

REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE ARAB REGION Synthesis Report

Doha, Qatar 24-25 January 2023













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Background

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) was originally mandated by the United Nations Member States in the outcome document of the 2012 "Rio +20" conference on sustainable development, "The Future We Want". Three years later, as part of the 2030 Agenda, Member States reaffirmed the importance of the GSDR and requested in 2016 that it would be written by an independent group of scientists (IGS). The first report was published in 2019. The next report is scheduled for release in September 2023.

The IGS, appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General, consists of 15 leading experts from the natural and social sciences, representing developed and developing countries. The current group is co-chaired by Prof. Imme Scholz of Germany and Prof. J. Jaime Miranda of Peru. The IGS is supported by a United Nations Task Team, with secretariat servicing from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DESA-DSDG). The current consultation has received additional substantive and secretariat support from the DESA United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD).

As requested by Member States, the GSDR aims to strengthen the sciencepolicy interface and to provide evidence-based guidance on global sustainable development issues and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The report is an important instrument to inform the deliberations at the quadrennial Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit (next held in September 2023), where it is presented to heads of state, who take stock on the progress towards the 2030 Agenda. The 2023 report will be launched at the half-way point on the 2030 Agenda when decision-makers will be looking for practical solutions that can accelerate progress.



The 2023 GSDR will incorporate a broad range of existing scholarship on SDG implementation. It will build on the 2019 GSDR which identified four levers for change as well as adding a fifth lever on capacities:

- Governance
- · Economy and finance
- Individual and collective action
- Science and technology
- Capacities

It will also build from the six entry points identified in the 2019 GSDR where interlinkages among the SDGs are especially strong such that interventions can address many goals and targets:

- Strengthening human wellbeing and capabilities
- · Shifting toward sustainable and just economies
- Building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns
- · Achieving energy decarbonization with universal access to energy
- Promoting sustainable urban and peri-urban development
- Securing the global environmental commons

For the 2023 GSDR, the IGS will expand on the 2019 report with a focus on accelerating action and overcoming impediments that stand in the way of making the levers work together toward transformation through the entry points. Acceleration and enabling transformations is critical as the world struggles to rebuild in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. The time dynamics of transformation and implementation are explicitly addressed - moving from emergence toward acceleration and finally to stabilization. The focus will be on identifying concrete recommendations and tools grounded in evidence for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and on making the field of science more supportive to this acceleration.

Science and technology have long been recognized as essential to achieving sustainable development. They allow for objective assessment, evidencebased policies and innovative solutions towards difficult challenges. Leveraging the systemic relationships between the individual SDGs leads the way towards the needed rebalancing between human progress, social outcomes and environmental conditions that are at the heart of sustainable development. While many science-based tools on interlinkages and transformation pathways already exist, there are many impediments to accelerating their uptake and applying them in practice. The GSDR 2023 aims to strengthen the science-policy interface and to provide guidance on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by presenting case studies and calls to action for governments, private sector actors, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders.

Sustainable Development Progress and Challenges in the Arab Region

The Arab or Western Asia region faces a unique set of natural, political, economic and social challenges on its road towards sustainability. Past and ongoing regional armed conflicts have tremendous effects on humanitarian needs, economic stability, and the local environment of the region. Furthermore, rapid development and a growing population in Western Asian countries have been associated with resource stress. Large parts of the region face increasing water shortages, including groundwater table declines, especially in highly populated and agricultural areas where unsustainable practices are exacerbating the challenge. For groups without access to public water sources, this development is particularly alarming. Protecting global environmental commons such as groundwater and managing the natural capital they provide is crucial for the sustainable development of the region.

Reliance on non-renewable energy resources and growth in consumption for transportation, construction, and landscaping has been associated with a doubling of average energy usage and carbon emissions over the past 30 years. And although a large share of the world's fossil fuel resources is

located in the Western Asian region, large parts of the region are confronted with energy shortages. The region has an enormous potential for renewable energy production, as a great part of Western Asia lies within the Global Sun Belt, the world's area with the most sunlight (and least rainfall). Developing this potential beyond the 1%-share of renewable energies and decarbonizing the energy sector with universal access to reliable energy sources are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. There are some signs of progress and these should be continued - for example, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar are investing in several renewable energy schemes and aiming to achieve 30, 15, and 20 percent of their power generation respectively from renewable energy sources by 2030.

The climate conditions which benefit the transformation towards energy decarbonization heavily challenge the regional food system of Western Asia. Further complicated by past and ongoing conflicts, limited arable land, water scarcity, population growth and climate change impacts, the issue of food insecurity is particularly complex. As countries like Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are highly dependent on food imports, the disruption of regional and global food production as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in the Ukraine add to the risk of a large-scale famine. Already over 51 million people in the region are suffering from hunger and 22% of children under five years are stunted. Simultaneously, overweight, obesity and micronutrient deficiencies continue to increase at an alarming speed in Western Asia. Additional health challenges are posed by the rising temperatures linked to climate change, including excess mortality due to heat waves.

Economic growth has been deeply unequal, increasing disparities in wealth and income - a trend that is expected to intensify in the future. Without sustainable livelihoods, the prospects for human wellbeing, gender equality, good health outcomes and social cohesion are undermined. Without sustainable livelihoods, the prospects for human wellbeing, gender equality, good health outcomes and social cohesion are undermined.

This multitude of threats and challenges towards the sustainable development and resilience of the region requires systematic approaches, international and especially regional cooperation, and just economic concepts.

The views expressed in this summary report are those of the consultation participants and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations or its senior management.

WORKSHOP BACKGROUND

The GSDR held a regional consultation workshop for the Arab region in Doha, Qatar, 24-25 January 2023 capitalizing on a rich transformative change agenda thanks to the presence of 53 stakeholders from civil society, academia, governments, and the private sector (Table 1). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University facilitated the workshop with financial and human resources. The workshop encouraged dialogue and actions including examining potential trade-offs involved with strategies for achieving the SDGs and pursuing transformational change in different contexts across the region.

The GSDR consultation workshop had the following objectives:

- To support exchange among stakeholders in the Arab region reflecting on themes covered by the GSDR.
- To enable the identification of priority SDGs and relevant trade-offs and co-benefits pertaining to the Arab region.
- To share successful pathways towards sustainable development as well as key challenges in the region.
- To feed into the GSDR, and contribute to a vision for the region's transformation pathways.

53 participants from over

18 countries

	Number of Participants	Percentage from total (n=X)
Stakeholder Categories		
Academia	31	58.49 %
NGO	8	15.09 %
International organisation	6	11.32 %
Government agency	5	9.43 %
Private sector	3	5.66 %
Gender Balance		
Women	29	54.71 %
Men	24	45.28 %
Regions		
Gulf countries	26	49.05 %
Levant region	7	13.21 %
North Africa	5	9.43 %
Other	15	28.30 %

WORKSHOP THEMES

Group 1 Strengthening human wellbeing and capabilities

Moderator: Jaime Montoya

Group 2 Energy decarbonization and universal access

Moderator: Stephanie Rambler

Group 3 Securing the global environmental commons

Moderator: Luise Gloeckner

TRANSFORMATIONS TO THE SDGS: ENTRY POINTS AND LEVERS

ENTRY POINTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Energy

Urban

Sustainable

Well-being and capabilities economies and healthy nutrition and healthy nutrition with universal access development economies and healthy nutrition with universal access development economics.

Governance

Covernance

Individual and collective action

Capacity Building

The 2019 GSDR identified six "entry points" or systems fundamental to sustainable development progress, and four "levers" or categories of interventions or tools.

The 2023 GSDR retains the four levers from the 2019 report and adds a fifth lever: **capacity building**.

KEY **MESSAGES**

emanating from the workshop



KM 1 - There is great potential for private sector actors, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMES) to be drivers of sustainable change in the region.

As a key actor in economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, the private sector has a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. The private sector also plays a key part in human wellbeing through the creation of healthy work environments, including in supporting diversity and inclusion and empowering women and the youth.

Recognizing the critical role of the private sector in the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12), private actors should strengthen their efforts in sustainability reporting (Goal 12.6), but also more readily share best practices and raise awareness.

SMEs, which are often more closely connected to the global commons, are crucial drivers for the implementation and localization of the SDGs. They should be given a voice on the international stage and in multi-stakeholders dialogues in the region. Partnerships and collaboration among different organisations and sectors, including access to financing for SMEs to innovate and develop, are key to achieving Agenda 2030.

KM 2 - Without sustainable and resilient cities, the prospects for human wellbeing, gender equality, good health outcomes, and social cohesion remain uncertain.

As cities account for over 70% of global CO2 emissions and more than two-thirds of global energy use, decarbonizing the energy sector, sustainable transition, and climate protection policy action are critical for building sustainable cities for the future

The building sector is crucially affecting the environmental commons of the Arab region: buildings are often built without efficient and are energy constructed on arable land, resulting in soil loss. This leads the valuable arable land of the region to be used for construction, rather than for agriculture and food production. Another concern raised is the proximity of many mega cities in the Gulf region close to the coast or to ecologically protected areas.

The unprecedented growth of cities in the Gulf States brings significant pressure on urban development planning and public policy, in addition to challenges in managing future growth and expansion while promoting wellbeing, resilience, and the quality of urban life.

KEY **MESSAGES**

emanating from the workshop

KM 3 - Youth should be empowered and given the means to foster transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.

The Arab region today has the largest youth cohort in history with around 30% of the population between the ages of 15-29 - or some 110 million people. In a region where 60% of the population has not yet reached the age of 30, investing in the youth is not only important; it is a necessary foundation for sustainable development.

CASE STUDY

The Youth Empowerment Centre 2 Palestine

Al-Quds University, in cooperation with local NGO PMRS and the UNFPA and with the support of Italian Cooperation, established a Youth Friendly Health Services centre in the main campus to empower the youth. Staffed with social work specialists, counsellors, health professionals, and faculty members, students have easy access to resources and tools, including innovation fairs, youth-led health initiatives, educational support, social

Using a holistic approach, such initiatives can empower the youth to address critical community needs through collective effort and

welfare programs, and environmental projects.

As youth in the Arab region are facing important challenges, including in finding decent work opportunities and rising unemployment rates, participants emphasized the need to foster innovation

and creativity for young people to be of entrepreneurs sustainable transformation. Shared best practices include the implementation of awarenesseffective raising programmes on sustainability in universities academic institutions. When given a voice and empowered to be leaders of change, young people can be catalysts for change and sustainable development.

KM 4 - Enhanced cooperation and coordination among Arab countries is needed to successfully implement the SDGs in the region.

Strengthening dialogue and cooperation at the national, regional and international levels, with all relevant stakeholders, to follow up on SDGs implementation in the Arab region will lead to better and more resilient outcomes.

Participants emphasized the critical importance of implementing Goal 17 to strengthen the capabilities of Arab countries. Progress reports on the SDGs in the region as well as dialogue platforms with relevant stakeholders have been brought up as helpful tools to achieve the SDGs together.

Sustainable The Arab Forum for Development (AFSD), for instance, is the main regional mechanism for the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region.

The Arab Vision 2045 project represents a technical platform for stakeholders to develop, review, and promote a common socioeconomic and institutional vision for.



KEY **MESSAGES**

emanating from the workshop



Arab states' sustainable development through joint Arab action for cooperation.

KM 5 - Think Global, Act Local: local communities and knowledge should be placed at the center of sustainable development.

Participants emphasized the need to work with local communities and ecosystems in adapting to environmental and local change, including conflicts.

Local approaches to harnessing the waterenergy-food nexus for sustainable development based on the idea of community-led adaptation help provide renewable energies, food and water while ultimately helping improve sustainable livelihoods, even often increasing peace and community cohesion.

There is a great potential for capacity building and knowledge transfer in the area. Often, innovations at community level in the area of basic services help women most as they relieve them from tedious tasks, and improve their health and education. Key issues to address are related to access to technology (cost), level of integration, as well as including organizational issues. ownership and participation.

KM 6 - A number of potential impediments continue to threaten the effectiveness of sustainable development interventions.

The five levers of policy, finance, technology

capacity-building, and governance can be powerful tools in accelerating sustainable development in the Arab region. However, key potential impediments threaten the effectiveness of such interventions. This includes the lack of political will or ability to implement policies that support these goals, which may result from various factors including political ideology, insufficient knowledge about sustainable development, or conflicting interests.

Another major obstacle is the lack of funding in sustainable development and climate mitigation projects in the Arab particularly in developing countries, which may result from a lack of resources or a misconception that these projects are too risky or unprofitable.

Additionally, the high cost or difficulty to implement technologies new sustainable development, as well as lack of access to technical expertise, can act as an impediment to climate change mitigation. The lack of trained experts, equipment, and funding renders capacitybuilding difficult in the Arab region as

ADDITIONAL KEY ELEMENTS

to be transmitted to the GSDR

In addition to the key messages based on the workshop discussions, a specific plenary session was organized where all participants were able to raise issues beyond those covered in the workshops. Key points discussed include:

- Water was emphasized as a common denominator of the region due to water scarcity. One of the main identified constraints in achieving integrated water resources management in the Gulf countries is the fragmentation of the water institutions. For example, there are different agencies responsible for drinking water supply, sanitation services, groundwater resources, and water-related ecosystems. This fragmentation leads to the dominance of sectoral planning and management and impedes efficient and integrated planning and management of the water cycle.
- · The lack of full scientific certainty and data should not be used as an excuse to postpone development action or implement the SDGs.
- The right to healthcare, as well as some countries' restrictions on non-citizens' access to quality healthcare and social protection, was raised as a concern for sustainable development in the region.
- · The concept of circular economy through market mechanisms was discussed.

- There is a need to institutionalize the science-policy interface to address the current gaps between science and policy. Academia must be used to support and guide policy-makers with evidence-based research.
- Better access to data is needed to formulate, evaluate, and launch effective sustainable development solutions.
- The full inclusion and empowerment of women in the region is vital to reaching all SDGs and Agenda 2030.
- · One of the main challenges in terms of energy transition is to successfully change the mindset and habits of people. We cannot only focus on technology; we must combine this with human-driven and human-centered solutions.



Workshop Participants

Talaat Abdel-Fattah Ahmed, Qatar University Fotouh Al-Ragom, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research Mohammad Al-Saidi, Oatar University Faisal Alfadl, Saudi Green Building Forum Hareb Aljabri, Qatar University Ruwa M. Assi, UNICEF Rasha Barakat, Zain Iraq Tarek Ben Hassen, Qatar University Abdelhadi Bennis, Association Ribat Al Fath for **Sustainable Development** Yusuf Bicer, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Logan Cochrane, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Ludgarde Coppens, UN Environment Tatenda Jane Dzvarai, RAWSA Network for SRH&Rs and Safe Abortion Rajae El Aouad, One Health Maroc Nada H. S. El Bohi, RAWSA MENA Mariam Mohamed El Forgani, Committed to Good Nada El-Agizy, League of Arab States Bachar El-Halabi, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Hanan Farhat, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Motasem Hamdan, Al-Quds University Helmi Hamdi, Qatar University May Hammoud, Arab NGO Network for Development Jawad Hasan, Al-Quds University Laury Haytayan, Natural Resource Governance Institute Rana Hendy, American University of Cairo Arab Hoballah, SEED - Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development Nader Kabbani, Middle East Council on Global Affairs Muammer Koc, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Laurent Lambert, Doha Institute Jenny Lawler, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Sylvie Maalouf, Qatar Foundation Ebaidalla Mahjoub, Qatar University Areej Masri, United Nations Human Rights Jessica Obeid, New Energy Consult Imen Saadaoui, Qatar University

Mona Said, American University in Cairo

Steven Wright, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Esmat Zaidan, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Waleed Zubari, Arabian Gulf University

Sami Sayadi, Qatar University

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United Nations Secretariat

Astra Bonini Nora Boudghène Stephanie Rambler

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Lorena Balcazar Rodal Nadja Emmanuel Luise Elenor Gloeckner

Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI)

Arokiasamy Perianayagam Sana Awadelsid Ahmed Abusin Ala Zakarya Yasseen Al Shareef

Report prepared by

Nora Boudghène, UN DESA

Appendix A: Workshop Programme



Agenda

Regional Conference for the Arab Region Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 24-25 January 2023





Qatar University, Research Complex (H10), Main Auditorium

24 January				
08:30 - 09:00	Registration			
09:00 - 09:05	 Welcome and programme overview (with simultaneous interpretation)- UN DESA 			
09:05 – 09:35	 Opening speeches (with simultaneous interpretation) Dr. Hassan Al-Derham, President of Qatar University Dr. Saleh M. Al-Nabit, Head of Statistics Authority-Qatar Professor Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Independent Group of Scientists, GSDR 2023 (SESRI-Director) Imme Scholz, Independent Group of Scientists, Co-Chair – Video message 			
09:35 – 10:00	Keynote Speech (with simultaneous interpretation) • Ms. Rewa Assi, Youth Representative, UNICEF MENA • Question and answer session			
10:00 - 10:30	Coffee break			

	Role of private sector in	the achievement of SDG	is
10:30 – 11:30	 Role of private sector in the achievement of food security in Arab and western Asia region - Dr Masoud Al Marri-Head of the food security department, Ministry of Municipality Economic diversification and entrepreneurship - Prof Ahmed Khalifa, Economics Department, Qatar University Sustainable and just economy - Dr Benjamin Banda, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 		
11:30 – 12:35	 Emerging messages from GSDR 2023? (with simultaneous interpretation) Dialogue on content and outlook of the GSDR 2023 Dr. Jaime Montoya, Professor, University of the Philippines College of Medicine, Member of Independent Group of Scientists, GSDR 2023 Dr. Ibrahima Hathie, Research Director Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR Senegal) Can we have a sustainable future? Diverse perspectives from sustainability experts to feed into the GSDR - Dr. Logan Cochrane, Associate Dean, Ham ad Bin Khalifa University 		
12:35 - 13:30	Lunch		
13:30 – 14:00	Working groups instructions (with simultaneous interpretation) UN DESA		
	Working Groups (incl. co	ffee break at 15:00)	
14:00 – 16:30	Entry point: Strengthening human wellbeing and capabilities	Entry point: Achieving energy decarbonization with universal access to energy	Entry point: Securing the global environmental commons
16:30 – 17:30	Reporting back to the plenary (with simultaneous interpretation) IGS member moderates Rapporteurs from each working group report back to the plenary as well as moderators of each group. Possibility for additional information by participants		

25 January				
09:00 - 09:10	Morning Light – Recap of day 2 (with simultaneous interpretation) UN DESA			
09:10 - 10:30	Fishbowl – Discussion on what was missing from the working groups (with simultaneous interpretation)			
	Rapporteurs from each working group, moderators of working groups and open space for further participation from the larger group			
10:30 - 11:00	Coffee break			
11:00 – 12:00	Cont. Discussion in the Working Groups World Café format (table hosts briefly report back to the plenary)			
12:00 – 12:30	Wrap-up, summary, and next steps (with simultaneous interpretation)			
12:30	Lunch			
1:30-2:45	Closing reflections			

- Promoting quality of urban life and wellbeing- Professor Arokiasamy Perianayagam, SESRI. OU.
- Building sustainable food systems in Arab world Dr Martin Keulertz, Assistant Professor, American University of Beirut.
- Circular economy Jwaher Al- Sulaiti. Ministry of Municipality, Centre for Waste Treatment and Recycling
- Closing remarks Professor Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Independent Group of Scientists, GSDR 2023, SESRI-Director

Appendix B: Concept Note



Concept Note

United Nations Regional Consultation for the Arab Region Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 23-25 January 2023





Background

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The member states of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.







Pathways are context-specific configurations of levers to achieve transformation in each entry point

potential beyond the 1%-share of renewable energies and decarbonizing the energy sector with universal access to reliable energy sources are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. There are some signs of progress and these should be continued – for example, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar are investing in several renewable energy schemes and aiming to achieve 30, 15, and 20 percent of their power generation respectively from renewable energy sources by 2030.

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GSDR Arab Regional Consultation Objectives

SDG implementation is achieved primarily at the local, national, and regional level. To inform the GSDR as an assessment of assessments, the IGS are collecting perspectives from different regions and stakeholders including context specific priorities, challenges, and opportunities as well as scalable, practical tools to accelerate progress. The IGS are seeking perspectives from scientists, government officials in their technical capacities, private sector experts, members of civil society, youth, indigenous people and local communities, people with disabilities, and stakeholders at all levels. The aim will be to identify case studies that will breathe life into the report and give shape to the concrete policy recommendations that the Member States are expecting.

In particular, the aim is to identify:

- 1) Innovative ways to make the five levers work together in the context of the 6 entry points to create enabling conditions for acceleration;
- 2) Specific promising tools for accelerating transformation in the context of these entry points (policies, initiatives, technologies, partnerships, etc.); and
- 3) Ways to create enabling conditions for transformation moving from emergence to acceleration to stabilization (including in different contexts).

In the Arab Region all six entry points identified in the 2019 GSDR are important for achieving the SDGs, but the following three entry points are especially critical to accelerate the sustainable development of the region.

- 1) Strengthening human wellbeing and capabilities
- 2) Achieving energy decarbonization with universal access to energy
- 3) Securing the global environmental commons

Identifying interventions

Within these entry points, workshop participants would be asked to identify practical tools and interventions to accelerate progress in the implementation of the SDGs. In thinking about these interventions, the following guiding questions can be considered.







- How is this intervention a strategic choice for addressing systemic and structural challenges? Does it have potential for generating synergies among the SDGs through a given entry point and managing critical trade-offs? Are there positive and negative spill- overs internationally?
- Is this intervention in the emergence, acceleration, or stabilization stage (globally and in different regions/contexts)?
- If in the emergence stage, are there ways to shorten the timeframe of scaling up and accelerating uptake? What evidence or signs do you see of tipping points/windows of opportunity to move into the acceleration phase?
- How particular is the intervention to a given context? What additional international support may be required to support the transformation in these contexts?
- What would help ensure that this intervention would address inequalities including gender inequality, reach those at risk of being left behind, and build resilience against shocks?

Bringing the levers together for action

Within these entry points, workshop participants would also be asked to discuss how levers can work together to accelerate progress and create enabling conditions for action. The following guiding questions can be considered.

- Who are the key actors and stakeholders involved, either promoting or resisting the intervention?
- Are there promising ways to apply the five levers together in support of acceleration through the intervention? At what levels of governance/society (local, national, regional, international)?
- What are the impediments to using the levers/engagement by different actors and are there promising ways for them to be overcome?









https://sdgs.un.org/ Regional Consultations on Western Asia



@SustDev



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