thunberg, consists of essays about the many fields affected by climate change, contributed by close to a hundred different scientists and activists. What these essays make abundantly clear is that nature and eco-systems are damaged by climate change in all their details, and that all these details are connected. The book does not focus on particular regions or countries, the writers show that climate change can only be understood as a global phenomenon.

The second point the book makes exceedingly clear is how climate change is caused by humans, and more specifically by humans from the Global North. So, although there is no focus on particular regions, the writers of the book seem to address citizens, politicians and businesses in the Global North to finally take responsibility and change their ways.

The large majority of contributors are European and American scientists. The essays from other parts of the world are from all continents, but none is from the Middle East or North Africa (MENA). In the few places that specific cases are described, it is never about the MENA-region. The few photographs included in the book show different parts of the world, but not a MENA-country. We have noticed it before, this region is not on people's minds when they think of environmental and climate issues. Is it because the region is somehow squeezed between Europe and Asia and Africa?

Whatever the reasons, it is problematic to overlook the MENA-region. Of course, the region is very diverse, it includes the richest countries in the world with the highest emissions, as well as low-income countries and communities. The oil producing countries and the non-oil producing countries in the MENA often have different interests. However, despite these differences, regional commonalities emerge concerning the impact of climate change. For one, the MENA-region is warming at nearly twice the global average. Some places are literally becoming unlivable because of the heat, other places experience an alarming increase of wild fires. Extreme temperatures are already leading to migration.

Also, when it comes to climate justice: the inequality, the exploitation of labor and nature, the theft of land and resources that are described in The Climate Book have happened (and are ongoing) throughout the MENA-region. Therefore, the call for global justice, for decolonization, for democracy that is made in the book, is a call that is highly relevant for the MENA.

The writers of the Climate Book emphasize that we are all in this together. The MENA-region with its more than 500 million inhabitants (when you include Iran and Turkey) needs to be recognized for its specific needs and possibilities. Its experts and citizens need to be part of the global strategies to counter the trends. Fortunately, there are many researchers and academics in the region working in the fields discussed in The Climate Book. They need to revitalize their land, govern water resources and clean the air.

From ocean science in Bahrein to biodiversity in Palestine, from land restoration in Lebanon to renewable energy in Egypt, local researchers in local universities work to find solutions for the climate-related challenges. In the same way, throughout the region from Morocco to Iraq, local activists and communities are developing traditional and new techniques to revive their land, govern water resources and clean the air.

Currently, environment-related collaboration between European and MENA-actors is centered around EU-Mediterranean initiatives. Much more exchanges and partnerships are possible between many more parties. From the side of the Global North, we would like to see the different levels of collaboration:

At state level, there are geopolitical issues with severe climate consequences in MENA-countries that can only be solved through international coordination. For example, military conflicts and occupation, but also the just and sustainable management of rivers in countries like Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. International coordination is also needed to help MENA-countries deal with the multinationals and petrochemical companies active in the region.

When it comes to the academic world, scientists from the Global North need to collaborate with their colleagues in the MENA-countries, and exchange knowledge, research and models related to environment and climate change. And they can learn from the MENA-scientists as well, on wildfires, land restoration, wind turbines and other common fields of interest.

At the level of civil society, global support is needed for journalists, activists, and NGOs in MENA-countries to work and speak freely and safely. Citizen movements in free countries need to speak on behalf of citizens in unfree countries, and challenge the Global North's dependency on authoritarian regimes to secure fossil fuels. Western mainstream media need to report about the environmental effects of a lifestyle that is based on stolen resources or extraction (for example on European cement factories polluting populated parts of cities like Amman and Cairo or Dutch tomato growers using up water resources in Tunisia).

From the side of MENA, activists and researchers can speak up to join the global movement for just transitions. They can learn and draw conclusion relevant for their own context. They need to find answers to the questions raised in *The Climate Book*, about long-term ambitions of local communities and local politicians, and how they see themselves positioned as nations among other nations in the world. They should be involved when trade agreements are made with other countries, to ensure these contribute to climate justice rather than to further exploitation of MENA-resources. And of course, they can contribute their knowledge of local climate and environment to help find solutions that bring justice to the people and well-being to the earth.

Greta Thunberg ends the final chapter of the book with a call that MENA-actors can take at heart: "Those of you that are hardest hit by the crisis, have truth at their side. You have ethics at your side. You have the law at your side. I ask you urgently to raise your voice and demand what you deserve."

There is no climate justice without human rights for all.

Vanessa & Sylva
Green MENA Network



Thanks!

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