

«Green Economy» In the Arab World: National Strategies and Regional Cooperation

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Abstract: This article explores the ecological transformation processes and the implementation of «Green economy» principles in the Arab world. It examines national strategies for sustainable development, investments in renewable energy, and the pivotal role of international cooperation. Particular attention is given to the experiences of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and Egypt as leading regional actors in this domain. The study highlights the increasing significance of the green agenda in shaping contemporary political and economic priorities across the region.

Keywords: «Green economy», the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Saudi «Vision 2030», NEOM, the Noor Abu Dhabi, The Noor Ouarzazate Solar Complex, COP27.

Introduction: The global environmental crisis is no longer an abstract threat—it has become an urgent reality affecting all nations without exception. Rapid population growth, the depletion of natural resources, climate change, and environmental degradation demand a fundamental rethinking of traditional economic growth models. In this context, the «Green economy» emerges as a strategic pathway capable of reconciling economic development with social equity and environmental sustainability.

Today, states around the world, especially those whose economies have traditionally depended on oil and gas, are forced to adapt national strategies to the new environmental realities. Many Arab countries, aware of the consequences of climate change and limited water and energy resources, have started to actively introduce green growth elements into their socio-economic development programmes. In this context, sustainability and environmental security are becoming an integral part of modernisation policies and long-term planning.

As former Saudi oil minister Ahmed Zaki Yamani, who held office from 1962 to 1986, remarked, «The Stone Age didn't end because we ran out of stones». This metaphor serves as a timely reminder that historical

eras do not end due to the depletion of resources, but rather as a result of technological advancement and shifts in values. Today, in the context of the climate crisis and the global energy transition, Yamani's words resonate with renewed significance — becoming, in essence, a reflection of the spirit of our time.

The «Green economy» is defined as one which promotes welfare and social equity whilst significantly reducing environmental risks and natural resource scarcity. The overarching principles that govern this initiative encompass energy efficiency, sustainable production and consumption, biodiversity conservation, and the development of green technologies. In the context of Arab countries, an important aspect is the balance between economic growth and the conservation of natural capital in the context of arid climates and limited water resources.

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a target date for achievement set for 2015. Recognizing the need to sustain and expand global efforts, the international community launched the development of a new set of global objectives — the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — during the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. Encompassing economic, social,

and environmental dimensions, the SDGs were adopted for the period 2015–2030 and aim to ensure a decent quality of life for all, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The implementation of the SDGs is the shared responsibility of all UN Member States.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, a «Green economy» entails the transformation of production and consumption patterns towards sustainable development.

This issue is of particular relevance to the countries of the Arab world, which possess the richest deposits of oil and gas. The ability of these nations to adapt to new realities, rethink economic priorities and become active participants in the global 'green turn' will have a significant impact on their future. The adoption of sustainable development strategies, investment in renewable energy sources, and the introduction of green technologies are not merely components of environmental agendas; they are imperative for maintaining competitiveness in the 21st century.

Global UN initiatives on the «Green economy», as outlined in the UNEP report «Towards a Green Economy» (2011), are being practically implemented in the strategies of Arab states. A striking example is the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28), held in December 2023 in Dubai (UAE). According to official data from the COP28 Secretariat, the summit recorded a record number of commitments to the energy transition:

- 118 countries supported the goal of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030
- Announced mobilization of \$85 billion for climate projects
- The UAE presented the "Net Zero by 2050" program with a budget of \$160 billion.

As is widely recognized, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia holds a pivotal position among Arab countries on the Arabian Peninsula, serving as a major center of power and influence and playing a crucial role in maintaining regional stability. Historically, the Saudi economy has been heavily dependent on oil exports; however, this reliance is increasingly unsustainable in the face of global pressures to reduce carbon emissions and shift towards renewable energy sources. Central to this transformative shift is «Vision 2030», the nation's comprehensive economic diversification strategy. A key pillar of this plan involves substantial investment in renewable energy, with particular emphasis on solar, wind, and hydrogen technologies.

The Kingdom aims to generate 50% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030, representing a significant

opportunity for investors in clean technologies. According to McKinsey, Saudi Arabia could attract investments totaling \$150 billion in renewable energy by 2030 as part of its ambition to become a clean energy powerhouse.

One of the main initiatives is the NEOM project, which includes the construction of an artificial city called "The Line" with a length of 170 km. The \$500 billion project is positioned as a "living futuristic laboratory" that is designed to be fully powered by renewable energy sources based on wind and solar energy. The significance of food in this context was emphasised by the head of the food department, Dr. Juan Carlos Motamayor, who noted that the fate of our planet over the next 30 years would be determined by our current actions. The eventual outcome, whether successful or unsuccessful, will be contingent on the manner in which food is produced, processed and consumed. The future of food is inextricably linked to the future of humanity. Projections indicate that by the year 2050, the global population will reach 9.7 billion, necessitating substantial modifications in order to meet the nutritional demands of this expanding demographic.

The NEOM team sees their work as a unique opportunity to build a food system from scratch. They want to create a model for a better world — one with new systems and collaborative development of innovative solutions that benefit the people of Saudi Arabia. Solutions that can then be transferred and scaled up to benefit everyone on Earth. Their goal is to turn NEOM into a global model for the transition from extractive to regenerative production systems.

Solar energy is plentiful in Saudi Arabia due to its ample sunlight, making it a priority sector for investment. The country is already developing large-scale solar projects, such as the Sudair Solar Plant, which is expected to become one of the largest in the world with a capacity of 1.5 gigawatts (GW). ChatGPT said:

The Kingdom receives approximately 3,000 hours of sunlight annually, making it an ideal location for solar energy production. The decreasing costs of solar technologies, combined with government incentives, have made this sector highly attractive. Initiatives such as the King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (KACARE) are paving the way for large-scale solar energy generation.

Wind energy is another burgeoning sector in Saudi Arabia's clean tech landscape. The Kingdom is strategically located to harness strong wind currents, particularly in the Red Sea region. The Dumat al-Jandal wind farm is already operational, with a capacity of 400 megawatts (MW), and more projects are in the

pipeline.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is making significant strides in renewable energy development, exemplified by the Noor Abu Dhabi solar plant and the UAE Energy Strategy 2050. Noor Abu Dhabi, located in Sweihan, is one of the world's largest single-site solar power plants, with a capacity of 1.2 gigawatts (GW). The facility comprises over 3.3 million solar panels and spans approximately 8 square kilometers. Operational since April 2019, it generates enough clean energy to power around 90,000 homes and reduces carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 1 million metric tons annually, equivalent to removing 200,000 cars from the roads.

Morocco has emerged as a regional pioneer in the deployment of solar energy. The Noor Ouarzazate Solar Complex—one of the largest of its kind globally—exemplifies the country's significant potential in the field of sustainable energy development.

Egypt also aspires to become a regional energy hub by advancing green hydrogen projects and modernizing its infrastructure in line with the Egypt Vision 2030 initiative. According to the World Bank, the country holds significant potential to emerge as a regional leader in green hydrogen production and renewable energy development.

Arab countries actively cooperate with international organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the World Bank. Foreign investment plays a crucial role in the development of green infrastructure across the region. Furthermore, the participation of Arab states in global climate summits and forums has become increasingly significant. Notably, COP27, held in Sharm El-Sheikh, served as an important platform for discussing the contribution of Arab countries to international climate governance.

Looking ahead, several strategic priorities emerge:

First, regional cooperation must be deepened. Joint investments in renewable energy projects, collaborative research, and the sharing of technological expertise are vital to accelerate progress.

Second, robust policy frameworks are essential. It is imperative that regulatory structures be clearly defined and consistently enforced, ensuring both public and private stakeholders remain accountable to sustainability goals.

Third, improving access to climate finance is crucial. Arab countries should expand partnerships with international actors to tap into financial mechanisms that can support large-scale renewable energy and

water management initiatives.

Fourth, investing in human capital is necessary. Prioritizing education and workforce training in green technologies will foster inclusive growth and employment opportunities within emerging sectors.

Finally, continued global engagement is key. By actively participating in multilateral environmental negotiations and climate diplomacy, the region can solidify its role as a proactive contributor to the global green transition.

In summary, by aligning economic diversification with sustainability, Arab states are positioned to achieve their development objectives and play a meaningful part in the international effort against climate change.

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