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POLICY OPTIONS FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN THE MENA REGION THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

Emem O. Anwana* & Oluwatobi Mary Owojori**

ABSTRACT

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces a complex set of challenges, including political instability, economic disparities, and environmental degradation. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in this region is paramount to ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for its diverse populations. Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) play a crucial role in addressing environmental issues, which are intertwined with many of the SDGs. This paper explored policy options that can help the MENA region make significant strides towards achieving the SDGs through the effective implementation of MEAs. To achieve this, the MENA region will be required to strengthen regional cooperation through the development and implementation of regional agreements that are tailored towards shared environmental issues, such as trans-boundary water management in the Nile River basin or tackling air pollution in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Strategies for the adoption of policies on the region's prevalent issues such as drought and desertification, renewable energy transition, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation will have to be negotiated, developed, strengthened, and implemented. The paper utilised a content analysis research approach in analysing selected international and regional MEAs. The paper highlights the challenges with the implementation of both international and regional MEAs, with a view to raising awareness on the shortcomings and challenges of implementation of these very important environmental treaties. Achieving the SDGs in the MENA region through the implementation of MEAs requires a coordinated effort amongst nations, international organisations, and civil society. By prioritising regional cooperation, sustainable resource management, renewable energy adoption, biodiversity conservation, climate action, waste management and education, the MENA

region can make significant progress towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. These policy options offer a roadmap to address pressing environmental challenges whilst simultaneously advancing the broader agenda of sustainable development.

Keywords: Climate change, Environment, Legislation, MENA, MEAs, Policy, Regulations, SDGs, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change poses an existential threat to people all over the planet. In an attempt to describe climate change, the phrase "defining challenge of our times" was coined.[1] This indicates the severity of the problem, which if left unchecked can be catastrophic to the environment, affecting all living organisms that rely on the earth for their survival and existence. The 2023 IPCC AR6 [2] synthesis report revealed that the globe is falling short of the Paris Agreement's targets. According to the report, if the worst effects of climate change are to be averted, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be reduced by 43% by 2030. However, as it stands, estimated worldwide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the UNFCCC's 2022 NDC Synthesis Report indicates that global warming would likely exceed 1.5 degrees unless more aggressive mitigation measures are implemented immediately. [3] Should this unsustainable pattern continue, not only will the effect of climate change become worse, but the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 will not be achieved.[4]

The effects of climate change are already evident across different sectors of the global economy, with agriculture standing out as particularly vulnerable.

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1 Chandler D, 'Explained: Greenhouse gases' (MIT News, 30 January 2017) https://news.mit.edu/2017/explained-greenhouse-gases-0130 accessed 27 Decem ber 2023.

2 IPCC, 'AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023' (2023) https://www. ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/ accessed 27 December 2023.

3 IPCC, 'AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023' (Interlaken, Switzerland, 2023) https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/ accessed 27 December 2023.

4 Campbell BM, Hansen J, Rioux J, Stirling CM and Twomlow S, 'Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13): transforming agriculture and food systems' (2018) 34 Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability 13.

Subsistence communities facing poverty have borne the brunt of these impacts, experiencing diminished crop yields and quality; heightened instances of crop pests and diseases; and disruptions to long-standing cultural traditions.[5] This negatively impact the SDGs, particularly SDGs, 1 (No poverty) and 2 (Zero hunger). There is therefore urgency that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreements be closely aligned with SDG 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) in order to forestall the negative effect of climate change on the world's food production, particularly in vulnerable regions of the world such as the MENA region.

Climate change in the MENA region manifests in numerous ways, causing adverse impacts on natural resources, ecosystems, human settlements, and overall human welfare. With its arid and semi-arid climate, the MENA region is especially susceptible to the consequences of climate change. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events like droughts, heatwaves, flooding, and dust storms, posing significant challenges in managing water resources, maintaining agricultural productivity, and safeguarding public health.[6] According to the WBG, "Economic growth and shared prosperity in MENA will be severely compromised in the absence of bold climate action." [7]

Over the years, the MENA region has taken proactive steps in forestalling and mitigating the harmful effect of climate change. Many of the MENA countries have signed up to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), with the hope of facilitating collaboration amongst member states by providing a framework for countries to come together and jointly tackle pressing environmental issues in the region. However, the MENA region's involvement in MEAs has been mixed. While some countries have shown

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5 Roy J and others, 'Sustainable development, poverty eradication and reducing inequalities' in V Masson-Delmotte and others (eds), Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty (Cambridge University Press 2018) 445.

6 Rohde MM, 'Floods and droughts are intensifying globally' (2023) 1(3) Nature Water 226.

7 World Bank, 'Middle East & North Africa Climate Roadmap (2021-2025)' (2022) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6f868d4a875db3ef23ef1dc747fcf2ca-0280012 022/original/MENA-Roadmap-Final-01-20.pdf accessed 30 December 2023.

commitment and actively participated in the implementation of the MEAs they signed up to, others have faced challenges in implementing and complying with the agreements. For instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have made efforts to strengthen regional environmental cooperation and policy coordination within the framework of MEAs. They have recognised the value of regional collaboration in addressing common environmental challenges and have engaged in initiatives in sectors such as water, energy, agriculture, ecosystems, and climate. [8] These efforts have been valuable for environmental collaboration and policy coordination but are not comprehensive and have not resulted in strong, enforceable outcomes. [9]

Scholars and environmental specialist have contended that in order for the MENA region to maximise the full potential of the various MEAs it has signed up to, there must be strong political commitment, effective institutional frameworks, adequate financial resources, and active participation and collaboration amongst the various stakeholders, which includes governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. [10, 11, 12, 13] Given this context, this paper advocates for enhanced coherence and coordination in the implementation of MEAs amongst the MENA countries. The paper is further divided into six sections, commencing with an overview of the meaning, nature, and scope of MEA implementation in the MENA region followed by a section on the legal and policy barriers to the effective implementation of MEAs in the region. This section also examines some key international and regional MEAs and their influence on environmental governance in the region. Section three examines the legal and policy barriers to the effective implementation of international MEAs in the MENA region. Section four examines selected MENA regional environmental agreements and section five provides an overview of the implementation challenges that

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8 Al-Saidi M, 'Cooperation or competition? State environmental relations and the SDGs agenda in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region' (2021) 37 Environmental Development 100581.

9 Li W and de Oliveira JAP, 'Environmental governance for sustainable development in Asia' (2021) 290 Journal of Environmental Management 112622.

10 Mitchell RB, 'International environmental agreements: a survey of their features, formation, and effects' (2003) 28(1) Annual Review of Environment and Resources 429.

11 Schaar J, 'What the world can do about the Middle East's coming environmental crisis' (2020).

12 Al-Saqri S and Sulaiman H, 'Comparative study of environmental institutional framework and setup in the GCC states' (2014) Journal of Environmental Protec tion.

13 Mitchell (n 10) 429

the MENA region faces in relation to MEA implementation. This is followed by a section on recommendations and suggestions on how the challenges could be mitigated.

2. MEANING, NATURE AND SCOPE OF MEA IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MENA REGION

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are a subset of International Environmental Agreements (IEAs), which are international agreements between multiple countries that aim to address global environmental issues.[14] The primary aim of IEAs it to enable countries to interact, share expertise and find long-term solutions to critical environmental concerns by offering a framework for international cooperation.[15] Over the years, MEAs have played a pivotal role in advancing environmental sustainability and facilitating progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.[16] The agreements serve as essential mechanisms for addressing shared environmental concerns and fostering collaboration amongst participating countries. By providing a structured framework, MEAs enable nations globally and in the MENA region to collectively tackle challenges such as biodiversity conservation, water resource management, climate change mitigation, and pollution control.[17]

In the context of the MENA region, the establishment of MEAs can be traced back to the early 1970s when the global environmental movement gained momentum. During this period, countries in the MENA region recognised the need for joint efforts to protect their shared natural resources and address their common environmental challenges.[18] One of the earliest MEAs in the MENA region is the Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, which was established in 1973.[19] This agreement aimed to promote cooperation amongst the countries

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Mathur A and Dang S, 'Multilateral Environmental Agreements versus World Trade Organization System: A Comprehensive Study' (2009) 1(3) American Journal of Economics and Business Administration 219.
19 Fieseler CM and others, 'Expanding ocean protection and peace: a window for science diplomacy in the Gulf' (2023) 10(9) Royal Society Open Science 230392.

bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in protecting their marine environments.[20] Other significant milestones in the establishment of MEAs in the MENA region include the signing of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean in 1976,[21] which aimed to address marine pollution and coastal zone management in the Mediterranean. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, played a crucial role in promoting regional and international cooperation on environmental issues in the MENA region.[22]

While the MENA region faces significant environmental challenges, several factors such as the diverse economic and political landscapes, coupled with geopolitical tensions, have created formidable barriers to the effective implementation and enforcement of environmental regulations.[23] However, despite these challenges, there are also examples of successful implementation and impact of MEAs in the region.[24] For example, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands played a critical role in preserving and managing wetlands across the MENA region.[25] Through this convention, countries such as Iran, Iraq and Egypt have designated multiple Ramsar sites, which are internationally recognised for their ecological importance.[26] Another success story is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its accompanying Paris Agreement. These agreements have prompted countries in the MENA region to take significant actions towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change.[27] For instance, countries like

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20 Ibid.

21 Plan MA, 'Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols' (2002) UNEP, MAP Coordinating Unit, Athens.

22 Grubb M and others, The 'Earth Summit' Agreements: A Guide and Assessment: An Analysis of the Rio '92 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Routledge 2019).

23 Al-Saidi M, 'Cooperation or competition? State environmental relations and the SDGs agenda in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region' (2021) 37 Environmental Development 100581.

24 Mitchell (n 10) 429.

25 The Ramsar Convention, 'The Ramsar Convention: What's it all about?' (2015) https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/fs_6_ramsar_convention.pdf accessed 12 April 2024.

26 Ibid.

27 Al-Saqri S and Sulaiman H, 'Comparative study of environmental institutional framework and setup in the GCC states' (2014) Journal of Environmental Protection.

Morocco and the United Arab Emirates have made significant investments in renewable energy, with Morocco aiming to reach 52% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030.[28] These examples highlight the potential benefits of MEAs in addressing regional environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development in the MENA region. [29]

Overall, while there are challenges and differences in environmental diplomacy and participation modes amongst countries in the region, there is potential for increased global engagement and better outcomes through the effective implementation of MEAs. To fully harness the benefits of MEAs, it is imperative for countries in the MENA region to prioritise environmental pillars in their national visions and strategies.[30] Strong political commitment, effective institutional frameworks, adequate financial resources, and active participation and collaboration amongst various stakeholders, as well as capacity-building and knowledge-sharing initiatives, can contribute to the successful implementation of MEAs in the MENA region.[31]

2.1 Achieving the SDGs in the MENA region through MEA implementation

Since the early-to-mid-twentieth century, when many of the MENA states were founded in the aftermath of world wars and regional conflicts, the MENA area has achieved considerable achievements in development. Economic, educational and health metrics all improved significantly. For example, life expectancy increased more in the Arab world than in any other region between 1970 and 2010. During the same period, the Human Development Index, which is based on life expectancy; average and projected years of schooling; and gross national income, improved by 65 percent amongst Arab states. Many areas of life for the majority of MENA citizens have considerably improved.[32] However, despite these improved indices, the

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28 IEA, 'Morocco Renewable Energy Target 2030' (2019) https://www.iea.org/policies/6557-morocco-renewable-energy-target-2030 accessed April 2024.

29 Mitchell (n 10) 429

30 Al-Saqri S and Sulaiman H, 'Comparative study of environmental institutional framework and setup in the GCC states' (2014) Journal of Environmental Protection.

31 Mitchell (n 10)

32 Assi Y, 'Challenges facing sustainable development goals in Arab States' (Arab Center Washington DC, 2021).

MENA region is considered highly vulnerable to climate change, with the most pressing concerns being that of drought and water scarcity.[33]
The MENA region faces challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in relation to the effects of climate change. Critics argue that the negative effect of climate change coupled with political instability, regional conflicts, a young population with high rates of unemployment, increased demand for electricity, limited investments in energy, reliance on fossil fuels and weak research capabilities, hinder long-term sustainable development initiatives.[34] The region's heavy reliance on fossil fuels makes transitioning to renewable energy sources difficult, while water scarcity and a lack of access to clean water pose significant challenges to achieving the SDGs related to health (SDG 3), sanitation (SDG 6), and sustainable life on the land (SDG 15).[35] This paper argues that without a commitment to invest in answers to future sustainability issues, MENA development, with its high levels of population increase, will remain ominous.[36]

Many of the SDGs, from adequate water and sanitation to decent education, are inextricably linked to regional poverty, economic progress, as well as the impact of global warming and climate change in the region.[37, 38] SDG 1 (eliminating poverty) in all its forms is a priority if the region is to achieve the SDGs. Moreover, this is inextricably linked to food production, which is also inextricably linked to eliminating hunger (SDG 2-zero hunger), a situation that has been worsened by a number of issues, including the Covid-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and growing inequalities in the region. [39]

According to scholars, climate change has the potential to substantially impact the waters of the Arabian Gulf countries and the MENA region as a whole, with the potential of affecting the salt levels and the sustainability of

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33 Al-Maamary HM, Kazem HA and Chaichan MT, 'Climate change: the game changer in the Gulf Cooperation Council Region' (2017) 76 Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 555.

34 Nathaniel S, Anyanwu O and Shah M, 'Renewable energy, urbanization, and ecological footprint in the Middle East and North Africa region' (2020) 27(13) Environmental Science and Pollution Research 14601.

35 Ibid.

36 Assi (n 32)

37 United Nations, 'Goal 2: Zero Hunger' (2023) https://www.un.org/sustainable development/hunger/ accessed 12 February 2024.

38 Assi (n 32)

39 United Nations (n. 37)

water distillation in the region.[40, 41] It is also predicted that by 2050, water runoff is expected to decrease by 10%, and the agricultural productivity gains over the last two to three decades may decline after 2050 due to recurrent droughts, which may spur increased rural-to-urban migration.[42] Furthermore, drought cycles have occurred in the region during the last decade, with the frequency and severity exceeding anything seen in hundreds of years.[43] This has exacerbated hunger and food shortages, as well as the loss of livelihoods and lives, and the relocation of millions. While the Arab region is already the most water-stressed and food-import-dependent region on the planet, temperatures in the region are already rising faster than the global average, with climate change threatening to cut food and water productivity by 20% by 2030. [44]

SDG 10 (reducing inequality) continues to be challenging for the MENA region.[45] According to recent research, the Middle East is the world's most unequal region. [46, 47] While the wealthiest 10% of the population obtains 56% of national income, the bottom half of the region receives only 12%. In addition, the region has the world's highest incidence of youth

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40 Al-Maamary HM, Kazem HA and Chaichan MT, 'Climate change: the game changer in the Gulf Cooperation Council Region' (2017) 76 Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 555.

41 Olawuyi DS, Climate Change Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa Region (Routledge 2021).

42 Verner D, Adaptation to a Changing Climate in the Arab Countries: A Case for Adaptation Governance and Leadership in Building Climate Resilience (World Bank Publications 2012).

43 UNDP, 'Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States Best Practices and Lessons Learned' (2018) https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Arab-States-CCA.pdf accessed 27 December.

44 Ibid.

45 United Nations (n. 37)

46 Joshan S and Maertens S, 'Low cost carriers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: Emergence and barriers to development' (2020) 87 Journal of Transport Geography 102799.

47 Nguyen VB, 'The role of digitalization in the FDI–income inequality relationship in developed and developing countries' (2023) Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science.

unemployment, particularly amongst women, and hosts more than half of the world's refugee population. [48, 49]

In light of these intertwined challenges, it becomes evident that a holistic and coordinated approach is necessary to make progress towards achieving the SDGs in the MENA region. Efforts to combat poverty, improve food security, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and promote economic resilience must be integrated to address the multifaceted nature of these interconnected issues. Coordinated action and policy solutions are imperative if the region is to achieve any of the SDGs. The challenges further underscore the need for improved coordination, sustained financial commitments, and enhanced capacities in policy and institutional assessments to effectively meet the SDGs in the MENA region.[50] The effective implementation and utilisation of the various MEAs that the region has signed up to are commendable steps to achieving the SDGs.

3. LEGAL AND POLICY BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL MEAs IN THE MENA REGION

The MENA region recognises the pressing need to address climate change and has consequently signed up to various international and regional climate legislation instruments. These agreements serve as crucial frameworks for coordinating efforts and implementing strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change in the region. Amongst the international agreements ratified by MENA countries and discussed in this paper are the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. The regional initiatives discussed are the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change; the Cairo Declaration on Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World; the Rabat Islamic Declaration on Environmental Protection and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals; the Arab Framework Action Plan

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48 Farzanegan MR and Gholipour HF, 'Youth unemployment and quality of education in the MENA: An empirical investigation' in Economic Development in the MENA Region: New Perspectives (Springer 2021) 65.

49 Boulby M and Christie K, Migration, Refugees and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA (Springer 2018).

50 Laamrani H, 'Arab Climate Change Action Plan: A Framework for the Regional Needs' (2023). https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NBFArabStates_Session3_Laamrani.pdf accessed 31 December 2023.

on Climate Change, 2010 – 2020; the Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy, 2010-2030; and the Arab Future Energy Index 2023. The aim is to highlight the level of commitment by the MENA regional members towards developing policies to combat climate change in the region.

However, despite the ratification of the various international and regional MEAs, the region is still confronted with the adverse effects of climate change. It is against this backdrop that the next sections delve into a discussion on some of the prominent international MEAs that most countries in the region have ratified. The shortcomings of these environmental instruments and the unique challenges that the MENA region faces in their enforcement and implementation are discussed.

3.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a global treaty aimed at addressing climate change. The UNFCCC entered into force on the 21st of March 1994. Today, it has near-universal membership. The Convention's ultimate goal is to keep greenhouse gas concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system". According to UNFCCC, "such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner." [51] The UNFCCC plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of climate change in the MENA region. One of its main goals in the region includes supporting the development of renewable energy sources, building climate-resilient infrastructure, and enhancing the capacity of local communities to cope with the effects of climate change.[52] Additionally, the UNFCCC facilitates international cooperation and financial support to assist MENA countries in their efforts to combat climate change. Defined as "the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects", the UNFCCC is instrumental in assisting the MENA region in its climate change adaptation by providing a platform for countries to

[51] UNFCCC, 'Regional Exchange on Climate Action Acceleration at the MENA Climate Week 2023' (2023) https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Regional_Exchange_MENA_CW2023_Concept_Note.pdf accessed 27 December 2023.

[52] UNFCCC, 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change' (1992) https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf accessed April 2014.

come together and collaborate on climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. [53]

While the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been a crucial international instrument for addressing climate change in the MENA region, it faces numerous challenges that hinder its ability to effectively address climate change. These challenges include limited enforcement mechanisms, ambiguity in commitments, and an over-reliance on voluntary compliance, leading to inconsistencies in emissions reduction efforts. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" has sparked debates about fairness and equity, further complicating consensus on climate action.[54] Additionally, adaptation financing remains inadequate, exacerbating vulnerabilities in the region.[55] The consensus-based decision-making process and incomplete global coverage contribute to slow progress and a fragmented implementation of climate actions. Over-reliance on voluntary pledges raises concerns about achieving collective goals, while the co-existence of various agreements alongside the UNFCCC leads to a duplication of efforts and inefficiencies.[56]

To effectively leverage the UNFCCC Convention in the MENA region, the region will require continuous collaboration amongst stakeholders to bolster international cooperation, improve transparency, and establish more robust mechanisms for enforcing commitments and ensuring the equitable distribution of responsibilities in addressing climate change.

The next segment of the paper discusses the Kyoto Protocol, followed by a discussion on the Paris Agreement, two significant international MEAs ratified by MENA states.

3.2 The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was ratified on December 11, 1997, and came into force on February 16, 2005 after a series of lengthy ratification processes. It is the first international treaty to set legally binding targets to cut greenhouse gas

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53 Eltinay N and Egbu C, Urban Resilience and Climate Change in the MENA Region (Taylor & Francis 2024).

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Borghesi S and Ticci E, 'Climate change in the MENA region: environmental risks, socioeconomic effects and policy challenges for the future' (2019) MED 289.

emissions.[57] The Protocol has been ratified by 192 countries,[58] including countries in the MENA region. Although the Protocol has been superseded by the Paris Agreement, it remains a historic landmark in the international fight against climate change.[59] The Kyoto Protocol operationalises the UNFCCC by committing industrialised countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce GHG emissions in accordance with agreed-upon individual targets. It initially exempted developing nations from binding emission reduction targets, prompting concerns over fairness and effectiveness as these countries are substantial contributors to global emissions, which led to one of the major criticisms that the Protocol merely requires polluting countries to only establish mitigation plans and actions and to report these actions on a regular basis.[60] To foster collaboration amongst the countries, the protocol included mechanisms such as the International Emission Trading (IET), Joint Implementation (JI) and Clean Development tools (CDM), through which the countries might collaborate to meet their targets collectively or individually.[61]

Similar to the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol was criticised for various reasons, the first and most serious of which was the differentiation amongst countries in terms of legal obligations under the UNFCCC's premise of "common but differentiated responsibilities."[62] The differentiation in the obligations of the parties, while reasonable at the time, confines the legal obligation within the borders of a small number of nations, leading to the problem of leakage.[63] Scholars have argued that the leakage problem arises in the fact that air is transboundary. Hence, transferring emissions across borders has no effect and could in fact be harmful if developing nations

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57 United Nations Climate Action, 'Marking the Kyoto Protocol's 25th anniversary' (2022) https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/marking-kyoto-protocol%E2%80%99s-25th-anniversary accessed 29 April 2024.

58 Maamoun N, 'The Kyoto Protocol: Empirical Evidence of a Hidden Success' (2019) 95 Journal of Environmental Economics and Management 227.

59 United Nations Climate Action, 'Marking the Kyoto Protocol's 25th anniversary' (2022) https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/marking-kyoto-protocol%E2%80%99s-25th-anniversary accessed 29 April 2024.

60 UNCC, 'What is the Kyoto Protocol?' (2023) https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol accessed 27 December 2023.

61 Maamoun (n 58)

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

exceed the production of industrialised countries.[64,65] Secondly, the introduction of flexible mechanisms like emissions trading and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) raised doubts about environmental integrity and the potential for developed countries to avoid domestic emission reductions.[66] There were concerns regarding the credibility of offset projects and their actual impact on emissions reductions, necessitating stronger oversight and accountability measures. Lastly, the Protocol's limited scope, primarily focusing on a subset of industrialized countries, hindered its ability to comprehensively address the global nature of climate change.[67] It argued that this narrow approach overlooked emissions from developing nations, thus impeding efforts to tackle emissions on a broader scale.

3.3 The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is a global climate policy agreement that acknowledges the impact of domestic politics on climate action and allows nations to determine their commitment to climate change. It provides a framework for countries to pledge their efforts, which can be compared and assessed internationally, fostering accountability through public scrutiny. The agreement resolves the issue of responsibilities distribution, allowing major powers to make gradual emissions cuts. It integrates pledges into an international framework for climate accountability, offering the potential for enduring international collaboration in tackling climate change.[68] More importantly, the Agreement is the first MEA to refer to human rights, the rights of indigenous and local communities, and the concept of climate justice explicitly.[69]

The Paris Agreement was formally adopted by the UNFCCC COP on 12 December 2015, and it focuses on the mitigation, adaptation, and

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64 Nordhaus W, 'Climate Clubs: Overcoming Free-Riding in International Climate Policy' (2015) 105(4) American Economic Review 1339.

65 Aldy JE and Stavins RN, 'Designing the Post-Kyoto Climate Regime' in Nugent J and Anderer S (eds), The Quest for Security: Protection without Protectionism and the Challenge of Global Governance (Columbia University Press 2013) 205.

66 Shi B, Wu L and Kang R, 'Clean Development, Energy Substitution, and Carbon Emissions: Evidence from Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Project Implementation in China' (2021) 13(2) Sustainability 860.

67 Nordhaus (n 64)

68 Falkner R, 'The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics' (2016) 92(5) International Affairs 1107.

69 Savaresi A, 'The Paris Agreement: A New Beginning?' (2016) 34(1) Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law 16.

implementation of climate change measures. It includes procedural and institutional arrangements and provides flexibility for Parties in addressing climate change. The agreement also outlines a global commitment to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions, specifically referring to the 2°C goal and an aspirational 1.5°C goal. This treaty provides ample leeway for Parties to take action to tackle climate change.[70]

Although huge increases in climate change action are required to meet the Paris Agreement's goals, the years since its implementation have already spawned low-carbon solutions and new markets. Carbon neutrality targets are being established by an increasing number of countries, regions, towns, and businesses.[71] Zero-carbon solutions are becoming more competitive in economic sectors that account for 25% of emissions. This trend is especially visible in the electricity and transportation sectors, where it has opened several new economic opportunities for early adopters.[72]

The Agreement is not free from its own fair share of criticism as it has been criticised for the non-binding nature of commitments made by participating countries. Moreover, it has been described as "a fantasy which lacks any actual plan of how to achieve the targets for emissions reductions." [73] Furthermore, the Agreement does not mention GHG sources; fossil fuel use; and measures on stopping fracking, shale oil, and Arctic and Antarctic oil and gas explorations.[74] Additionally, there is a lack of enforcement mechanisms as Article 15 establishes a non-adversarial, non-punitive expert committee for implementation and compliance, and Article 28 permits countries to withdraw from the Agreement without consequences.[75] This was witnessed in 2017, when the United States of America's President Trump announced

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70 Schleussner C-F and others, 'Science and Policy Characteristics of the Paris Agreement Temperature Goal' (2016) 6(9) Nature Climate Change 827.

71 UNFCCC, 'The Paris Agreement' (2023) https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement accessed 4 January 2024.

72 Ibid.

73 Spash CL, 'This Changes Nothing: The Paris Agreement to Ignore Reality' (2016) 13(6) Globalizations 928.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

their withdrawal from the Agreement, citing concerns that it would harm the country's economy and permanently disadvantage it.[76]

Other criticisms have been leveraged against its reliance on voluntary pledges, which raises doubts about accountability and the enforceability of emission reduction targets and seems to undermine the agreement's effectiveness with experts arguing that the emission reduction targets set by countries fall short of what is needed to curb global temperature increases to below 2 degrees Celsius.[77, 78, 79] Furthermore, the lack of uniform reporting and monitoring standards complicates efforts to evaluate progress, and the ambiguity surrounding climate finance commitments hampers the ability of developing countries to cope with climate impacts effectively.[80] Additionally, the Agreement's limited focus on emissions from the energy sector overlooks other critical sectors like agriculture and land use, hampering its ability to address emissions holistically.[81] Addressing these shortcomings requires concerted efforts to strengthen emission reduction targets, enhance monitoring standards, increase climate finance commitments, and develop robust enforcement mechanisms. The next section probes the regional MEAs formed by countries in the MENA region, shedding light on the challenges faced during implementation, and the inadequacies in supporting the region's fight against climate change.

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76 McGrath M, 'Climate Change: US Formally Withdraws from Paris Agreement' (2020) https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54797743 accessed April 2024.

77 Falkner R, 'The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics' (2016) 92(5) International Affairs 1107.

78 Savaresi A, 'The Paris Agreement: A New Beginning?' (2016) 34(1) Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law 16.

79 Spash CL, 'This Changes Nothing: The Paris Agreement to Ignore Reality' (2016) 13(6) Globalizations 928.

80 Peake S and Ekins P, 'Exploring the Financial and Investment Implications of the Paris Agreement' (2017) 17(7) Climate Policy 832.

81 Tanaka K and O'Neill BC, 'The Paris Agreement Zero-Emissions Goal Is Not Always Consistent with the 1.5°C and 2°C Temperature Targets' (2018) 8(4) Nature Climate Change 319.

4. MENA REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

Despite their lack of comprehensiveness and enforceable measures, regional environmental cooperation amongst MENA countries has demonstrated its worth in facilitating environmental collaboration and policy alignment.[82] Regional Environmental Agreements (REAs) are vital for enhancing the region's ability to contribute to future environmental outcomes at the regional level.[83] This section examines several key regional environmental agreements within the MENA region, along with the key implementation challenges hindering the region from fully realising the potential benefits of these agreements.

4.1 Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change of December 6, 2007, in Cairo

Taking into account the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, as well as the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol and the commitments therefrom, and recognising the risks posed by climate change, such as declining agricultural production and vegetation; loss of biodiversity; threats to food security; and jeopardy to vital economic investments, the Ministers and heads of delegations attending the 19th session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment on the 5th – 6th of December 2007 at the League of Arab States in Cairo expressed their determination to work towards finding solutions to the effect of climate change in the region. These initiatives included the incorporation of climate change policies in all sectors of national and regional strategies for sustainable development in a manner that complements sustained economic growth and efforts to reduce poverty. The adoption of national and regional action plans on climate change, with governments playing a crucial role in coordinating with scientific research centres, universities, civil society institutions and the private sector to assess potential impacts and the development of mitigation programmes, aimed to improve energy efficiency by producing cleaner fuels, diversifying energy sources, expanding cleaner production techniques, and using economic incentives. The Council also pledged to intensify efforts to negotiate with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to develop lists of

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82 Al-Saidi M, 'Cooperation or Competition? State Environmental Relations and the SDGs Agenda in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Region' (2021) 37 Environmental Development 100581.

83 Ibid.

environmental goods in order to reduce or lift customs restrictions and utilise carbon trading and its markets to encourage more efficient products.[84]

The Council confirmed the readiness of Arab countries to host the Adoption Fund and provide logistical facilities for its success. It urges developed countries to increase their commitment to reducing GHG emissions across all sectors due to their historical and direct responsibility for climate change, emphasising the need for quantitative targets post-2012 that do not negatively impact sustainable development in developing countries. The Council further called on developed countries to support technology transfer, capacity-building, and financing for a comprehensive assessment of climate change impacts on vulnerable developing countries, including Arab countries. This calls for priority identification and implementation of mitigation and adaptation programmes.[85]

Lastly, the Council urged the XIII Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC to *inter alia* create climate change studies and research institutes in developing nations, particularly in the Arab region.[86]

4.2 The Cairo Declaration on Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World, 2013

At the Regional Conference on Population and Development in the Arab States held on the 24 - 26 June 2013, representatives of the League of Arab States (LAS) gathered in Cairo, Egypt, to review the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), adopted in Cairo in 1994, as well as to commit to key actions and priorities to expedite the achievement of the goals and objectives of the ICPD. It was at this gathering that the LAS, in its recommendation, called on member states to develop policies, programmess, institutions and partnerships, as well as allocating appropriate resources that are commensurate with the challenges and priorities for achieving human well-being and sustainable development, as identified by the regional review of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action and recommendations for its continuation beyond 2014. The recommendation urged member states to

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84 United Nations, 'Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change' (2007) https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/ministerialdeclarationoncc.pdf

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

ensure an integrated approach to inclusive economic growth and inclusive social development; the right of everyone to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health; equality of opportunity for all; access to social and health services; and the recognition of equality and dignity as central to progress, peace and security within the region.[87]

On the issue of environmental sustainability, the LAS called on all member states to (i) ensure a thorough understanding of the interactions between population, environment, climate change and economic growth in order to lay the groundwork for long-term development that considers the existing and future population size, composition, requirements and rights; (ii) to remove all impediments and barriers to sustainability by increasing the use of clean technology, including innovation, solid governance, systematic public awareness development and sensitisation, and the promotion of environmentally friendly consumption behavior; and (iii) members were urged to ensure that regional and local climate change response strategies include the distribution, sensitivity and resilience of the targeted populations. Nations were further urged to initiate a large-scale plan for coastal zone development based on a coastal defense strategy, which supports inhabitants as well as minimising displacement and giving developmental alternatives where displacement is necessary. Other recommendations included the need for members nations to identify competence gaps and local community requirements in addition to improving institutional capacities to accomplish long-term change through monitoring programmes that track and regularly review the region's ecological, demographic, and socio-economic performance, as well as sufficient environmental planning. Member nations were further urged to better manage natural and environmental resources, hence institutions at all levels, local, national, regional and global, as well as an independent legal system and effective governance, must be activated. Furthermore, nations were encouraged to develop environmentally friendly production and consumption habits through research and clean technology, as well as technical collaboration amongst countries and regions.[88]

As a final recommendation on the issue of the environment, the LAS called on members states to recognise and acknowledge young people as change agents that should be encouraged to be involved in environmental

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87 ICPD, 'Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World: Cairo Declaration' (2013) https://unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/Cairo_Declaration_English.pdf accessed 30 December 2023.

88 Ibid.

preservation initiatives. Member states are to do this by making concrete, long-term contributions that influence the mindsets, attitudes and behaviour of the youth and their peers and communities. Furthermore, the youth should be educated on practical skills in disaster preparedness and adaptation to climate change, the potential consequences of climate change and global environmental degradation, and the technological and social foundations of sustainable development so that they can make sustainable choices in terms of consumption and lifestyle, as well as green jobs, and develop the innovations required to achieve sustainability.[89]

4.3 The Rabat Islamic Declaration on Environmental Protection and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

In 2017, the ministers and heads of delegations from Arab Member States of the United Nations, as well as representatives from regional, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, announced the adoption of the Rabat Declaration for Disaster Risk Reduction, which calls on all Arab governments, partners and stakeholders to integrate and align disaster risk reduction strategies. In November 2021, the ministers and heads of delegations from the Arab member states met again virtually to re-affirm their commitment and dedication to leading a paradigm shift from disaster risk management to a more comprehensive and risk-resilient development practice through policy alignment with sustainable development and climate change policies.[90]

The Rabat Declaration recognised the need to strengthen cooperation amongst Arab States, UN organisations, Arab and intergovernmental organisations, and non-governmental organisations, amongst others, in the face of the multiple challenges posed by natural and biological hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, storms, droughts, epidemics, fires, including forest fires, agricultural crops, and other man-made disasters that directly affect the environment, population and livelihoods. The proclamation also recognises accomplishments in the development of frameworks and policies for disaster risk reduction and underlines the importance of policies and programmes that address developing hazards.

The ministers and heads of delegations emphasised the importance of continuing to promote and develop Arab disaster risk reduction policies that

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89 Ibid.

90 UNDRR, 'Rabat Declaration for Disaster Risk Reduction' (2021) https://www.undrr.org/publication/rabat-declaration-disaster-risk-reduction accessed 30 December 2023.

consider the impacts of climate change by supporting the interdependence of disaster risk reduction with climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes in order to achieve the SDGs and to build Arab States' capacities to receive international disaster risk reduction funding from funding institutions dedicated to disaster risk reduction. [91]

4.4 The Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change, 2010 – 2020

In 2007, the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change, through CAMRE, expressed Arab willingness to join the international community in its efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change. The Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change for 2010-2020 (AFAPCC) was then developed under the auspices of the League of Arab States (LAS) Committee of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) Technical Secretariat in collaboration with ESCWA, the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA), and Regional Arab Organizations. [92]

The Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy 2030 proposes two implementation phases: 2010-2020 and 2020-2030. Three scenarios (for renewable energy contribution to power generation in 2030) are forecasted: a low scenario (2.3%), a medium scenario (4.7%), and a high scenario (9.4%).[93] The 2010-2020 phase was intended to strengthen Arab countries' capacity to adopt appropriate steps to address climate change challenges whilst meeting the region's sustainable development targets and the MDGs. [94]

4.5 Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy, 2010-2030

The second phase of the Pan-Arab Strategy for the Development of Renewable Energy Applications: 2010-2030 was developed during the 3rd Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in January 2013. This strategy proclaims a goal of 75GW of installed renewable energy power capacity by 2030. [95] The strategy demonstrates the League of Arab States' shared commitment to a sustainable energy future. The strategy asks for the

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91 Ibid.

92 Tarek S, 'Existing Institutional Capacities and Coordination Mechanisms for Climate Change Adaptation' (2009) https://www.preventionweb.net/files/11716_21Nov0909TarekSadek.pdf accessed 31 December 2023.

93 Alhaj M, 'The Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy' (2019) https://cleanenergy4africa.org/the-pan-arab-renewable-energy-strategy/ accessed 31 December 2023.

94 Tarek (n 92)

95 Alhaj (n 93)

large-scale exploitation of the Arab region's tremendous renewable energy potential, including renewable electricity generation resources, by 2030.[96]
To expedite the renewable energy implementation, Arab states were called upon to enhance institutional frameworks, modernise grid infrastructure, secure financing, and develop trained workforces.[97] However, having an ambitious objective like 75GW for an area that relies heavily on fossil fuels necessitates a specific action plan. Based on this, the LAS Energy Department created the Arab Renewable Energy Framework (AREF) to help member nations design and report on their National Renewable Energy Action Plans (NREAPs) in a consistent manner.

The AREF document establishes a framework for Arab League member nations to create NREAPs that incorporate all key features of the AREF. The report covers predictions for non-renewable energy output, renewable energy targets and trajectories up to 2030, ways to achieve the targets, administrative procedures and planning, and power infrastructure development. Countries were urged to utilise the recommended form for future periodic reports to maintain comparability.[98]

5. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF MEAs IN THE MENA

The MENA region faces a complex array of challenges in implementing both the international and regional MEAs that it has signed up to, largely stemming from the delicate balance between economic imperatives and environmental responsibilities.[99, 100] MENA countries have a number of challenges, which include underdeveloped private sectors, high unemployment, low productivity, and autocratic regimes. All of these stems

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96 IRENA, 'Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy 2030: Roadmap of Actions for Implementation' (2014) https://www.irena.org/publications/2014/Jun/Pan-Arab-Renewable-Energy-Strategy-2030-Roadmap-of-Actions-for-Implementation accessed April 2024.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Djoundourian SS, 'Response of the Arab World to Climate Change Challenges and the Paris Agreement' (2021) 21(3) International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics 469.

from the region's economic structure, which is predicated on an over-reliance on unearned and external income streams (the so-called "rents"). [101]

As a result, the MENA region grapples with an economic dilemma driven by its reliance on fossil fuel exports for government revenues. Hence, while there is a recognised need to transition away from polluting energy sources to combat climate change, the economic stability provided by fossil fuel revenues presents a significant barrier to fully committing to MEAs.[102]

Governments in the region may perceive environmental agreements as threats to their economic stability, complicating efforts to implement measures that could impact revenue streams.[103] Moreover, the MENA region's economic well-being is closely tied to global market dynamics, particularly as a major exporter of fossil fuels. Fluctuations in global oil and gas prices directly impact government revenues, shaping the region's perspective on MEAs. Concerns about maintaining economic stability may lead the region to approach climate agreements cautiously, seeking measures that ensure a fair and equitable transition.[104]

Additionally, there exists a policy trade-off between the imperative to diversify energy sources and the desire to maintain economic growth. The MENA region may be hesitant to adopt stringent environmental regulations that could potentially hinder economic development, especially if alternative revenue streams are not readily available. As a result, governments may

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[101] Hafner M, Raimondi PP and Bonometti B, 'Domestic and International Drivers and Challenges for the Energy Transformation in the MENA Region' in Hafner M, Raimondi PP and Bonometti B (eds), The Energy Sector and Energy Geopolitics in the MENA Region at a Crossroad: Towards a Great Transformation? (Springer 2023) 27.

[102] Belaid F, Boukrami E and Amine R, 'Renewable Energy in the MENA Region: Key Challenges and Lessons Learned' in Montanari F and Khan M (eds), Advances in Managing Energy and Climate Risks: Financial, Climate and Environmental Sustainable Strategies (Springer 2021) 1.

[103] Hafner M, Raimondi PP and Bonometti B, 'Domestic and International Drivers and Challenges for the Energy Transformation in the MENA Region' in Hafner M, Raimondi PP and Bonometti B (eds), The Energy Sector and Energy Geopolitics in the MENA Region at a Crossroad: Towards a Great Transfor mation? (Springer 2023) 27.

[104] Borghesi S and Ticci E, 'Climate Change in the MENA Region: Environmental Risks, Socioeconomic Effects and Policy Challenges for the Future' (2019) MED 289.

approach MEA implementation cautiously, seeking to balance economic interests with environmental responsibilities.[105]

Furthermore, the technological transition away from fossil fuels poses a formidable challenge for the MENA region. Shifting towards cleaner energy sources requires significant investment in research, development and infrastructure, which may be perceived as complex and resource intensive. The perceived challenges of adapting to new technologies can influence the region's willingness to fully commit to MEAs that demand rapid and transformative changes.

Socio-political considerations also play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions of MEA implementation in the MENA region. Governments may face public resistance if environmental policies are perceived as jeopardising job security or economic prosperity. Addressing these concerns becomes paramount in gaining public support and ensuring successful MEA implementation.[106]

Furthermore, the MENA region's response to MEAs is influenced by the level of international cooperation and support. If there is a perception that developed nations are not adequately mitigating climate change or supporting the region's transition efforts, it may impact the commitment of MENA countries to MEAs. Hence, implementing MEAs in the MENA region is a complex endeavour fraught with economic, policy, technological and socio-political challenges. Overcoming these obstacles requires careful navigation of economic imperatives and environmental responsibilities, as well as fostering international cooperation and addressing public concerns to ensure the successful implementation of MEAs.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Implementing the effective utilisation of MEAs to tackle climate change in the MENA region requires a comprehensive approach that involves various stakeholders and leverages existing frameworks. The World Bank urges MENA nations to accelerate comprehensive transitions within their systems

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105 Ibid.

106 IRENA, 'Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy 2030: Roadmap of Actions for Implementation' (2014) https://www.irena.org/publications/2014/Jun/Pan-Arab-Renewable-Energy-Strategy-2030-Roadmap-of-Actions-for-Implementation accessed April 2024.

and outline enduring pathways for the establishment of societies that are both low-carbon and resilient. These efforts should aim to foster fair prosperity, peace and stability throughout the region. [107]

The paper proffers the following recommendations to assist the region in the effective implementation of the MEAs that the region has signed up to:

- **Engagement with the Private Sector:** MENA countries must strengthen collaboration with the private sector to enhance climate action. This entails reducing barriers to private sector involvement through policy development and implementation. Creating financial incentives for private sector investments in renewable energy and sustainability initiatives is essential. Likewise, facilitating public-private partnerships to finance and execute climate projects and establishing a transparent regulatory framework that fosters innovation and sustainability in business operations is imperative.[108]

- **Alignment with the World Bank Group (WBG) policy and investment programmes:** The World Bank[109] established a roadmap to drive transformational climate action and green recovery in MENA. This paper urges the MENA region to align with the World Bank Group (WBG) policy and investment programmes for climate action in the MENA by allocating funds specifically for climate-resilient and low-carbon projects, and collaborating with MENA countries to develop tailored climate action plans for the region and different countries within the region.[110]

- **Transformative Programmes and Policies:** There is need to develop and implement transformative programmes and policies supported by cutting-edge analytics and technical assistance. Data analytics to identify priority areas for climate action are necessary. Technical assistance must be provided

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107 World Bank, 'Middle East & North Africa Climate Roadmap (2021-2025)' (2022) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6f868d4a875db3ef23ef1dc747fcf2ca-0280012022/original/MENA-Roadmap-Final-01-20.pdf accessed 30 December 2023.

108 IRENA, 'Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy 2030: Roadmap of Actions for Implementation' (2014) https://www.irena.org/publications/2014/Jun/Pan-Arab-Renewable-Energy-Strategy-2030-Roadmap-of-Actions-for-Implementation accessed April 2024.

109 World Bank, 'Middle East & North Africa Climate Roadmap (2021-2025)' (2022) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6f868d4a875db3ef23ef1dc747fcf2ca-0280012 022/original/MENA-Roadmap-Final-01-20.pdf accessed 30 December 2023.

110 Ibid.

to countries in developing and implementing effective climate policies. Moreover, there is need to establish mechanisms for the continuous evaluation and improvement of climate programmes. [111]

- **Facilitate regional collaboration through joint climate initiatives and projects:** By fostering global, regional and country-level partnerships with key stakeholders, the MENA region will continue to review and monitor their commitment to the implementation of the MEAs. The already established platforms discussed in this paper should be strengthened to engage in regular dialogues and make commitments on the environmental issues affecting the region. Knowledge-sharing with global climate organisations and research institutions is also essential.

- **Regular Monitoring and Course Correction:** It is of vital importance that regular monitoring and course correction are conducted to reflect lessons learnt from the MEA implementation. By establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for climate projects, periodic reviews can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of implemented policies and programmes. Lessons learned can be used to make data-driven adjustments for continuous improvement.[112]

- **Develop a flexible roadmap that can be updated regularly:** Putting in place a flexible roadmap that can adapt to changing conditions would make for easier implementation of the MEAs in the region. The roadmap should be updated as often as is necessary to account for changes in development needs and political environments. These periodic reviews would assist in facilitating the integration of updated data and the necessary strategy revisions. So doing should ensure that the roadmap is aligned with the latest global and regional climate targets.[113]

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper examined both international and regional MEAs signed by the countries of the MENA region. The paper delved into the intricacies of these MEAs, highlighting their significance in addressing

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111 Ibid.

112 World Bank, 'Middle East & North Africa Climate Roadmap (2021-2025)' (2022) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6f868d4a875db3ef23ef1dc747fcf2ca-0280012 022/original/MENA-Roadmap-Final-01-20.pdf accessed 30 December 2023.

113 Ibid.

pressing environmental challenges such as rising greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, climate change and global warming.

However, despite the noble intentions behind these international and regional MEAs, their effective implementation faces considerable challenges in the MENA region. The volatile and often tumultuous nature of the region presents obstacles that hinder the realisation of the full potential of these treaties. Political instability, socio-economic constraints and competing priorities pose significant barriers to the successful execution of climate action initiatives outlined in these agreements.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, there remains hope for progress. The paper has outlined several measures that could assist the region in overcoming obstacles to effective MEA implementation. These include fostering closer collaboration with the private sector, creating financial incentives for investments in renewable energy and sustainability, facilitating public-private partnerships for climate projects, and establishing transparent regulatory frameworks conducive to innovation and sustainability in business operations. Aligning with the WBG and United Nations (UN) policy and investment programmes, as well as investment in transformative programmes and policies amongst other suggestions, are measures that could assist in the full utilisation of the MEAs.

It is believed that by incorporating these recommendations into the implementation of MEAs, the MENA region will not only mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, but MEA implementation can also pave the way for a more expedited advancement towards the achievement of the SDGs in the region. As noted above, there is a symbiotic relationship between climate change and the 17 SDGs. The paper contends that climate change mitigation initiatives will most likely positively affect SDG 1(No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy), SDG 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 13 (Climate action), amongst others.

Additionally, the effective implementation of MEAs holds the potential to not only mitigate the adverse effects of climate change but also promote equitable prosperity, peace and stability across the region. It is through such concerted efforts and collective action that the MENA countries can navigate the challenges ahead and harness the transformative power of international and regional MEAs for the betterment of present and future generations.